



Chapter 2

Performance-approach goals: good or bad forms of regulation?

Andrew J. Elliot*, Arlen C. Moller

Department of CSP, University of Rochester, Meliora Hall, Rochester, NY 14627, USA

Abstract

At present, there is disagreement among achievement goal theorists regarding the beneficial or inimical nature of performance-approach goals. This article evaluates performance-approach goals using three criteria: empirical, theoretical, and meta-theoretical (values/beliefs). On the basis of these criteria, we conclude that performance-approach goals may be construed in both positive and negative terms, and that one's opinion of these goals is likely to be based in which evaluative criteria one highlights. At the end of the article, we offer our own opinion of how educators should view performance-approach goals.

© 2004 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Achievement; Motivation; Goals; Performance-approach

1. Introduction

In the past few years, achievement goal researchers and theorists seem to have accepted the theoretical and empirical utility of bifurcating performance goals into two distinct constructs: performance-approach goals and performance-avoidance goals. In addition, there appears to be widespread agreement that performance-avoidance goals are deleterious forms of regulation. Considerably less agreement is

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-5852758710.

E-mail addresses: andy@psych.rochester.edu (A.J. Elliot), moller@psych.rochester.edu (A.C. Moller).

present with regard to performance-approach goals. Some theorists posit that performance-approach goals are beneficial forms of regulation, whereas others contend that they are inimical. In this article, we address the question of the positive or negative nature of performance-approach goals.

An important preliminary issue concerns how performance-based goals are defined. There is much ambiguity in the literature regarding the definition of performance-based goals, but most (if not all) theorists include a normative standard of evaluation in their conceptualization and/or operationization of these goals (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Nicholls, 1984; Ames, 1992). Elliot and McGregor (2001) have contended that a normative definition of competence is the core or conceptual centerpiece of performance-based goals, and it is this position that we adopt herein. Thus, throughout this article, performance-approach goals are conceptualized as goals that focus on approaching a normative standard of competence (i.e., doing well relative to others).

The goodness or badness of a particular achievement goal may be evaluated on several grounds. Three central grounds for evaluation are: (1) empirical, (2) theoretical, and (3) meta-theoretical—values and beliefs. We think it is important to acknowledge these different grounds for evaluation, because we believe that much of the expressed disagreement among achievement goal theorists (e.g., see Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001) is rooted in an emphasis on different aspects of these evaluative criteria. Below we address each of the three criteria in turn.

2. Empirical

One way to evaluate performance-approach goals is to examine the empirical research that has been conducted linking these goals to positive and negative processes and outcomes. It is extremely difficult to review the literature on performance-approach goals, because the majority of the relevant research has been conducted from a dichotomous performance/mastery perspective in which the approach/avoidance distinction has been ignored. Measures of performance-based goals that have emerged from this dichotomous framework vary considerably in composition, with some composed entirely of positively valenced items (thereby assessing a performance-approach goal) and others composed of a combination of positively and negatively valenced items (thereby assessing a hybrid performance-approach/performance-avoidance goal; Elliot & Church, 1997). We know from personal experience that efforts to track down the specific item content of the various measures (via personal communication with researchers) are often unsuccessful.

One systematic, yet still manageable alternative to attempting to review the full literature is to summarize the research that has been conducted using the trichotomous (mastery/performance-approach/performance avoidance; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Elliot & Church, 1997) and 2×2 (mastery-approach/mastery-avoidance/performance-approach/performance avoidance; Elliot, 1999; see also Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Pintrich, 2000a) achievement goal frameworks. In these

frameworks, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals have been explicitly bifurcated, thus allowing a clear analysis of performance-approach goals per se. Although this approach allows a clear differentiation of performance-approach goals from performance-avoidance goals, it is important to note that performance-approach goals themselves have been operationalized in different ways by different researchers (Elliot & Thrash, 2001). Some researchers have emphasized the normative definition of competence, while others have emphasized the demonstration or validation of competence and, furthermore, some researchers have focused on situation or context specific aims, while others have focused on dispositional orientations (akin to motives). This variability in operationalization is likely to reduce the consistency of the empirical yield; nonetheless, we have opted to review all of the available studies, regardless of how performance-approach goals are operationalized. We limited our review to process and outcome variables related to achievement goals, and did not include antecedents of achievement goal adoption (in several studies it was difficult to distinguish antecedents from process and outcomes; we have opted for maximum inclusiveness herein).

Our literature search uncovered 41 published studies that have explicitly utilized the trichotomous or 2×2 achievement goal frameworks, and the results from these studies are overviewed in Table 1. In the following, we offer several summary statements, focusing specifically on variables that have been attended to in two or more of the extant studies. First, performance-approach goals are clearly positively related to a number of positive variables: challenge construal, competence valuation, effort, performance aspirations, performance attainment, self-efficacy, and surface processing (which is adaptive in many achievement contexts). Second, performance-approach goals clearly exhibit a null relationship with avoidance of help seeking, deep processing, disorganization, feedback seeking, self-handicapping, self-regulated learning, test anxiety, and worry. Third, performance-approach goals appear to be positively related or unrelated to intrinsic motivation, task absorption, and threat construal, and appear to be negatively related or unrelated to depression. Fourth, the relationships between performance-approach goals and both emotionality and procrastination are not clear from the literature, but are likely to be null.

In summary, the extant data on performance-approach goals indicate that they are positively related to several positive processes and outcomes, that they are unrelated to some positive and some negative processes and outcomes, and that they do not appear to be reliably linked to any negative processes and outcomes (although a few trends and a few single studies are suggestive in this regard). We do think it likely that performance-approach goals have some negative consequences, but the empirical evidence for this point is, at present, meager, and additional research in this area is obviously needed.

In interpreting this summary statement, it is important to bear in mind that the literature is at a nascent stage of development, and that the findings obtained thus far may or may not represent generalizable, widespread empirical patterns. Researchers not only need to extend the range of variables examined and to employ a greater diversity of methodologies, but also need to attend to different types of achievement situations, different types of achievement tasks, and different subject populations.

Table 1
 Relationship with performance-approach goals: results from studies explicitly using the trichotomous or 2 × 2 frameworks

Variable	Type of relationship observed		
	Positive	Null	Negative
Ability-related self-esteem		U	
Academic delay of gratification		B	
Adaptive help seeking	KK		
Anxiety		HH	
Avoidance of help seeking		V, W	
Avoiding risk	W		
Calmness due to preparation	T		
Challenge construal	S, T		
Competence valuation	C, E, L, Y, DD		
Conscientiousness	CC		
Controlledness	T		
Deep processing	A	K, M, N	
Depression		HH	P
Desire to escape			{U}
Disorganization	A	K, M, N	
Disruptive behavior	{O}		
Early vs. late preparation	U		
Effort	N, R, NN		
Effort regulation	{GG}		
Emotionality	J	K, FF	{EE}
Feedback seeking		LL, MM	
Health center visits		L	
Intrinsic motivation	R, FF, II	E, G, Q, JJ	
<i>Motivational regulation strategies</i>			
Negative incentives	B		
Self-efficacy-enhancement		B	
Stress reduction		B	
Performance aspiration	S, Q, NN		
Performance attainment	{DD}, E, G, {H}, I, J, L, M, N, R, FF, II	D, Q, Z, JJ	
Persistence	N		
Preparedness		U	
Procrastination	OO	T, CC	
Retention		J	
Self-efficacy	C, E, G, Y, AA, DD, EE, FF, GG, HH	V, W, BB, NN	
Self-handicapping		X, HH	
Self-regulated learning		V, W, AA, BB	
<i>Subgoal content</i>			
Acquiring positive evaluations	D		
Avoiding negative evaluations	D		
Skill improvement	D		
<i>Subsequent goal adoption</i>			
Mastery-approach		K	
Mastery-avoidance		K	

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Type of relationship observed		
	Positive	Null	Negative
Performance-approach	K		
Performance-avoidance		K	
Surface processing	A, (K), N	M	
Task absorption	Q	T	
Test anxiety	V, {GG}	I, J, K, S, AA, BB	R
Threat construal	T	S	
Worry		I, J, K	

Note: Results are from basic regression analyses or partial correlations when available, otherwise zero-order correlations are presented. Experimental studies are not included in the table, because they yield data regarding inter-goal comparisons only. The focus of this table is on process and outcome variables rather than antecedents of achievement goal adoption (in several studies it is difficult to distinguish antecedents from processes and outcomes; we have opted for maximum inclusiveness herein). Parentheses indicate marginally significant results, and brackets indicate results that are significant in some samples or for some types of measures, but are non significant in other samples or for other types of measures. Findings that are reported in more than one article are only included once in the table. The tabled studies are as follows: A = Al-Emadi (2001); B = Bembenutty (1999); C = Bong (2001); D = Brett and VandeWalle (1999); E = Church et al.(2001) (Study 2); F = Cury, DaFonseca, & Rufo (2002); G = Elliot and Church (1997); H = Elliot and Church (2003); I = Elliot and McGregor (1999) (Study 1); J = Elliot and McGregor (1999) (Study 2); K = Elliot and McGregor (2001) (Study 2); L = Elliot and McGregor (2001) (Study 3); M = Elliot, McGregor, and Gable (1999) (Study 1); N = Elliot et al. (1999) (Study 2); O = Kaplan, Gheen, and Midgley (2002); P = Kuroda and Sakurai (2001); Q = Lee, Sheldon, Turban (2003); R = Lopez (2000); S = McGregor and Elliot (2002) (Study 1); T = McGregor and Elliot (2002) (Study 2); U = McGregor and Elliot (2002) (Study 3); V = Middleton and Midgley (1997); W = Middleton and Midgley (2002); X = Midgley and Urdan (2001); Y = Pajares (2001); Z = Pajares and Valiante (2001); AA = Pajares, Britner, and Valiante (2000) (Study 1); BB = Pajares et al.(2000) (Study 2); CC = Scher and Osterman (2002); DD = Sideridis (in press) (Study 2); EE = Skaavlik (1997) (Study 1); FF = Skaavlik (1997) (Study 2); GG = Smith, Duda, Allen, and Hall (2002); HH = Smith, Sinclair, and Chapman (2002); II = Tanaka and Yamauchi (2000); JJ = Tanaka and Yamauchi (2001); KK = Tanaka, Murakami, Okuno, & Yamauchi (2002); LL = Tuckey, Brewer, and Williamson (2002); MM = VandeWalle (1997); NN = VandeWalle, Cron, and Slocum (2001); OO = Wolters (2003) (Study 2).

Thus, for example, the positive influence of performance-approach goals on performance attainment witnessed reliably in the literature to date may or may not be found in elementary school classrooms (as opposed to collegiate classrooms), when task-based competence feedback is provided (as opposed to norm-based competence feedback), following a failure experience (as opposed to following a success experience or no prior feedback), and among ethnically diverse samples (as opposed to predominantly Caucasian samples). However, what can be concluded with confidence from the extant data is that performance-approach goals *can* have positive implications for some types of achievement-relevant processes and outcomes.

3. Theoretical

Another way to evaluate performance-approach goals is to consider the conceptual nature of norm-based motivation. The desire for normative competence may be construed as part of a natural, inherent source of motivation, specifically, the need for competence (Elliot, McGregor, & Thrash, 2002). The need for competence and “the desire to be competent in one’s actions, skills, and abilities” (Elliot et al., 2002, p. 365) is initially manifested as a desire to have an immediate effect on the environment (i.e., the effective motivation of White (1959)). As children grow and develop more elaborate cognitive capabilities, they are able to represent competence in a more complex fashion. In addition to representing competence in absolute terms (e.g., directly comparing one’s concrete actions to the demands of the task), they are able to represent competence in terms of normative comparison (e.g., comparing one’s concrete outcomes to those of another), as well as temporal comparison (e.g., comparing one’s concrete outcomes to an abstract memory of one’s prior outcomes). Shortly after children develop the capacity to represent competence in these more complex ways, they exhibit strivings to attain these types of competence (see Butler, 1998; Dweck, 1999; Ruble & Frey, 1991). Conceptually, these strivings for normative or temporal competence appear to be a straightforward manifestation of the need for competence that is initially manifested in the exploratory behavior of the infant.

The function of the need for competence is to propel the individual into the environment to acquire a psychological nutriment, competence, that is necessary for optimal functioning (Ryan, 1995; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Infants can only obtain competence information through one source, task-based standards of evaluation. Cognitive maturation enables children to additionally acquire competence information through the use of normative and temporal standards. These more complex standards not only provide an additional *source* of competence information, but they also provide additional *types* of competence information. With regard to normative standards of evaluation, they often provide information that is more diagnostic of competence (Festinger, 1954; Trope, 1983) than the information provided by a task-based evaluative standard. For example, correctly solving five out of five math problems provides one type of competence information, knowing that the average number solved by one’s peers is three out of provides additional, and more diagnostic, competence information.

From the aforementioned analysis, it seems reasonable to conclude that performance-approach goals can be a natural and valuable manifestation of an inherent need for competence, in that conceptually, they represent one way of acquiring competence information that is integral to the well-being of the individual. However, a close examination of the nature of normative strivings reveals some potentially problematic features. First, in normative strivings, competence feedback is typically not available directly from the task itself (some types of face to face competition being the exception), but requires reliance on a separate source of information. This separation of task performance and competence feedback may limit the degree to which normative strivings can facilitate flow and task absorption.

Furthermore, normative feedback is often provided by another individual, meaning that the timing of the feedback process is often out of one's control, and the acquisition of feedback is an interpersonal and often public event. As such, normative strivings are more likely to be linked to self-presentation, self-validation, and self-protection concerns (Elliot, 1999). Such strivings would seem most susceptible to becoming sullied by these motivational concerns when they are pushed from without (i.e., suggested or encouraged by others or the structure of the evaluative environment) rather than being allowed to emerge naturally from within.

Second, the use of others as a reference point in normative standards means that these goals entail striving against others. In some instances, this form of striving may cause direct relational difficulties, as when it turns friends into rivals, or causes jealousy, envy, or hostile feelings. Often normative strivings appear to cause no direct relational disturbance and, indeed, competition among friends can enhance the enjoyment of some achievement experiences. Also, in many instances, the "other" that one strives against is simply a large, anonymous group of persons (e.g., standardized norms) that functionally represent abstract numbers rather than concrete individuals. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that at a structural level, normative strivings involve striving against others, rather than with others or independent of others. Individuals possess an inherent need to connect to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan, 1995) as well as an inherent need for competence, and it seems that at least some forms of normative striving for competence may be antagonistic to this basic relational need.

Third, through socialization in the home, the classroom, the ballfield, etc., children learn the relative value of different types of competence. In many cultures, normative competence is clearly disproportionately valued relative to absolute and temporal competence. Consequently, parents, teachers, coaches, etc., exhibit a tendency to guide children, in both implicit and explicit ways, toward the pursuit of performance-approach goals. Unfortunately, this socialization often sullies these goals, by distorting them into tools for demonstrating positive characteristics, pleasing others, and validating one's worth, rather than tools for acquiring competence information per se (Elliot et al., 2002). Performance-approach goals seem to be particularly vulnerable to being sullied in this fashion, not only because their definition of competence matches that of the cultural emphasis, but also because their enhanced diagnosticity affords the clearest, most emphatic means of demonstrating positive characteristics, pleasing others, and validating worth.

In sum, performance-approach goals appear to represent a valuable form of motivation in that they are able to provide the individual with competence feedback that is necessary for the individual's optimal functioning. However, and importantly, performance-approach goals also appear to carry with them some risks and vulnerabilities. Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, performance-approach goals are neither all good, nor all bad; rather, they represent *valuable*, yet *vulnerable* forms of regulation.

4. Meta-theoretical values and beliefs

A third way to evaluate performance-approach goals is to consider them from a meta-theoretical standpoint in terms of values and beliefs. Science is not value-neutral. At minimum, our meta-theoretical values and beliefs serve as the perceptual lens through which we conduct our research, derive our interpretations, and argue our positions. Moreover, in an inherently applied field such as educational psychology, it seems reasonable to give such values and beliefs a prominent role in discussing such topics as “Should performance-approach goals be considered good or bad?” When values and beliefs are taken into consideration, empirical patterns and theoretical premises that state how things are or tend to be may be evaluated further in terms of whether that is the way that things ideally should be. Thus, even if performance-approach goals are found to be predictive of certain positive outcomes, we may ask whether it is best to value such outcomes in the first place, whether these goals interfere with other important outcomes, and whether these goals simply represent effective coping strategies in a system that is itself problematic and in need of change (Kaplan & Middleton, 2002; Urdan, 1997).

Several of the pioneers of the achievement goal approach to achievement motivation were educational psychologists, and these theorists explicitly grounded their work in deeply held values and beliefs regarding the optimal nature of education. Two such values/beliefs may be seen as predominant in this early work. First, most of these theorists believed that learning is a valuable end in itself, not simply a means to performance attainment or a way of equipping individuals to contribute to society (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1983). Second, most theorists believed that competence should be available to individuals of all ability levels (Maehr, 1983; Nicholls, 1984). From this foundation, these theorists proceeded to contend that educators should seek to maximize mastery-approach goals and some additionally argued that educators should seek to minimize performance-approach goals.

We presume that most contemporary achievement goal researchers and theorists concur with these core values/beliefs, and that most agree that educators should do all they can to foster mastery-approach goals. The central and, importantly, separate question for the present discourse is whether these values/beliefs necessarily lead to the contention that performance-approach goals should be minimized. Before proceeding to examine this question, it is important to highlight that educators may seek to minimize performance-approach goals in two distinct ways: they may do so indirectly by eliminating the normative evaluative structures in the school and classroom environment that tend to evoke performance-approach goals or they may do so directly by explicitly communicating to individual students that performance-approach goals should not be pursued. Below we address both of the core values/beliefs in turn, with an eye toward whether they require the elimination of normative structures and whether they require the direct discouragement of performance-approach goal pursuit.

4.1. *Learning for its own sake*

At the structural level, the key question is whether the normative structures that evoke performance-approach goals undermine the pursuit of learning and mastery via mastery-approach goals. The available research on this question is equivocal. Some studies show that normative structures are indeed negative predictors of mastery-approach goals, but others show a null relationship (Ames & Archer, 1987; Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001; Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995; Roeser, Midgley, & Urda, 1996). It is likely that the impact of normative structures on mastery-approach goals depends on a variety of factors, perhaps most important being the *relative* emphasis of normative to task-based evaluation. We suspect that normative structures do not undermine mastery-approach goals when they are a peripheral feature of a strongly task-based learning environment. However, we have little doubt that when normative evaluation is the primary emphasis in a learning environment, it will evoke a host of motivational concerns (e.g., self-presentation, self-validation, self-protection) that disrupt mastery-approach goal pursuit. Thus, it would seem that valuing learning per se does not necessitate the elimination of normative structures, but suggests that such structures should be kept a peripheral, as opposed to central focus.

At the individual goal level, the key question is whether an individual's pursuit of performance-approach goals undermines his or her pursuit of learning and mastery via mastery-approach goals. The available research on this question indicates that performance-approach and mastery-approach goals can peacefully coexist. A significant positive relationship between mastery-approach and performance-approach goals is commonly observed (Elliot & Church, 1997; Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998), and the simultaneous pursuit of these goals has been clearly documented and linked to positive consequences (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001; Pintrich, 2000b). Nevertheless, we suspect that when performance-approach goals emerge from motivational concerns such as self-presentation, self-validation, or self-protection, rather than the need for competence, they may indeed distract individuals from mastery-approach considerations (Elliot & Thrash, 2001; Thrash & Elliot, 2001). Unfortunately, research has yet to explicitly address this important issue (although see Grant & Dweck, 2003, for a step in this direction). Thus, from the available data it seems that valuing learning for its own sake does not require that individuals be directly discouraged from pursuing performance-approach goals.

4.2. *Equal access to competence*

At the structural level, the key question is whether the normative structures that evoke performance-approach goals preclude some individuals from obtaining positive competence feedback. Normative structures, by their very nature, require that some persons be more successful than others. In a zero sum competition, my victory precludes your success, and clearly not all individuals can reach the 99th percentile of a normative curve. Normative structures vary dramatically in terms of

how many succeed relative to how many do not. For example, under some structures, one person succeeds while many do not (e.g., selection of a Nobel Prize winner), whereas in others, nearly all persons succeed (e.g., an easy curve in a pass/fail course). Normative structures also vary dramatically in terms of how concretely competence is defined. In the aforementioned examples, competence is a highly concrete, either/or proposition, whereas in other instances competence is defined much more vaguely (e.g., national norms on a standardized test). Nevertheless, all normative structures, no matter their specific type, require that some individuals be more successful than others. Thus, from a purely objective standpoint, it would seem that valuing equal access to competence does necessitate the elimination of normative structures.

At the individual level, however, matters are more complex. In the achievement goals that individuals adopt and pursue, competence is typically construed in subjective, rather than objective terms. This is true for mastery-approach goals as well as performance-approach goals. When faced with a highly difficult crossword puzzle, an individual may seek to simply get a few solutions correct, and may feel a sense of task mastery upon doing so. Likewise, an individual who is new to an activity or who has low perceived ability may strive to do well relative to 25% of other performers, and may feel successful upon reaching this goal. Thus, just as task-based success is by no means synonymous with perfection, normative success is not synonymous with being number one; individuals at all ranges of experience and ability may strive for and attain (subjective) normative success. Stated differently, it seems that optimal challenge can be a feature of normative, as well as task-based goals, in that individuals may strive for individually calibrated performance-approach, as well as mastery-approach goals. Therefore, it seems that in many instances, performance-approach goals are not functionally antithetical to the value of equal access to (subjectively experienced or perceived) competence. Accordingly, this value does not, by necessity, seem to require that individuals be directly discouraged from pursuing performance-approach goals.

Some scholars beyond the achievement goal literature not only espouse the two values/beliefs discussed in the aforementioned, but also explicitly argue against any and all forms of norm-based, competitive striving (Kohn, 1986; Orlick, 1978). These individuals lament the hypercompetitive nature of Western culture, and contend that this competitiveness has extensive negative implications for all facets of society, including our educational system. In discussing educational contexts, these individuals commonly advocate cooperative learning as the alternative to competitive school environments. Working from this foundation, these scholars would undoubtedly contend that performance-approach goals should be minimized.

At the structural level, normative and cooperative evaluative structures are not necessarily antithetical to each other; indeed some achievement environments are explicitly designed to contain a mixture of both types of structures. For example, some types of cooperative learning incorporate norm-based elements within them, the prototype being group competition (Slavin, 1993). Likewise, at the individual level, it seems as though normative striving and cooperative striving can coexist. For example, friends may work together to prepare for a normatively graded exam, with

each person fully invested in both helping the other to do well relative to others and striving for individual normative success. Nevertheless, norm-based and cooperation-based structures and goals do seem antagonistic to one another in spirit, in that the former entails persons working *against* each other, whereas the latter entails persons working *with* each other. Furthermore, even if cooperation and normative striving can coexist in certain instances, the position explicated by these scholars is that normative striving per se is detrimental to society. As such, this position would seem to necessitate that normative structures be eliminated and that individuals be directly discouraged from pursuing performance-approach goals.

In sum, it is important to explicitly consider meta-theoretical values and beliefs when evaluating performance-approach goals. Although the values/beliefs that have served as the foundation of the achievement goal literature clearly suggest that mastery-approach goals should be maximized, these values/beliefs do not lead to as clear a proscription regarding the minimization of performance-approach goals. On one hand, the normative evaluative structures that evoke performance-approach goals seem contradictory to the value of equal access to competence at least to the extent that competence is defined in objective terms. On the other hand, it appears that the individual pursuit of performance-approach goals does not necessarily contradict either of the foundational values/beliefs, meaning that the pursuit of performance-approach goals need not be actively discouraged. However, if one moves beyond the foundational values/beliefs to additionally consider an explicitly anti-competition stance, this perspective would clearly seem to necessitate both the elimination of normative structures and the direct discouragement of performance-approach goals.

5. Conclusion

In evaluating the goodness or badness of performance-approach goals we have discussed empirical, theoretical, and meta-theoretical (value/belief) considerations. From an empirical standpoint, performance-approach goals look rather good, in the sense that they are associated with several positive variables and are not reliably associated with many negative variables. However, the literature is at an early stage of development, and there remain critical issues in need of investigation such as whether performance-approach goals lead to such valued outcomes as enhanced learning and information retention, and whether the positive empirical patterns witnessed to date are broadly generalizable. From a theoretical standpoint, performance-approach goals may certainly be construed in a positive light, in that they appear to represent a natural manifestation of an inherent need for competence. However, these goals also seem to be particularly susceptible to becoming intertwined with disruptive motivational concerns such as self-presentation, self-validation, and self-protection. As such, in terms of their conceptual nature, we have portrayed performance-approach goals as valuable, yet vulnerable forms of regulation. From a meta-theoretical standpoint, one of the values/beliefs that has served as the foundation of the achievement goal literature would appear to suggest

that normative structures that tend to evoke performance-approach goals should be eliminated. However, it also seems that educators need not directly discourage individuals from pursuing performance-approach goals, because the pursuit of these goals does not necessarily contradict either of the foundational values/beliefs (only if one endorses a more strident stance against any and all forms of competitive striving is it necessary to argue for the direct discouragement of performance-approach goals). Thus, performance-approach goals are not necessarily problematic on the meta-theoretical front. Of course, this failure to indict can hardly be considered a strong endorsement, particularly given the far superior match between the two foundational values/beliefs and mastery-approach goals.

Each of the evaluative criteria (empirical, theoretical, and meta-theoretical) is valuable, because each provides unique information that helps establish a more comprehensive portrait of the positivity/negativity of performance-approach goals. Taken together, these criteria portray performance-approach goals in a decidedly mixed light. Performance-approach goals can be positive/acceptable forms of regulation, but they can be negative/unacceptable forms of regulation as well. In part, the degree to which one construes performance-approach goals as positive or negative will depend on how one weighs the information from the different evaluative criteria. If one weighs the empirical data most heavily, performance-approach goals look quite positive, if one weighs the theoretical considerations most heavily, these goals look positive but potentially problematic, and if one weighs the meta-theoretical values/beliefs most heavily, these goals look the least positive (and certainly pale in comparison to mastery-approach goals).

No set guidelines exist regarding how to integrate the information derived from the different evaluative criteria. Should meta-theoretical values/beliefs be weighed most heavily, as some seem to suggest (Nicholls, 1989), or should empirical data or theoretical considerations be considered paramount? Given the absence of guidelines for how to integrate the available information, disagreements among researchers and theorists are likely to persist. It is our hope that at minimum, making explicit the grounds on which opinions regarding performance-approach goals are held will help create a more efficient and productive dialogue. On one thing we are confident most would agree: far more research is needed on all three fronts (empirical, theoretical, meta-theoretical) before definitive statements regarding performance-approach goals will be warranted.

It is important to highlight that evaluating the positivity/negativity of performance-approach goals is an extraordinarily complicated endeavor, and that in many respects our analysis has merely scratched the surface of a deep and intricate set of issues. It seems that as one moves from empirical to theoretical to meta-theoretical considerations, this complexity increases. Certainly the complexity is at a peak as one tries to integrate the available information to form an opinion on how performance-approach goals should be addressed in everyday educational environments. In the following, we offer a brief sketch of our own views. In developing these views, we have sought to weigh information from each of the evaluative criteria more or less equally, taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses evident in each case. For better or worse, we acknowledge that our views are additionally

informed by the extensive “field” experience of the senior author, who has parented, taught, and coached three offspring through many a competence-relevant event over the past 15 years.

We do not agree with those who argue against any and all forms of norm-based, competitive strivings. It is worth noting that even prominent advocates of cooperation do not feel a need to take such a strident position (see Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Our analysis of performance-approach goals suggests that these goals have some positive elements, that performance-approach goals per se are not problematic (but can become so when sullied by other motivational concerns), and that the direct discouragement of such goals by educators is not a value-based necessity. In this statement, we are emphasizing the potentially positive (and non-negative) aspects of performance-approach goals, because the prevailing stance in the literature seems to be that these goals are primarily, if not exclusively, deleterious in nature. Importantly, we do not mean to convey that performance-approach goals are as positive forms of regulation as mastery-approach goals; on the contrary, we emphatically believe that mastery-approach goals are to be preferred, and that educational environments at all levels should be unabashedly mastery-oriented. In addition, we do not think that performance-approach goals should be encouraged (either indirectly or directly) by educators at any level. We simply contend that individually adopted performance-approach goals *can* have positive implications when allowed to emerge of their own accord and, therefore, that their adoption and pursuit should not be directly discouraged by educators.

Even this qualified endorsement of performance-approach goals must be understood in a broader context. We concur with those scholars who contend that Western culture is hypercompetitive, and that this has negative implications for society. Furthermore, we agree with those who insist that educational systems should not simply be promulgators of dominant societal values, but should be agents of societal change (Covington, 1992; Nicholls, 1989). Certainly, one important way in which educators may seek to instigate such change is through the design of their school and classroom environments. Rather than structure educational environments to reflect the normative concerns that pervade society, educators would do well to highlight task-based and cooperative evaluative structures, and minimize the use of normative structures that evoke performance-approach goals. Thus, we think that educators should indeed be seeking to promote change toward a less normatively focused, competitive society, but that the eradication of *all* normative strivings, including performance-approach goals, is neither a realistic, nor even a desirable aim.

Normative comparison and competition are deeply engrained in our cultural fabric and, as we discussed earlier, normative striving may very well be a natural manifestation of an inherent need for competence. Regardless of its origin, the tendency toward normative comparison is so firmly embedded in our psychological makeup that such comparisons are relatively spontaneous, effortless, and unintentional reactions to the performances of others and may occur even when people consider such reactions logically inappropriate (Gilbert, Giesler,

& Morris, 1995, p. 227). Indeed, Levine (1983) observed that students tend to compete with each other even when learning environments are explicitly structured to minimize normative comparison. In light of these considerations, it must be acknowledged that attempts to reduce the normative emphasis of educational environments and society at large will meet with great resistance and will involve a protracted time period. Our educational systems must not only aim to change society, but must also teach children how to function productively in the society that presently exists. If the real world to which students will graduate is rife with competition (and will be so for the foreseeable future), school should be a place where children are provided with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively adapt to such an environment. Importantly, this does *not* require that we train children to be strong competitors or that we make extensive use of normative evaluative structures. Rather, it requires that we fully and openly educate children on the nature of competitive structures, the ills of hypercompetitiveness, and the potential costs and benefits of their own normative strivings.

In essence, we are suggesting that issues pertaining to competence evaluation and motivation become a focal part of a life skills curriculum in which students are both urged toward task mastery and cooperation, and provided with concrete, practical tips for how to optimally regulate normative tendencies and how to effectively negotiate the normative contexts that they will inevitably and repeatedly encounter. It is likely that part of this curriculum would eventually involve exposing students to some forms of normative evaluative structures and to some normative information. Helping students to process and learn how to negotiate actual evaluative encounters seems preferable to simply discussing such matters in the abstract, and clearly some normative information is valuable to students as they seek to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and make practical decisions regarding educational and occupational trajectories. In the context of an unabashedly mastery-oriented educational environment we doubt that such minimal use of normative structures and feedback would be problematic, but we do acknowledge that it may be seen as running contrary to the value of equal access to (objective) competence. As our educational ideals are translated into concrete educational practice, instances such as this, where two endorsed values clash (the value of providing all students equal access to competence and the value of preparing all students for societal adaptation), seem unavoidable.

Schools and classrooms clearly have a dramatic effect on children's motivation, but it should also be noted that by the time a child enters formal schooling, many aspects of his or her motivation are already in place. Parents exert a formative influence on the competence-relevant beliefs, values, and aspirations of their children (Dweck, 1999; Eccles, 1993; Elliot & Thrash, 2004) and, furthermore, the most well-intentioned and well-implemented school and classroom interventions can be thoroughly undermined by countervailing forces on the homefront. If we as educators truly desire to transform society into a more mastery-oriented, more cooperative, less competitive place, our intervention efforts must be focused broadly to encompass parents as well as students.

References

- Al-Emadi, A. A. (2001). The relationships among achievement, goal orientation, and study strategies. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 29, 823–832.
- Ames, C., & Archer, J. (1987). Mothers' beliefs about the role of ability and effort in school learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79, 409–414.
- Ames, C. (1992). Achievement goals, motivational climate, and motivational processes. In G. Roberts (Ed.), *Motivation in sports and exercise* (pp. 161–176). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Barron, K. E., & Harackiewicz, J. M. (2001). Achievement goals and optimal motivation: Testing multiple goal models. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 706–722.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497–529.
- Bembenutty, H. (1999). Sustaining motivation and academic goals: The role of academic delay of gratification. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 11, 233–259.
- Bong, M. (2001). Between- and within-domain relations of academic motivation among middle and high school students: Self-efficacy, task-value, and achievement goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 23–34.
- Brett, J. F., & VandeWalle, D. (1999). Goal orientation and goal content as predictors of performance in a training program. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 84, 863–873.
- Butler, R. (1998). What young people want to know when: The effects of mastery and ability goals on social information-seeking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62, 934–943.
- Church, M. A., Elliot, A. J., & Gable, S. L. (2001). Perceptions of classroom environment, achievement goals, and achievement outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 43–54.
- Covington, M. V. (1992). *Making the grade: A self-worth perspective on motivation and school reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cury, F., DaFonseca, D., & Rufo, M. (2002). Perceptions of competence, implicit theory of ability, perception of motivational climate, and achievement goals: A test of the trichotomous conceptualization of endorsement of achievement motivation in the physical education setting. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 95, 233–244.
- Dweck, C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. *American Psychologist*, 41, 1040–1048.
- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality and development*. Levittown, PA: Psychology Press.
- Eccles, J. S. (1993). School and family effects on the ontogeny of children's interests, self-perceptions, and activity choices. In J. E. Jacobs (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation: Developmental perspectives on motivation*, Vol. 40 (pp. 145–208). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Elliot, A. J. (1999). Approach and avoidance motivation and achievement goals. *Educational Psychologist*, 34, 169–189.
- Elliot, A. J., & Church, M. A. (1997). A hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 218–232.
- Elliot, A. J., & Church, M. A. (2003). A motivational analysis of defensive pessimism and self-handicapping. *Journal of Personality*, 71, 369–396.
- Elliot, A. J., & Harackiewicz, J. M. (1996). Approach and avoidance achievement goals and intrinsic motivation: A mediational analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 461–475.
- Elliot, A. J., & McGregor, H. A. (1999). Test anxiety and the hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 628–644.
- Elliot, A. J., & McGregor, H. A. (2001). A 2 × 2 achievement goal framework. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 501–519.
- Elliot, A. J., & Thrash, T. M. (2004). The intergenerational transmission of fear of failure. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 957–971.
- Elliot, A. J., McGregor, H. A., & Gable, S. (1999). Achievement goals, study strategies, and exam performance: A mediational analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91, 549–563.

- Elliot, A. J., McGregor, H. A., & Thrash, T. M. (2002). The need for competence. In E. L. Deci, & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 361–387). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
- Elliot, A. J., & Thrash, T. M. (2001). Achievement goals and the hierarchical model of achievement motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13, 139–157.
- Elliott, E. S., & Dweck, C. S. (1988). Goals: An approach to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 5–11.
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7, 117–140.
- Gilbert, D. T., Giesler, R. B., & Morris, K. A. (1995). When comparisons arise. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 227–236.
- Grant, H., & Dweck, C. S. (2003). Clarifying achievement goals and their impact. *Journal of Social and Personality Psychology*, 85, 541–553.
- Harackiewicz, J. M., Barron, K. E., & Elliot, A. J. (1998). Rethinking achievement goals: When are they adaptive for college students and why? *Educational Psychologist*, 33, 1–21.
- Harackiewicz, J. M., Barron, K. E., Pintrich, P. R., Elliot, A. J., & Thrash, T. M. (2002). Revision of achievement goal theory: Necessary and illuminating. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94, 638–645.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1989). *Cooperation & competition: Theory and research*, Edina, MN: Interactive Book Company.
- Kaplan, A., Gheen, M., & Midgley, C. (2002). Classroom goal structure and student disruptive behavior. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 191–211.
- Kaplan, A., & Middleton, M. J. (2002). Should childhood be a journey or a race? Response to Harackiewicz et al. (2002). *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94, 646–648.
- Kohn, A. (1986). *No contest: The case against competition*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Lee, F. K., Sheldon, K. M., & Turban, D. B. (2003). *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 88, 256–265.
- Levine, J. M. (1983). Social comparison and education. In J. M. Levine, & M. C. Wang (Eds.), *Teacher and student perceptions: Implications for learning* (pp. 29–55). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Lopez, D. (2000). Social cognitive influences on self-regulated learning: The impact of action-control beliefs and academic goals on achievement related outcomes. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 11, 301–319.
- Maehr, M. L. (1983). On doing well in science: Why Johnny no longer excels, why Sarah never did. In S. G. Paris, G. M. Olson, & H. W. Stevenson (Eds.), *Learning & motivation in the classroom*. Hillsdale, NJ: LEA.
- McGregor, H. A., & Elliot, A. J. (2002). Achievement goals as predictors of achievement-relevant processes prior to task engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94, 381–395.
- Middleton, M. J., & Midgley, C. (1997). Avoiding the demonstration of lack of ability: An underexplored aspect of goal theory. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 710–718.
- Middleton, M. J., & Midgley, C. (2002). Beyond motivation: Middle school students' perceptions of press for understanding math. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 27, 373–391.
- Midgley, C., Anderman, E., & Hicks, L. (1995). Differences between elementary and middle school teachers and students: A goal theory approach. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 15, 90–113.
- Midgley, C., Kaplan, A., & Middleton, M. (2001). Performance-approach goals: Good for what, for whom, under what circumstances, and at what cost? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 77–86.
- Midgley, C., & Urdan, T. (2001). Academic self-handicapping and achievement goals: A further examination. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 26, 61–75.
- Nicholls, J. G. (1983). Conceptions of ability and achievement motivation: A theory and its implications for education. In S. G. Paris, G. M. Olson, & H. W. Stevenson (Eds.), *Learning & motivation in the classroom*. Hillsdale, NJ: LEA.
- Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: Conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review*, 91, 328–346.
- Nicholls, J. G. (1989). *The competitive ethos and democratic education*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Orlick, T. (1978). *The cooperative sports and games book*, NY: Pantheon.

- Pajares, F. (2001). Toward a positive psychology of academic motivation. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 27–35.
- Pajares, F., Britner, S. L., & Valiante, G. (2000). Relation between achievement goals and self-beliefs of middle school students in writing and science. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 406–422.
- Pajares, F., & Valiante, G. (2001). Gender differences in writing motivation and achievement of middle school students: A function of gender orientation? *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 20, 366–381.
- Pintrich, P. R. (2000a). An achievement goal theory perspective on issues in motivation terminology, theory, and research. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 92–104.
- Pintrich, P. R. (2000b). Multiple goals, multiple pathways: The role of goal orientation in learning and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92, 544–555.
- Roeser, R. W., Midgley, C., & Urdan, T. C. (1996). Perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 408–422.
- Ruble, D. N., & Frey, K. S. (1991). Changing patterns of comparative behavior as skills are acquired: A functional model of self-evaluation. In J. Suls, & T. Ashby (Eds.), *Social comparison: Contemporary theory and research*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Ryan, R. M. (1995). Psychological needs and the facilitation of integrative process. *Journal of Personality*, 63, 397–427.
- Scher, S. J., & Osterman, N. M. (2002). Procrastination, conscientiousness, anxiety, and goals: Exploring the measurement and correlates of procrastination among school-aged children. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39, 385–398.
- Sheldon, K. M., & Elliot, A. J. (1999). Goal striving, need satisfaction, and longitudinal well-being: The self-concordance model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 482–497.
- Sideridis, G. D. (in press). Performance approach-avoidance motivation and planned behavior theory: Model stability with students with and without learning disabilities. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*.
- Skaalvik, E. M. (1997). Self-enhancing and self-defeating ego orientation: Relations with task and avoidance orientation, achievement, self-perceptions, and anxiety. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89, 71–81.
- Slavin, R. E. (1993). When does cooperative learning increase student achievement? *Psychological Bulletin*, 94, 429–445.
- Smith, M., Duda, J., Allen, J., & Hall, H. (2002). Contemporary measures of approach and avoidance goal orientations: Similarities and differences. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 155–190.
- Smith, L., Sinclair, K. E., & Chapman, E. S. (2002). Students' goals, self-efficacy, self-handicapping, and negative affective responses: An Australian senior school student study. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 27, 471–485.
- Tanaka, A., Murakami, Y., Okuno, T., & Yamauchi, H. (2002). *Learning and Individual Differences*, 13, 23–35.
- Tanaka, A., & Yamauchi, H. (2000). Causal models of achievement motive, goal orientation, intrinsic interest, and academic achievement in classroom. *The Japanese Journal of Psychology*, 71, 317–324.
- Tanaka, A., & Yamauchi, H. (2001). A model for achievement motives, goal orientations, intrinsic interest, and academic achievement. *Psychological Reports*, 88, 123–135.
- Thrash, T. M., & Elliot, A. J. (2001). Delimiting and integrating achievement motive and goal constructs. In A. Efklides, J. Kuhl, & R. M. Sorrentino (Eds.), *Trends and prospects in motivational research* (pp. 1–19). The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Trope, Y. (1983). Self-assessment in achievement behavior. In J. Suls, & A. J. Greenwald (Eds.), *Psychological perspectives on the self*, Vol. 2 (pp. 93–121). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Tuckey, M., Brewer, N., & Williamson, P. (2002). The influence of motives and goal orientation on feedback seeking. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 75, 195–216.
- Urdu, T. C. (1997). Examining the relations among early adolescent students' goals and friends' orientation toward effort and achievement in school. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 22, 165–191.

- VandeWalle, D. (1997). Development and validation of a work domain goal orientation instrument. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 57, 995–1015.
- VandeWalle, D., Cron, W. L., & Slocum, J. W. (2001). The role of goal orientation following performance feedback. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 629–640.
- White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review*, 66, 297–333.
- Wolters, C. A. (2003). Understanding procrastination from a self-regulated learning perspective. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95, 179–187.