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## Social agents, achievement goals, satisfaction and academic achievement in youth sport

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### Abstract

*Objectives:* This study examined the contribution of motivational climate created by mothers, coaches, and best friends in the explanation of variance of athletes' achievement goals, sport satisfaction and academic performance.

*Design:* Cross-sectional; participants completed self-reports assessing achievement goals in sport, perceptions of goals that are endorsed by mother, coach and best friend, satisfaction in sport and academic achievement.

*Methods:* Participants were 863 current Greek athletes (488 males, 372 females, 3 did not provide gender) aged  $14.5 \pm .60$  ( $n = 420$ ) and  $11.5 \pm .60$  ( $n = 443$ ).

*Results:* Factor, reliability and correlation analyses supported the psychometric properties of the instruments. All socialization agents had unique contribution to the explained variance of athletes' achievement goals in sport. Mastery goals and perceptions corresponded positively to satisfaction in sport and they had low positive relationship with academic performance. Perceptions of performance approach goals endorsed by significant others had low negative relationship with academic performance and they were unrelated to sport satisfaction.

*Conclusions:* Mastery oriented climates should be established in sport, family, and peer contexts because all social contexts seem responsible for the formation of athletes' achievement goals, emotions, and behaviours.

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*Keywords:* Significant others; Mother; Coach; Friends; Motivational climate

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A viable frame of reference for studying motivation in sport is achievement goal theory (Ames, 1992; Duda, 1992; Nicholls, 1984). Achievement goal theory assumes that the individual is an intentional, goal-directed organism operating in a rational manner. According to this theory, in achievement domains such as sport, two classes of goals predominate, namely task and ego (Duda, 1992; Nicholls, 1989), or mastery and performance goals, respectively (Ames & Archer, 1988). With reference to dispositional goal orientations, task-oriented individuals have a general tendency to seek to demonstrate competence using criteria such as personal progression, task mastery, the application of effort, and the learning of skills (Nicholls, 1989). Ego-oriented individuals have a tendency to seek to demonstrate competence by proving their superior ability to others (Nicholls, 1989). In essence, variation in achievement behaviour may not be the result of high or low motivation, but rather may be the manifestation of different perceptions of appropriate goals (Roberts, 1992).

Research in sport contexts indicates that task involvement is positively associated with adaptive cognitive, affective and behavioural outcomes but there is no support for an adaptive role for ego involvement (Duda, 2001; Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995; Ntoumanis & Biddle S.J.H., 1999). Similar findings emerged in Greece, where this study was conducted (e.g., Papaioannou, Bebetos, Theodorakis, Christodoulidis, & Kouli, 2006; Papaioannou & Theodorakis, 1996).

According to Elliot, the ego/performance goal should be distinguished from performance avoidance and performance approach goals (Elliot & Church, 1997). A performance approach goal indicates people's efforts to establish that they are competent in a normative sense, whereas a performance avoidance goal indicates people's attempts to avoid negative evaluation of their competence. Later Elliot and McGregor (2001) suggested that the mastery goal should be also distinguished into approach and avoidance tendencies towards task mastery. In the context of sport some theoretical assumptions concerning consequences of performance approach and performance avoidance goals have been supported (Cury Papaioannou, 2006) but research into mastery avoidance goals is still limited (Conroy, Elliot, & Hofer, 2003) while the essence of mastery avoidance goals has been questioned by some authors (Roberts, 2006).

The first version of goal orientation theory was built on a cross-cultural analysis of achievement motivation (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). In this original model social approval was considered an important goal in achievement domains. Recent cross-cultural research implies that social approval is important in many non-western cultures (Hayashi, 1996). Papaioannou, Milosis, Kosmidou, and Tsigilis (2002) adopted Maehr and Nicholls (1980) definition of social approval motivation as the behaviour directed at maximizing the chances of attributing high effort to oneself and minimizing the chances of attributing low effort to oneself. This position is based on the assumption that effort (unlike ability) is seen as voluntary and something that anyone can display (Nicholls, 1976). Accordingly, social approval goals are expected to converge with mastery goals because both goals lead to high effort. On the other hand, for both social approval and performance goals the elaboration of one's achievement is based on criteria that are determined by others. Hence, social approval goals should be positively linked to performance goals too. Based on these assumptions Papaioannou et al. (2002) developed an instrument incorporating social approval goals alongside mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance goals. These studies revealed that social approval corresponded positively to both mastery and performance approach goals, as well as to intrinsic motivation and satisfaction in physical activity contexts.

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