



## Linking social interdependence preferences to achievement goal adoption☆



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### ABSTRACT

Social interdependence theory and the 2 × 2 achievement goal framework represent two important literatures that are often studied independently. The present research examined general social interdependence attitudes in school (cooperative, competitive, and individualistic) as antecedents of individuals' situation-specific (semester- or class-focused) achievement goal adoption. All three studies consistently found that a cooperative attitude positively predicted mastery-approach goals, a competitive attitude positively predicted performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals, and an individualistic attitude positively predicted mastery-approach goals. The only anticipated relation that did not emerge consistently was that of an individualistic attitude as a positive predictor of mastery-avoidance goals. Implications of the present work for future empirical and theoretical development both in the social interdependence and the achievement goal literature are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Achievement goals – competence-relevant commitments that guide individuals' behavior (Elliot, 1999) – are central constructs in the

achievement motivation literature. Achievement goals vary on two dimensions: how competence is defined (performance vs. mastery) and how competence is valenced (appetitive vs. aversive). When combined, these two dimensions create a 2 × 2 model comprising mastery-approach goals (trying to master a task or do better than before), mastery-avoidance goals (trying to avoid leaving a task unmastered or doing worse than before), performance-approach goals (trying to do better than others), and performance-avoidance goals (trying to avoid doing worse than others; Elliot, 1999; Pintrich, 2000).

A full and complete account of achievement motivation must not only attend to goals, but also the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual antecedents of the goals (Elliot & Thrash, 2001). These antecedents are posited to not only influence the adoption of achievement goals, but also to influence the way that achievement goal pursuit is experienced (Elliot, 2006). Many antecedents of achievement goals have been documented over the years, with the major focus being on competence-relevant antecedents (e.g., need for achievement, fear of failure, test anxiety, implicit theories of ability, perceived competence, and the way in which competence is evaluated in a given context; Baranik, Stanley, Bynum, & Lance, 2010; Burnette, O'Boyle, VanEpps, Pollack, & Finkel, 2013; Elliot, 1999; Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007).

Achievement goals are commonly conceptualized as intrapersonal forms of self-regulation, but their adoption and pursuit are

☆ Given that there is conceptual similarity among the competitive attitude and performance-approach goal variables, and among the cooperative attitude and mastery-approach goal variables, we conducted ancillary confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) in each study to test the separability of each pair of variables. We used  $\chi^2$  difference tests, the AIC, the BIC, and the sample-adjusted BIC to determine whether the hypothesized two factor models (e.g., competitive attitude items load on one factor and performance-approach goal items load on a separate factor) or the alternative one factor models (e.g., competitive attitude items and performance-approach goal items load on the same factor) were a better fit to the data from CFAs with maximum likelihood estimation. In all instances, the  $\chi^2$  difference test favored the two factor model (albeit only at  $p = .064$  for a competitive attitude and performance-approach goals in Study 2). Likewise, in all instances, the AIC and adjusted BIC values favored the two factor model (albeit only weakly for a competitive attitude and performance-approach goals in Study 2); the findings were the same for the BIC, only the weak findings for a competitive attitude and performance-approach goals in Study 2 were equivocal (they favored the one factor model, but the difference in BIC was only 0.197).

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unequivocally social in nature. That is, achievement goals are often adopted with one's interpersonal relationships in mind, they are often pursued in the presence of others, and their attainment (or not) often has implications for one's interactions and relationships with, and one's standing relative to, others (Poortvliet & Darnon, 2010; Ryan & Shim, 2006; Tossman, Kaplan, & Assor, 2008). Given this intertwining of social and achievement motivation, in the past decade researchers have called for and begun to conduct more and more research in this important area (for a review, see Darnon, Dompier, & Poortvliet, 2012). The present research was conducted within this social-achievement motivation nexus, as we focused on general social interdependence attitudes toward school as antecedents of the adoption of the  $2 \times 2$  achievement goals for specific semesters or classes.

Social interdependence is the degree to which the outcomes of an individual's actions influence those of others. Social interdependence can be high and positive leading to cooperation, high and negative leading to competition, or low leading to independence or individualism (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Individuals vary in their general attitudes toward each of these interdependence relations, and these attitudes have been shown to influence a variety of different achievement-relevant variables, such as effort, persistence, achievement, and transfer of learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Some existing research has linked general tendencies toward competitiveness to the adoption of situation-specific performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals (Murayama & Elliot, 2012; Pastor, Barron, Miller, & Davis, 2007). Other relevant research has linked situation-specific achievement goals to behavior within collaborative task settings (e.g., mastery-approach goals have been linked to cooperation with peers regardless of their group membership, whereas performance-approach goals have been linked to cooperation with ingroup peers and peers of high status; Levy, Kaplan, & Patrick, 2004; see also Poortvliet, Ansel, Janssen, Van Yperen, & Van de Vliert, 2012; Poortvliet, Janssen, Van Yperen, & Van de Vliert, 2009; Tossman et al., 2008). Systematic research has yet to be conducted linking the three social interdependence attitudes – cooperative, competitive, and individualistic – to the adoption of achievement goals in specific situations.

Social interdependence attitudes, like other attitudes (Allport, 1935), encompass both valuation and liking components. A cooperative attitude represents a valuing of and a liking of working with others and helping others (Johnson & Norem-Hebeisen, 1979). This attitude reflects a self-confidence and sense of security (Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981; Ross, Rausch, & Canada, 2003) that allows one to immerse oneself in tasks and self-improvement with minimal concern about the evaluation or performance of others (Nichols & Miller, 1994). As such, a cooperative attitude may be expected to positively predict mastery-approach goal adoption. A competitive attitude represents a valuing of and a liking of comparing oneself to others and performing better than others (Johnson & Norem-Hebeisen, 1979). This attitude can reflect high but conditional self-acceptance (Norem-Hebeisen & Johnson, 1981; Tjosvold, XueHuang, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008) that is focused on norm-based evaluation. As such, a competitive attitude may be expected to positively predict both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal adoption (see Murayama & Elliot, 2012; Pastor et al., 2007). An individualistic attitude represents a valuing of and a liking of working by oneself and performing alone (Johnson & Norem-Hebeisen, 1979). This attitude reflects an ability to think independently and creatively, but also a tendency toward self-criticism (Choi, Johnson, & Johnson, 2011; Tjosvold et al., 2008). As such, an independence attitude may be expected to positively predict mastery-approach, but also mastery-avoidance goal adoption. Other links between social interdependence attitudes and achievement goal adoption may also emerge, but the aforementioned have the strongest and clearest conceptual grounding.

The present research comprises three studies focused on these relations between social interdependence attitudes and the adoption of the goals from the  $2 \times 2$  achievement goal model. All studies contained the

same core social interdependence and achievement goal variables, with variation in the specific focus of the achievement goals, the country in which the data were collected, and the temporal separation of the variables. In all studies we controlled for participant sex in analyzing the data to ensure that any observed relations were not simply a function of sex differences; in one study we controlled for socially desirable responding to ensure that any observed relations were not simply a function of response bias. Together, the results of these studies should afford a deeper and richer understanding of both social interdependence attitudes (i.e., evaluative dispositions) and achievement goals (i.e., intentional commitments), and will help further the process of integration of these two important literatures.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

#### 2.1.1. Study 1

394 individuals (272 females, 120 males, 2 missing) completed the study voluntarily online on one of three sites: Research Match (61%), Hanover College "Psychological Research on the Net" (37%), and InMind (2%). For Research Match, the age of participants was restricted to 18–25 to maximize the likelihood that they would be university students (non-students were omitted from the data set a priori, resulting in a final N of 354). In the final sample, the mean age of participants was 22.32 years old; participants' ethnicity was 72% Caucasian, 5% African-American, 10% Asian, 5% Hispanic, 8% "Other/unspecified". Participants completed the questionnaire during the months of November through April; the achievement goal measure focused on students' goals for the classes they were taking that semester.

#### 2.1.2. Study 2

333 undergraduates (246 females, 87 males) enrolled in psychology classes at a Saudi Arabian university participated in the study in return for extra course credit. The mean age of participants was 21.51 years old, and participants' ethnicity was 96% Saudi, 2% Asian, 1% African, and 1% "Other/unspecified". All measures were translated from English to Arabic (including back translation processes). Participants completed the questionnaire during the last month of the semester; the achievement goal measure focused on students' goals for the classes they were taking that semester. Thus, this study was more targeted than Study 1 in that all participants attended the same university and they reported on their goals during the same time of the semester.

#### 2.1.3. Study 3

340 undergraduates (214 females, 108 males, 18 missing) enrolled in a psychology class at a university in the U.S. participated in the study in return for extra course credit. The mean age of participants was 19.4 years old, and participants' ethnicity was 54.1% Caucasian, 26.2% African-American, 5.3% Asian, 8.2% Hispanic, 6.1% "Other/unspecified".

The data for this study were collected in the context of a larger project; data from that project have been published in prior work (see Weidman, Tracy, & Elliot, *in press*, Study 2c), but none of the variables used herein have been used in prior work. Participants completed the social desirability measure online the first week of the semester, the social interdependence attitudes measure online the second week of the semester, and the achievement goals measure online the third week of the semester; the achievement goal measure focused on students' goals for their psychology class. Thus, this study was more targeted than Study 2 in that all participants were in the same course and they reported their goals with respect to this course at the beginning of the semester. In addition, the social interdependence attitudes and achievement goals measure were separated in time, and a measure of social desirability was utilized in order to control for response bias.

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