



Beyond positive and negative affect: Achievement goals and discrete emotions in the elementary physical education classroom

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Based on the Achievement Goal perspective [Dweck, C. S., Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95, 256–273; Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review*, 91, 328–346] and on Pekrun et al.'s [(2004). Beyond test anxiety: development and validation of the test emotions questionnaire (TEQ). *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping*, 17, 287–316] model of discrete class-related emotions, this study investigated the relation of achievement goals to discrete emotions in the Physical Education (PE) class.

Design: Cross-sectional.

Method: Participants were 319 Greek upper elementary school students who responded to a set of questionnaires assessing their achievement goal orientation, perceived competence, and the class-related emotions they experienced in the PE classes.

Results: Hierarchical regression analyses showed that, after controlling for perceived competence and gender differences, task goals were positively related to positive activating emotions and negatively related to negative emotions. Ego goals exhibited a mixed picture as they were positively associated with pride and all the negative emotions. Furthermore, the relations between ego goals and emotions were qualified by an ego by task goal and by an ego by perceived competence interaction suggesting that ego goals were especially linked to emotional maladjustment when task goals were low and when competence perceptions were high rather than low.

Conclusion: Unique associations between task and ego goals and specific emotions were found, rendering insightful the disentanglement of positive and negative emotions into its components. The pursuit of task goals might help to counteract the emotional burden associated with ego goal pursuit whereas feeling competent to outperform when one endorses ego goals might perhaps put extra pressure on the pupils and, hence, have negative implications for their emotional adjustment.

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Achievement goals are considered as the aims or purposes for students' task engagement in achievement settings and they create the framework within which students interpret and react to learning outcomes and academic achievements (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Two types of achievement goals have received most attention within the achievement goal tradition: Task goals in which competence is defined with self-referenced or absolute standards and which focus on the development of competence, on learning,

and on mastering new skills and ego goals in which competence is defined with normative standards and which focus on the demonstration of competence mainly by outperforming others (Nicholls, 1984; Roberts, 2001). Task and ego goals have been related to a host of different motivational outcomes (e.g., Duda & Ntoumanis, 2003; Matos, Lens, & Vansteenkiste, 2007).

Given the importance and the omnipresence of emotions in educational settings (Pekrun et al., 2004), several studies have investigated the relations of achievement goals to emotions and affect-related outcomes. Most studies, however, have used composite measures of positive and negative affect, thus obscuring possible insightful information with respect to relationships between achievement goals and specific emotions (for reviews see Biddle, Wang, Kavussanu, & Spray, 2003; Ntoumanis & Biddle,

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1999). In an attempt to move beyond positive and negative affect, Pekrun et al. (2004; see also Pekrun, Elliot, & Maier, 2006) have called for studies on emotions in educational settings that focus on separate positive and negative emotions. We aimed to meet this call, thereby examining the relationship between elementary school students' achievement goals and a set of specific positive and negative emotions.

Achievement goals and emotions in the physical education context

A number of previous studies in the PE context have examined the associations between the task and ego goals and positive and negative affect. These studies have shown that whereas task goals are positively associated with positive affect and inversely related to negative affect, ego goals tend to show a mixed pattern of relations, as they relate both to positive and negative affect (see Biddle et al., 2003; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; cf. Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). However, as Ntoumanis and Biddle (1999) showed, the positive relation of ego goals to positive affect is relatively weak and may be moderated by factors such as the context (e.g., sport setting vs. PE setting) and the type of activities.

Apart from positive and negative affect, a number of studies have paid attention to specific emotions. The one discrete positive emotion that has probably been studied most extensively within the achievement goal framework is enjoyment and previous research has shown that task goals are positively associated to enjoyment (e.g., Biddle, Soos, & Chatzisarantis, 1999; Duda & Nicholls, 1992). This is obvious because endorsement of task goals is presumed to elicit more inner sources of satisfaction as task-involved individuals are more likely to perceive their task engagement as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end (Roberts, 2001). The relationship of ego goals to enjoyment is less clear, with some studies finding evidence for a positive association (e.g., Wang & Liu, 2007), but other studies failing to confirm such a relation (e.g., Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Spray, Biddle, & Fox, 1999). The most studied discrete negative emotions in the PE contexts are boredom and anxiety with boredom showing a negative relationship to task goals and a no relationship to ego goals in the PE settings (Duda & Nicholls, 1992) and with anxiety showing a negative relation to task goals and a positive one to ego goals (Hall & Kerr, 1997).

Pekrun's taxonomy of emotions

In the present research, we aimed to examine the relation between achievement goals and emotions in greater detail by relying on Pekrun et al.'s (2004) proposed taxonomy of emotions. According to Pekrun, emotions can be meaningfully classified along four different dimensions: (1) Valence, which refers to whether an emotion is desired or not (i.e., positive or negative); (2) activation, which implies whether an emotion promotes or inhibits physiological activation or arousal (i.e., activating vs. deactivating); (3) object-focus, which signifies whether an emerging emotion is linked with a test, a learning, or a task-related activity (i.e., activity-related emotions that are referring to a test or to a learning process); and (4) reference of time which is referred to whether an emotion is experienced before, during, or after a given event (i.e., anticipatory, concurrent, or retrospective emotions). To illustrate, enjoyment for the forthcoming PE class could be characterized as a positive, activating, anticipatory, class-related emotion according to the dimensions of valence, activation, time reference, and object-focus, respectively. In contrast, shame because of poor performance on a fitness test in a PE class could be considered as a negative, activating, retrospective, test-related emotion.

The association between achievement goals and different sets of emotions according to the valence, activation, and object-focus

dimensions has only recently received empirical attention in a study by Pekrun et al. (2006) among university students. When combining the dimensions of valence and activation, these authors created three aggregated categories of emotions for class-related activities, that is, (1) positive activating emotions such as enjoyment, hope, and pride, (2) negative activating emotions, such as anxiety, anger, and shame, and (3) negative deactivating emotions such as hopelessness and boredom; positive deactivating emotions such as relief are not included in the class-related emotions as they are particularly salient during test situations. Given that students' emotions were not assessed during a test situation in the present research, we equally refrained from assessing students positive deactivating emotions.

Pekrun et al. (2006) found task goals to be positively associated with positive activating class-related emotions and to be negatively associated with negative activating and deactivating class-related emotions. In contrast, and similar to previous research on the composite scores of positive and negative affect, an inconsistent and mixed pattern of relationships was obtained for ego goals.

Present research

Despite the 2×2 conceptualization (Elliot & McGregor, 2001) according to which task and ego goals are further classified depending on how one's competence relative to the demands of a task is valenced (i.e., positively or negatively signifying, respectively, an approach or an avoidance orientation for either task or ego goals), research conducted in sport and PE domain has provided some equivocal results within this 2×2 achievement goal model (Duda, 2005). For instance, high intercorrelations between goals that share no common dimension have been reported (Guan, Xiang, McBride, & Bruene, 2006; Wang, Biddle, & Elliot, 2007) and similar relations of different achievement goals to outcomes were obtained, suggesting a lack of functional discrimination among the four proposed achievement goals (Carr, 2006; Guan et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2007). In this regard, Duda (2005) suggested that task and ego goals along with the perceived competence may sufficiently explain the motivational phenomena in sport and PE settings. Specifically, low competent ego-oriented individuals would be more likely to display an avoidance orientation, that is, a tendency to avoid showing incompetence, whereas the pursuit of ego goals among highly competent individuals would represent the tendency to outperform others. Thus, the present study indirectly considered the pursuit of ego-approach, relative to ego-avoidance goals, by examining whether ego-goal pursuit interacts with perceived competence in the prediction of emotions. Moreover, we deemed it most instructive to examine possible differential relations of both types of approach goals (i.e., task and ego) to one's emotional functioning, as these goals have been most heatedly debated in the achievement goal literature (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001).

Following Duda's (2005) suggestion, we aimed to build on the initial study on discrete emotions by Pekrun in several ways. First, we tested the generalizability of the observed relationships between achievement goals and specific emotions (see Pekrun et al., 2006) by examining these associations in the PE context (rather than a regular school context) and in a sample of upper elementary school pupils (rather than university students). Second, we sought to examine the relation of task and ego goals to discrete emotions after taking into account perceived competence. In addition, we tested the moderating role of perceived competence in the relationship between achievement goals and emotions (Biddle et al., 2003). The latter constitutes a critical issue, because the association between ego goals and positive activating emotions might be very different under conditions of low versus high

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