



Social achievement goals, needs satisfaction, and coping among adolescents



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ABSTRACT

In a sample of Turkish adolescents ($N = 1614$), we investigated whether pursuing social demonstration-approach goals (to attain popularity), next to social development goals (to cultivate meaningful relationships), explains differences in need satisfaction and frustration and coping. Cluster analysis showed that students who favored social development over social demonstration-approach goals reported less need frustration and defensive coping than students who favored both goals. These results were replicated with a prospective analysis with part of the initial sample ($N = 425$) as students who endorsed both goals reported more defensive coping five months later than students who mainly favored social development goals over social demonstration-approach goals.

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1. Introduction

Social achievement goals pertain to people's different strivings to attain success in the social domain (Ryan, Kiefer, & Hopkins, 2004). Social development goals (i.e., cultivating meaningful relationships) are considered the most adaptive type of social achievement goals as they have been associated with more adaptive outcomes than social demonstration-approach goals (i.e., gaining popularity and social prominence) (Ryan & Shim, 2006). It remains unclear however, whether concurrently pursuing both social development goals and social demonstration-approach goals relates to better adjustment or whether social demonstration-approach goals interfere and degenerate the positive qualities of social development goals.

This is an interesting research question with theoretical and practical implications. From the theoretical standpoint, it is still debated whether the concurrent pursuit of different achievement goals can yield multiplicative or additive effects (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001). From the practical standpoint, it is important to clarify whether the endorsement of social demonstration-approach goals next to social development goals should be encouraged as nowadays youngsters tend to value popularity and self-image relatively higher compared to previous

generations (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). We designed this study to address this particular research question – whether pursuing social development goals along with social demonstration-approach goals is as much need satisfying and effective in coping in demanding situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) as favoring the social development goals over the social demonstration-approach goals. We focused on coping as we consider it a significant marker of human functioning (Lazarus, 2006).

1.1. Social achievement goals and the multiple goal perspective

Following the academic achievement goal perspective, Ryan and associates introduced three types of social achievement goals that refer to striving for competence in the social domain (Ryan & Shim, 2006; Ryan et al., 2004). *Social development goals*, correspond to mastery-approach academic goals (i.e., goals aiming at learning and developing competence in the academic domain) and reflect people's focus on developing social competence by cultivating the quality of relationships. *Social demonstration-approach goals*, correspond to performance-approach academic goals (i.e., goals aiming at demonstrating competence through outperforming others) and represent people's aim to demonstrate social competence by gaining popularity and others' admiration. *Social demonstration-avoid goals*, correspond to performance-avoidance academic goals (i.e., goals aiming at avoiding showing incompetence in the academic domain) and pertain to people's striving to avoid negative evaluation in social interactions.

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Presuming that social development goals reflect self-growth (Ryan & Shim, 2006), researchers have found social development goals to relate negatively to loneliness (Liem, 2016; Shim, Cho, & Wang, 2013) and positively to positive emotions (Shim, Wang, & Cassady, 2013), prosocial behavior (Rudolph, Abaied, Flynn, Sugimura, & Agoston, 2011), self-acceptance (Ryan & Shim, 2006), peer relationships satisfaction (Liem, 2016), grades (Liem, 2016; Makara & Madjar, 2015), and, relevant to the present study to adaptive coping in stressful situations with friends (Shin & Ryan, 2012).

In contrast, social demonstration-approach goals have been associated negatively with personal growth (Ryan & Shim, 2006) and prosocial behavior (Rodkin, Ryan, Jamison, & Wilson, 2013) and positively with aggression (Shim & Ryan, 2012) disruptive behavior (Shim, Cho, et al., 2013) and suboptimal coping strategies (Shin & Ryan, 2012). Occasionally however, social demonstration-approach goals have been linked positively with joy (Shim, Wang, et al., 2013) and perceived popularity (Ryan & Shim, 2008). Regarding social demonstration-avoid goals, they have been found to associate with negative outcomes such as low perceived acceptance, anxiety and internalizing behavior, and avoidance coping, and sometimes with some positive ones, such as less aggression (Ryan & Shim, 2008) better grades (Makara & Madjar, 2015) and more collective efficacy (Jones & Ford, 2014).

Taken together, research has highlighted the adaptive character of social development goals over the social demonstration ones. In the academic domain, research has also highlighted the adaptive character of mastery-approach goals (i.e., the corresponding to the social development goals). However, in the academic domain a multiple goal perspective has been adopted for academic-related achievement goals, suggesting that endorsing both mastery-approach and performance-approach goals could yield benefits to students (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001). Based on this multiple goal perspective, we examined whether endorsing both social development goals and social demonstration-approach goals would be equally, if not more, adaptive than favoring social development goals over social demonstration-approach goals.

Research in the framework of Self-determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) has shown that the intrinsic aspiration of establishing meaningful relationships (which is conceptually similar to social development goals) facilitates the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy (one's desire to define her own actions, thoughts, and feelings), competence (a need to interact effectively with the environment), and relatedness (one's desire to be connected with, loved and cared about by important others) and therefore it is related to well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). In contrast, the extrinsic aspiration of attaining popularity (which conceptually overlaps with social demonstration-approach goals) thwarts the psychological needs and relates to depression and anxiety (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

Extrapolating from this line of work to social achievement goals, we presumed that social development and social demonstration-approach goals represent, respectively, an intrinsic and extrinsic type of aspirations and therefore favoring social development goals over social demonstration goals could explain more need satisfaction, less need frustration and better coping strategies (as different goals may entail different coping mechanisms Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010; Weinstein & Ryan, 2011) than endorsing both social development and social demonstration-approach goals.

1.2. The present research

We set two objectives in our research. First, given that people may concurrently pursue to different degree the three social achievement goals, we tested through a cluster analysis whether students who strongly endorse both social development and social demonstration-approach goals would differ in needs satisfaction and frustration and coping than students who favor mainly social development goals. Prior research has indicated that all the three social achievement goals are

positively intercorrelated (Ryan & Shim, 2008; Shim & Ryan, 2012; Shin & Ryan, 2012), as they can be concurrently endorsed (Shim & Finch, 2014), though each one to different degree. More important, prior SDT-based research has also indicated that endorsing extrinsic aspirations (e.g., gain popularity; a social demonstration-approach goal) along with intrinsic ones (e.g., develop meaningful relationships; a social development goal) lead to suboptimal outcomes (Niemi, Ryan, & Deci, 2009). We relied on this set of findings to hypothesize that students who pursue both social development goals and social demonstration-approach goals would report less need satisfaction, higher need frustration, and less adaptive coping (Hypothesis 1) than students who favor social development goals over social demonstration-approach goals.

Second, we tested whether these differences in coping would emerge again five months later (T2). We hypothesized that students who favored social development goals over social demonstration goals would report better coping strategies few months later than students who equally espoused social development goals and social demonstration-approach goals (Hypothesis 2). Regarding social demonstration-avoid goals, we made no particular hypothesis because although prior research has shown its negative nature (Ryan & Shim, 2006), research conducted with adolescents has shown that these type of social goals are not necessarily linked with negative outcomes (Ryan & Shim, 2008; Shim, Cho, et al., 2013; Shim, Wang et al., 2013).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Nine hundred seventy-five 6th grade (12-year old) and 639 9th-grade (15-year old) Turkish adolescent students from, respectively 12 middle and 6 high schools located in the metropolitan area of Istanbul, Turkey, participated at T1 (October of 2014); among them 425 (73.8% 6-the graders) participated also at T2, five months later. Data were collected during one-hour class-session. After getting consent from the Ministry of Education, the school principals and parents, a research assistant explained the purpose of the study and assured students that their participation would be anonymous and voluntary. An unexpected administrative problem (the page that contained questions on demographics was omitted), prevented us from getting information about the gender and the precise age of participants, but as school principals informed us in retrospect, the distribution of gender in the classes that we sampled was approximately equal. The questionnaires were translated and back-translated by two experts and adjusted according to the procedures proposed by Hambleton (1994). A 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) was used in all the measures.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Social achievement goals

We used the Ryan and Shim's (2008) scale to assess students' social development (6 items; e.g., "I like it when I learn better ways to get along with friends"), social demonstration-approach (6 items; e.g., "It is important to me that other kids think I am popular."), and social demonstration-avoid goals (6 items; e.g., "I try not to do anything that might make other kids tease me."). A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) showed acceptable fit after two modifications. First, the social demonstration-approach item "I try to do things that make me look good to other kids" showed high cross-loading with the social development latent factor. In retrospect, we presumed that this item was equally perceived as an item implying endorsing social development goal and we therefore dropped it. Second, we let the errors of two items from the social demonstration-avoid goals to covary. The fit for the modified scale was as follows: Satorra-Bentler χ^2 (115, $N = 1614$) = 463.94, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.933, SRMR = 0.051, RMSEA = 0.046 (90% CI: 0.042–

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