Moving beyond academic achievement goal measures: A study of social achievement goals ☆

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Abstract

The current research explored the theory of social goal orientation. More specifically, we conducted three studies utilizing six-independent university student samples to evaluate the construct validity of the Social Achievement Goal Orientation Scale (SAGOS; Ryan & Hopkins, 2003), a measure representing the construct of social goal orientation. The purpose of Study 1 was to: (1) compare the three-dimensional (mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance) model of social goal orientation to three theoretically based competing models, (2) examine item functioning, and (3) assess generalizability of the factor structure. The fit of the proposed three-factor model was promising; however, areas of misfit and problematic items were identified. Stronger support for the three-factor structure of goal orientation was found using scores from an abbreviated 13-item SAGOS. In Study 2, item wording was altered slightly to evaluate a revised Social Achievement Goal Scale (SAGS), yet resulted in similar findings. Study 3 examined external validity evidence for the SAGS, garnering some support for the meaning of the scores. Although continued refinement of the SAGOS and SAGS is recommended, the findings help contribute to our general understanding and conceptualization of social goal theory and the role that social goals may play in academic contexts.
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1. Introduction

Student motivation is critical for success in school, and it is important to understand its origins. One prominent approach has been to examine students' underlying achievement goals for their coursework (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Recently, a growing number of researchers have recognized the importance of studying social goals along with academic goals to better understand motivational dynamics (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Covington, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Dowson & McInerney, 2001; Patrick, Anderman, & Ryan, 2002; Urdan, 1997; Wentzel, 2000). For example, there may be many reasons why a student tries hard (or does not try hard) in an academic setting, some of which are social in nature. Consider a student who is working on a group project. The student may work hard and contribute to the group, not only out of an interest in the subject, but also for social reasons, such as to make friends, impress others, or out of social responsibility. Covington (2000) noted that, although we have a fairly well developed understanding of achievement goals, we understand much less about students' social goals and their role in academic settings. Moreover, he asserted that students often place as much or more importance on pursuing social goals. Urdan and Maehr (1995, p. 232) suggested that "there is a critical need to untangle the many constructs represented by the term *social goals*." Thus, a call for further investigation and continued construct development of social goals has been made.

Goals, in general, have been described as the purposes for behavior (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Wentzel (2002) offered a definition of goals as "cognitive representations of future events that are powerful motivators of behaviors" (p. 222). Building upon that definition, social goals, she asserted, are goals that people set for themselves to achieve particular social outcomes or interactions. Others have offered a definition of social goals that is more specific to academic achievement, saying that social goals are the social purposes for behavior in an academic setting (Dowson & McInerney, 2001; Patrick et al., 2002; Urdan, 1997).

1.1. Current approaches to studying social goals

Currently, the study of social goals reflects a variety of perspectives. Researchers have attempted to name and quantify specific social goals by asking students how frequently they desire or carry out specific social behaviors (such as getting together with friends or following classroom rules; Wentzel, 2000, 2002). This focus is directed at defining and quantifying the *content* of the goal (e.g., goals that are prosocially oriented, relationship oriented, or status oriented) and then exploring how certain goal content relates to other variables, such as achievement. Utilizing this approach, a researcher may examine whether high achieving students are more likely to espouse a certain goal, such as being responsible (Wentzel, 1989).

Another emphasis on social goals intertwines social and academic goals by examining social aspects and their relationship to achievement motivation. For example, Urdan (1997) examined the relationship between peers' attitudes toward school and a student's own achievement goal orientation. Rather than approaching the study of social goals from the perspective of trying to figure out *how much* of a certain personal goal a student aspires to, this line of research focuses on describing certain social features (such as peers' attitudes) and relating those features to achievement goals.