The influence of achievement goals and social goals on help-seeking from peers in an academic context

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Abstract

The influence of achievement goals and social goals on help-seeking from peers in an academic context was examined in two studies. A total of 551 high school students participated in the two studies. The results across the studies demonstrated strong convergence, revealing that mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, and friendship-approach goals were positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking, whereas performance-avoidance and friendship-avoidance goals were negative predictors. Study 2 additionally demonstrated that attitudes toward help-seeking mediate the influence of achievement and social goals on instrumental help-seeking. These results add to the body of work investigating achievement and social motivation together to more fully understand motivational influences on academic outcomes.

Keywords: Achievement goals; Social goals; Help-seeking; Perceived benefit; Perceived costs

1. Introduction

Based on the self-regulation framework of learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989), help-seeking is considered an adaptive strategy that people can use when they encounter problems too difficult for them to solve by themselves (Newman, 1990). Help-seeking is considered adaptive (and, therefore, instrumental) when the help requested is limited to the assistance needed to solve a problem independently (for reviews, see Karabenick & Newman, 2006; Karabenick & Newman, 2009). In academic settings, students may have different attitudes toward help-seeking with regard to both the perceived benefits and perceived costs (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Perceived benefits reflect an understanding that help-seeking is a useful strategy that promotes learning, whereas perceived costs reflect threats to one’s self-worth engendered by acknowledging one’s need for assistance.

Recent research on help-seeking has been guided by an achievement goal perspective (see Butler, 2006; Karabenick, 2006, for reviews). Achievement goals represent the aims that guide competence-relevant behavior, and these aims provide a framework for how students interpret and experience achievement settings (Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 1999; Midgley et al., 2000; Nicholls, 1984). Performance-based goals represent striving to be competent relative to others (using others as the standard for competence), whereas mastery-based goals represent striving to develop competence through task mastery (using the task itself or one’s own past competence as the standard for competence). Each of these goals may be bifurcated in terms of approach (focused on competence) and avoidance (focused on incompetence). Accordingly, Elliot’s (1999; see also Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Pintrich, 2000) 2 × 2 achievement goal model identifies four different types of goals: mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance.

Achievement goals are posited to affect students’ instrumental help-seeking by influencing their attitudes toward the benefits and costs of requesting assistance (Karabenick, 2003;
Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). The existing studies focused on these constructs show that mastery-approach goals are positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking (Kaplan, Lichtinger, & Gorodetsky, 2009; Karabenick, 2003, 2004; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) and the perceived benefits of help-seeking (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). For mastery-approach focused students, seeking help is viewed as an adaptive strategy to improve performance and increase understanding using available resources (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick, 2006; Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001). A clear pattern of results for the other achievement goals is more difficult to discern, especially regarding instrumental help-seeking and the perceived benefits of help-seeking. For instrumental help-seeking, most findings are null for each of the three goals, that is, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals (Karabenick, 2003); for the benefits of help-seeking, no relation has been observed with performance-approach goals (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997), whereas relations with performance-avoidance and mastery-avoidance goals have yet to be examined. For the costs of help-seeking, performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and mastery-avoidance goals have all been shown to positively predict the perception that help-seeking is threatening to the self (Karabenick, 2003, 2004; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

1.1. The present study — hypotheses

One aim of the present research was to examine the links between the four goals of the 2 × 2 achievement goal model, instrumental help-seeking from peers, and attitudes toward help-seeking using a goal measure revised on the basis of recent recommendations by Elliot and Murayama (2008). These theorists noted that existing measures of performance-avoidance goals tend not to make normative comparison salient, and that existing measures of mastery-avoidance goals tend to make negative affective content salient. Adjusting the performance-avoidance and mastery-avoidance goal measures to address these issues may have implications for the predictive utility of these goals, and will likely make interpretation of observed empirical patterns more straightforward.

In the present study, the predictions for mastery-approach and performance-approach goals may be derived directly from prior research, given the comparability of the measures used in the present study and those used in the existing studies. Specifically the hypotheses were the following: (a) Mastery-approach goals were expected to positively predict instrumental help-seeking and the perceived benefits of help-seeking, whereas performance-approach goals were only expected to be positive predictors of the perceived costs of help-seeking (Hypothesis 1a). (b) Performance-avoidance goals with a salient normative focus likely evoke strong self-protection tendencies and concern that asking others for help signals incompetence (Cury, Elliot, Da Fonseca, & Moller, 2006). Therefore, these goals are expected to be negative predictors of instrumental help-seeking and positive predictors of the perceived costs of help-seeking (Hypothesis 1b). (c) Mastery-avoidance goals devoid of negative affective content likely allow the more positive, mastery-based component of the goal to exert a stronger influence on self-regulation; furthermore, an avoidance focus may not be as detrimental to goal pursuit in the context of task-based or intrapersonal evaluation (relative to normative evaluation; Van Yperen, Elliot, & Anseel, 2009). As such, these goals may be positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking and the perceived benefits of help-seeking or, at worst, unrelated to these variables (Hypothesis 1c).

Achievement motivation is one form of motivation likely to influence instrumental help-seeking, but it is not necessarily the only form. Help-seeking combines aspects of academic and social engagement, as it is both a learning strategy and a form of social interaction (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Newman, 1990, 2006; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Ryan et al., 2001). As Newman (2000) declares, “Help-seeking can satisfy academic as well as social purposes” (p. 388). In the academic arena, a significant body of research has demonstrated that students’ social interactions, specifically, their quality of friendships, help explain their propensity to work together and seek academic assistance from one another (Newman & Schwager, 1993; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Adolescence is an important period during which the quality of friendship plays a critical role in self-definition (Berndt, 1999), and close relationships among peers provides an interpersonal context that supports students’ academic collaboration (Newman, 2000, 2006). Studies have shown that close relationships, familiarity, and friendship are positively related to instrumental help-seeking (Nelson-Le Gall, 1992), and are negatively related to threats to self-esteem (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). As in the achievement domain, goal striving in the social domain may be appetitive or aversive; social-approach goals focus individuals on positive relational outcomes, whereas social-avoidance goals focus individuals on evading negative relational outcomes (Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006; see also Gable, 2006; Ryan & Shim, 2006). As noted by Ryan et al. (2001), research on social goals and help-seeking could benefit from incorporation of the approach-avoidance distinction.

Accordingly, a second aim of the present research was to investigate the influence of friendship-approach and friendship-avoidance goals on instrumental help-seeking from peers. Friendship-approach goals were expected to be positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking and the perceived benefits of help-seeking, whereas friendship-avoidance goals were expected to be negative predictors of instrumental help-seeking and positive predictors of the costs of help-seeking (Hypothesis 2). Friendship-approach goals are presumed to evoke appetitive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relationships that draw people into more satisfying connections with others (Elliot et al., 2006). In academic settings, positive, secure relationships enable exploration unfettered by concerns about shame and rejection (Elliot & Reis, 2003), and should lead students to construe others as an available resource for assistance when needed. On the contrary, friendship-avoidance goals are presumed to evoke processes likely to degrade the quality of social interactions (e.g., threat appraisals, self-protective withdrawal) and hamper the development of social
bonds (Elliot et al., 2006). In academic settings, insecure or tenuous relationships hinder exploration due to a preoccupation with self-protection and self-worth (Elliot & Reis, 2003), and should lead students to construe seeking help as a threatening proposition.

The third aim of the present research was to test whether the relations between achievement/friendship goals and instrumental help-seeking are mediated by attitudes toward help-seeking. Only two existing studies have investigated this issue, and neither study attended to the approach-avoidance distinction (Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). The one clear, relevant, finding from this research is that the perceived benefits of help-seeking mediated the positive relation between mastery-approach goals and instrumental help-seeking. In our research, we sought to replicate the aforementioned mediational finding, and to extend the examination of mediational processes to avoidance-based achievement goals, friendship-approach and friendship-avoidance goals. The predicted paths from goals to instrumental help-seeking, and from goals to attitudes toward help-seeking have been delineated above. With regard to the final path between attitudes toward help-seeking and instrumental help-seeking, predictions are straightforward, that is, emphasis on the possible benefits of help-seeking should lead to more instrumental help-seeking, whereas emphasis on the possible costs of help-seeking should lead to less instrumental help-seeking. In sum, regarding mediation, the following hypotheses were formulated: (a) the perceived benefits of help-seeking would mediate the positive relations between the two mastery-based goals and instrumental help-seeking (Hypothesis 3a); (b) the perceived benefits of help-seeking would mediate the positive relation between friendship-approach goals and instrumental help-seeking (Hypothesis 3b); (c) the perceived costs of help-seeking would mediate the negative relation between performance-avoidance goals and instrumental help-seeking (Hypothesis 3c), and (d) the perceived costs of help-seeking would mediate the negative relation between friendship-avoidance goals and instrumental help-seeking (Hypothesis 3d).

Finally, the present research sought to test, in exploratory fashion (i.e., without a priori hypotheses), if the interaction between approach and avoidance achievement goals, and approach and avoidance friendship goals, accounts for further variation in instrumental help-seeking. Although, as noted by Horst, Finney, and Barron (2007), a growing number of researchers have recognized the importance of studying social goals in conjunction with academic goals to better understand academic outcomes, no study has been conducted that examines the interaction between friendship and achievement approach-avoidance goals; the present research sought to rectify this oversight.

2. Study 1

Study 1 was conducted to determine how achievement and friendship goals relate to instrumental help-seeking. The main aim of this study was to fill the empirical gap regarding how achievement and friendship goals predict instrumental help-seeking. Specifically, the first study tested Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c, and 2.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

Participants were 317 students who voluntarily participated in the study. The study was conducted in a senior high school district in a predominantly middle-class Caucasian area of Toulon, France. Participants had a mean age of 17.33 years (SD = .97; range = 15–19 years), and came predominantly from Grade 12 (86% of the sample).

2.1.2. Measures

2.1.2.1. Achievement goals. Elliot and Murayama’s (2008) scale, a revised form of Elliot and McGregor’s (2001) Achievement Goals Questionnaire (AGQ), was used. Three items are used to assess each goal, mastery-approach (e.g., “This term, my goal is to learn as much as possible”), performance-approach (e.g., “This term, my goal is to do better than other students”), mastery-avoidance (e.g., “This term, my goal is to avoid learning less than I possibly could”), and performance-avoidance (e.g., “My goal this term is to avoid performing worse than other students”). In this revised measure, the mastery-avoidance goal items are adjusted to make them less affectively based, and the performance-avoidance goal items are adjusted to make them explicitly normative in focus. Participants answered using a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The original revised AGQ was translated into French following the standardized back-translation procedures described in the literature (Brislin, 1986; Van de Vijver & Hambleton, 1996). Translation from English into French was done separately by two bilingual researchers and a bilingual translator. Thereafter, translation discrepancies between the three translated forms were discussed in order to develop an initial French version. A second bilingual translator whose native language was English and who had not seen the original English version of the AGQ translated this French version back into English. The back-translated version was then compared with the original English version and inconsistencies, errors, and biases were highlighted. The translation process was repeated until the back-translated versions were equivalent to the original English version. The final versions exhibited no discrepancies with the original version when back-translated. As an additional check, the final version was independently reviewed by the translators to confirm that each item had kept its original meaning (Brislin, 1986). The same procedure was used to translate the other scales used in the present study.

2.1.2.2. Friendship goals. The Friendship Goals Questionnaire (FGQ) from Elliot et al. (2006) was used. Four items are used to assess each goal, friendship-approach (e.g., “I will be trying to deepen my relationships with my friends this term”) and friendship-avoidance (e.g., “I will be trying to avoid
Table 1
Descriptive statistics, Cronbach’s αs, and confirmatory factor analysis fit indexes for Study 1/Study 2.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
<th>χ²/df</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
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<td>−1.76</td>
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<td>−.99</td>
<td>−.99</td>
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</table>

= = data not applicable.

2.1.2.3. Instrumental help-seeking. The Help-Seeking Questionnaire (HSQ) from Newman (1990) was used. Four items are used to assess students’ intentions to seek help for the purpose of learning and understanding. The items were worded to focus on schoolmates as a source of help (e.g., “When I need help understanding how to do a problem, I ask a schoolmate”). Participants answered using a response scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (very true of me).

2.1.3. Psychometric properties of the measures

Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted separately on the eight friendship goals items, the twelve achievement goals items, and the four help-seeking items. Means, standard deviations, fit indexes, and Cronbach’s αs for all variables are presented in Table 1. Analyses were conducted using maximum likelihood estimations on the three covariance matrices. As recommended by several researchers (Byrne, 2005; Hoyle & Panter, 1995; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000), we used several different indexes to evaluate the fit of the models to the data, including the chi-square degree of freedom ratio (χ²/df), comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). To evaluate the adequacy of model fit the criteria χ²/df ≤ 2.0 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995), CFI ≥ .90, IFI ≥ .90, and RMSEA ≤ .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) were used. The four-factor, two-factor, and single-factor models for the AGQ, FGQ, and HSQ, respectively, were acceptable (χ²/df ratios < 2, fit indexes ≥ .99, and RMSEAs < .05).

2.1.4. Procedure

The study was conducted during the second term of the school year. During the first week of the term, participants completed the friendship goals questionnaire. One week later, participants completed the achievement goals measure. After another week had elapsed, participants completed the instrumental help-seeking scale. All measures were completed in group-sessions ranging from 40 to 60 participants.

2.2. Results

The intercorrelations between the variables of the study are presented in Table 2.
A simultaneous multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze the main and interactive effect of achievement and friendship goals. The main and interactive effects of gender (men = +1, women = -1) were also investigated. The initial regression model was comprised of the four achievement goals, the two friendship goals, gender, and the first-order interactions among these variables. All main effect terms were centered, and multiplicative interaction terms were created with these centered variables. Preliminary analyses revealed that no interactions were significant, so they were trimmed from subsequent analyses. Thus, the basic model consisted of the seven main effect terms.

Regressing help-seeking on the basic model yielded a significant overall effect, $F(7, 309) = 15.51$, $p < .001$ ($R^2 = .26$). Mastery-approach goals, $F(1, 309) = 18.23$, $p < .001$ ($\beta = .22$), mastery-avoidance goals, $F(1, 309) = 13.84$, $p < .001$ ($\beta = .19$), and friendship-approach goals, $F(1, 309) = 15.44$, $p < .001$ ($\beta = .22$), were significant positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking. Performance-avoidance goals, $F(1, 309) = 23.43$, $p < .001$ ($\beta = -.25$), and friendship-avoidance goals, $F(1, 309) = 10.69$, $p < .01$ ($\beta = -.18$), were significant negative predictors of instrumental help-seeking. A significant gender effect, $F(1, 309) = 6.66$, $p < .05$ ($\beta = -.13$), indicated that females had higher scores than did males on instrumental help-seeking.

2.3. Discussion

The results of study one provided strong support for the predicted influence of achievement and friendship goals on instrumental help-seeking. As expected, it was found that both types of mastery goals (approach and avoidance) were positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking (Hypotheses 1a and 1c). Additionally, and in line with predictions, friendship-approach goals were positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking (Hypothesis 2). Finally, both performance-avoidance and friendship-avoidance goals were found to be negatively related to instrumental help-seeking (Hypotheses 1b and 2, respectively). No relation between performance-approach goals and instrumental help-seeking was observed. Though unexpected, a significant gender effect emerged, suggesting that females reported more instrumental help-seeking than males.

Study 1 was limited in that it did not include any measures of attitudes toward help-seeking. As discussed above, it was conjectured that these attitudes may mediate the relationship between achievement and friendship goals and instrumental help-seeking. Thus, Study 2 was conducted to both replicate the results of Study 1 and to demonstrate the proposed mediation.

3. Study 2

The primary aim of Study 2 was to demonstrate that attitudes toward help-seeking (both the perceived benefits and costs) would mediate the relationship between achievement and friendship goals and instrumental help-seeking. As such, a measure of attitudes toward help-seeking was included. Furthermore, as discussed above, the ambiguity in the literature regarding the influence of achievement and friendship goals on instrumental help-seeking suggested a need to replicate the results from Study 1 to confirm their validity. Hence, all Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Participants were 234 students who voluntarily participated in the study. The study was conducted in a senior high school district in a predominantly middle-class Caucasian area of Toulon, France. Participants had a mean age of 16.55 years (SD = .83; range = 15–19 years), and came predominantly from grade 12 (83% of the sample).

3.1.2. Measures

3.1.2.1. Achievement goals, friendship goals, and instrumental help-seeking. The same measures used in Study 1 were used in this study.

3.1.2.2. Attitudes toward help-seeking. Newman’s (1990) Attitudes Toward Help-Seeking Questionnaire (ATHSQ) was used. The scales were adjusted slightly to make them specifically focused on schoolmates as a source of help. Three items are used to assess the perceived benefits of help-seeking (e.g., “I think that asking a schoolmate questions helps me learn”) and five items are used to assess the perceived costs of help-seeking (e.g., “I think schoolmates might think I’m dumb when I ask them a question”). Participants answered using a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale. The same back-translation procedures as in Study 1 were used in this study.

3.1.3. Psychometric properties of the measures

Following the same procedure used in Study 1, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted separately on the eight friendship goals items, the twelve achievement goals items, the four help-seeking items, and the eight attitudes toward help-seeking items. The four-factor, two-factor, single-factor, and two-factor models for the AGQ, FGQ, HSQ, and ATHSQ, respectively, were acceptable, with $\chi^2/df$ ratios $< 2$, fit index $\geq .98$, and RMSEAs $< .06$. The means, standard deviations, fit indexes, and Cronbach’s alphas for all variables are presented in Table 1.

3.1.4. Procedure

The study was conducted during the second term of the school year. During the first week of the term, participants completed the achievement goal and friendship goal questionnaires. One week later, participants completed the attitudes about help-seeking measure. After another week had elapsed, participants completed the instrumental help-seeking scale. All measures were completed in group-sessions ranging from 40 to 60 participants.
3.2. Results

The intercorrelations between the variables of Study 2 are presented in Table 2.

The same initial regression model used in Study 1 was used in this study. Preliminary analyses revealed that no interactions were significant, so they were trimmed from subsequent analyses. Thus, the basic model consisted of the seven main effect variables.

To examine the direct influence of the predictor variables on instrumental help-seeking, instrumental help-seeking was regressed on the basic model. The analysis yielded a significant overall effect, \( F(7, 226) = 16.70, p < .001 (R^2 = .34) \). Mastery-approach goals, \( F(1, 226) = 15.60, p < .001 (\beta = .22) \), mastery-avoidance goals, \( F(1, 226) = 19.98, p < .001 (\beta = .25) \), and friendship-approach goals, \( F(1, 226) = 32.60, p < .001 (\beta = .34) \), were significant positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking. Performance-avoidance goals \( F(1, 226) = 17.14, p < .001 (\beta = -.23) \), and friendship-avoidance goals, \( F(1, 226) = 16.81, p < .001 (\beta = -.24) \), were significant negative predictors of instrumental help-seeking. A significant gender effect, \( F(1, 226) = 5.24, p < .05 (\beta = -.12) \), indicated that females had higher scores than males on instrumental help-seeking.

Next, in order to examine the influence of the predictor variables on the perceived benefits and costs of help-seeking, each variable was regressed on the basic model. For the perceived benefits of help-seeking, the overall model was significant, \( F(7, 226) = 10.31, p < .001 (R^2 = .24) \). Mastery-approach goals, \( F(1, 226) = 43.96, p < .001 (\beta = .39) \), and mastery-avoidance goals, \( F(1, 226) = 14.06, p < .001 (\beta = .22) \), were significant positive predictors of the perceived benefits of help-seeking. For the perceived costs of help-seeking, the overall model was significant, \( F(7, 226) = 17.44, p < .001 (R^2 = .35) \). Performance-approach goals, \( F(1, 226) = 9.86, p < .01 (\beta = .17) \), performance-avoidance goals, \( F(1, 226) = 19.71, p < .001 (\beta = .25) \), and friendship-avoidance goals, \( F(1, 226) = 49.56, p < .001 (\beta = .41) \), were significant positive predictors of the perceived costs of help-seeking. Friendship-approach goals, \( F(1, 226) = 39.44, p < .01 (\beta = -.37) \), were significant negative predictors of the perceived costs of help-seeking.

Baron and Kenny’s (1986) “measurement of mediation” procedure was followed to test the mediational role of attitudes toward help-seeking in the relation between achievement goals, friendship goals, and instrumental help-seeking (see Table 3 for details on the different steps in this procedure). To document the influence of an independent variable (IV) on a dependent variable (DV) through a mediator or process variable (PV), three relations must be established (Baron & Kenny, 1986): (a) an IV must directly predict a DV; (b) an IV must predict a PV; and (c) a PV must predict a DV, and the direct relation between the IV and the DV must be changed (i.e., must decrease or increase) when the PV is controlled. Following the Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure, instrumental help-seeking was regressed on the basic model with the attitudes toward help-seeking variables also in the equation.

### Table 3

<table>
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<td>attitudes toward help-seeking predicting instrumental help-seeking, controlling for achievement goals and friendship goals</td>
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<td>( F(9, 224) = 16.39^{**}, R^2 = .40 )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendship-avoidance goals</td>
<td>-.14^{*}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived benefits of help-seeking</td>
<td>.18^{**}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived costs of help-seeking</td>
<td>-.21^{**}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall mediation model was significant, \( F(9, 224) = 16.39, p < .001 (R^2 = .40) \). The perceived benefits of help-seeking, \( F(1, 224) = 9.49, p < .01 (\beta = .18) \), mastery-approach goals, \( F(1, 224) = 5.24, p < .05 (\beta = .13) \), mastery-avoidance goals, \( F(1, 224) = 10.89, p < .01 (\beta = .18) \), and friendship-approach goals, \( F(1, 224) = 15.76, p < .001 (\beta = .25) \), were significant positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking. The beta for the direct influence of mastery-approach goals was .13, \( p < .05 \), as opposed to the original .22, \( p < .001 \) (a beta decrease of 41%), and Sobel’s Z test
documented the significant influence of mastery-approach goals on instrumental help-seeking through the perceived benefits of help-seeking \((Z = 2.79, p < 0.05)\). The beta for the direct influence of mastery-avoidance goals was \(0.18, p < 0.01\), as opposed to the original \(0.25, p < 0.001\) (a beta decrease of 28%).\footnote{The beta decrease of 26.5%), and Sobel’s Z test documented the significant influence of friendship-approach goals on instrumental help-seeking through the perceived costs of help-seeking \((Z = 2.92, p < 0.01)\). These results indicate that the perceived costs of help-seeking partially mediated the direct negative relations between performance-avoidance goals and instrumental help-seeking, between friendship-avoidance goals and instrumental help-seeking, and between friendship-approach goals and instrumental help-seeking (see Fig. 2).}

3.3. Discussion

Study 2 provided even more support for the proposed link between achievement and friendship goals and instrumental help-seeking. Replicating Study 1, mastery- and friendship-approach goals were found to be positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking (Hypotheses 1a, 1c, and 2, respectively), while performance-avoidance and friendship-avoidance goals were found to be negative predictors of instrumental help-seeking (Hypotheses 1b and 2, respectively). Similar to Study 1, performance-approach goals were found to be unrelated to instrumental help-seeking and females reported more instrumental help-seeking than males.

Extending the results of Study 1, it was found that achievement and friendship goals have unique effects on attitudes toward help-seeking. Specifically, both mastery- and mastery-avoidance goals were positive predictors of perceived benefits of help-seeking (Hypotheses 1a and 1c, respectively). A different pattern was observed for the perceived costs of help-seeking, that is, performance-approach, performance-avoidance, and friendship-avoidance goals were all positive predictors of the perceived costs of help-seeking (Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 2, respectively), whereas friendship-approach goals were negative predictors (Hypothesis 2).

Support was also found for the hypothesized mediational processes. First, the perceived benefits of help-seeking mediated the positive relationship between the two mastery goals and instrumental help-seeking (Hypothesis 3a). Second, the perceived costs of help-seeking mediated the negative relationship between both performance-avoidance and friendship-avoidance goals and instrumental help-seeking (Hypotheses 3c and 3d, respectively). Finally, and somewhat unexpectedly, the perceived costs (rather than the perceived benefits: Hypothesis 3b) mediated the positive relationship between friendship-approach goals and instrumental help-seeking.

4. General discussion

This research was designed to examine the influence of achievement and friendship goals on help-seeking from peers. Our hypotheses concerning the direct influence of achievement and friendship goals on instrumental help-seeking received robust support across the two studies. In addition, Study 2 provided support for our mediational hypotheses. Moreover, no interactions were found between achievement goals and friendship goals in predicting help-seeking across the two studies.
In both studies, mastery-approach and mastery-avoidance goals were positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking. The positive relationship between mastery-avoidance goals and help-seeking is of particular interest, because several studies (see Moller & Elliot, 2006, for review) have found negative consequences of mastery-avoidance goal pursuit (e.g., high test anxiety, low intrinsic motivation). In the present research, the use of a mastery-avoidance goal measure stripped of negative affect allowed a more positive picture of these goals to emerge. The mastery focus of mastery-avoidance goals seems to enable individuals to face the prospect of utilizing the help of others without viewing it as a threat to their competence or self-worth.

The results of the present research also indicate that the approach-avoidance distinction is important with regard to the relation between performance-based goals and help-seeking. Performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals were both linked with perceived costs of help-seeking, but only performance-avoidance goals were shown to be negative predictors of instrumental help-seeking. Most studies (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) have found no significant link between performance-avoidance goals and instrumental help-seeking, and we think that the present, significant, finding is due to our use of a goal measure with a more explicit normative focus than that used in past work. Together, the mastery- and performance-avoidance results highlight that not all avoidance goals should be considered equally inimical, and that performance-avoidance goals are the primary regulatory vulnerability in achievement settings.

In addition to documenting systematic links between achievement goals and help-seeking, the present research extends the nomological network of the social-approach and social-avoidance goal constructs. Elliot, Gable, et al.’s empirical work (Elliot et al., 2006; Gable, 2006) has shown that social-approach goals are linked to positive relationship outcomes (e.g., relationship satisfaction), whereas social-avoidance goals are linked to negative relationship outcomes (e.g., frequency of negative relational events). In the present research, friendship-approach goals were positive predictors of instrumental help-seeking in an achievement setting, whereas friendship-avoidance goals evidenced the opposite relation. Furthermore, in Study 2, friendship-approach goals were shown to be negatively related to the perceived costs of help-seeking, while friendship-avoidance goals were positively related to the perceived costs of help-seeking. Thus, these results demonstrate that social goals have implications that extend beyond the relational domain to the achievement domain. Although social and achievement constructs are commonly studied separately by researchers, in everyday life, social strivings have important implications for achievement outcomes and achievement strivings have important implications for social outcomes (Moller & Elliot, 2006; Newman, 2000). Parenthetically, we note that the findings of the present research are concordant with that of Ryan and Shim (2006, 2008) in showing the commingling of social and competence (achievement) concerns. The analysis of social and competence concerns in the present research differs from that of Ryan and Shim (2006, 2008) in that social and achievement goals were examined separately (and in interaction), whereas Ryan and Shim (2006, 2008) examined social and competence goals together within the same construct (i.e., “social achievement goals”). The present results appear to indicate that the pursuit of achievement and social goals operate in independent and, perhaps, complementary fashion (see Wentzel, 2000) to influence help-seeking.

Importantly, the present research not only documented direct relations between goals and instrumental help-seeking, but also documented mediation of these direct relations via attitudes toward help-seeking. All but one (Hypothesis 3b) of our hypothesized mediational models was validated, and even in this exceptional case, mediation was established, only via a different variable than anticipated (i.e., the direct relation between friendship-approach goals and instrumental help-seeking was mediated by lower perceived costs of help-seeking rather than higher perceived benefits). Our examination of mediation herein helped shed light on the precise perceptual-cognitive construals of help-seeking that emerge from achievement and social goals; subsequent work would do well to extend this analysis to affective mediators as well, such as eagerness for challenge and anxiety.

The present research is not without limitations. First, the data were correlational in nature. Although our assessments were conducted with complete temporal separation of the independent, mediator (Study 2), and outcomes variables, the fact remains that reciprocal, or even inverse, relation among the focal variables remains possible. Simply put, care must be taken to interpret our results in terms of associations rather than causal relations. Second, the present work focused on personal goals, and did not include situational factors such as the classroom goal structure. It would be helpful to replicate and extend the present work focusing on personal and classroom goal structures together (Karabenick, 2004). Third, the present research focused exclusively on seeking help from peers. Future studies would do well to additionally examine students’ perceptions and intentions regarding help-seeking from teachers, parents, and other authority figures with whom students relate on a daily basis (see Karabenick, 2003; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

Our research adds to an emerging literature that acknowledges the importance of examining achievement motivation in conjunction with social motivation to better understand how students’ competence and relational commitments influence their academic outcomes (Levy-Tossman, Kaplan, & Assor, 2007). The achievement and social domains are arguably the most central domains of academic life, and investigating the systematic ways in which achievement and social motivation jointly impact important outcomes within and beyond achievement contexts seems likely to bear much fruit in the years to come.

References


Help-seeking in academic settings: Goals, groups and contexts (pp. 15–44). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.


