

Achievement Goals and the Hierarchical Model of Achievement Motivation

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The achievement goal approach has attained prominence in the achievement motivation literature and has produced a valuable empirical yield. However, the precise nature of the achievement goal construct is in need of scrutiny, as is the issue of how achievement goals and their antecedents combine to produce competence-based self-regulation. In this article, we address these important conceptual issues in the context of the hierarchical model of achievement motivation. The approach–avoidance distinction, which has been an integral part of the achievement motivation literature since its inception, is highlighted throughout.

KEY WORDS: achievement; motivation; goal; competence; approach–avoidance.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the study of goals has become the predominant focus of researchers and theorists working in the achievement motivation domain. Much has been learned about the types of goals that students adopt in achievement settings, as well as the processes and outcomes that result from the pursuit of such goals (see Ames, 1992; Urdan, 1997). Given the extensive attention allocated to goals in the achievement motivation literature, it is surprising that there has been relatively little discussion among achievement goal theorists regarding the precise conceptual nature of the achievement goal construct (see Dweck and Elliott [1983] for an exception). In addition, achievement goal theorists have spent a modicum of time

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delineating the antecedents of achievement goal adoption (see Dweck, 1990; and Maehr and Midgley, 1991, for noteworthy exceptions), and explicating the manner in which achievement goals and their antecedents combine to produce competence-based self-regulation. It is these issues that we seek to address in the present article.

We begin by considering the important, foundational matter of how achievement goals are commonly defined in the achievement goal literature, and we proceed to offer a somewhat different conceptualization of the achievement goal construct. Next, we discuss this conceptualization in the context of our hierarchical model of achievement motivation, which attempts to incorporate goals and their antecedents together within the same framework. We then overview some conceptual and empirical implications of our achievement goal conceptualization and the hierarchical model. The distinction between approach and avoidance motivation is fundamental and basic to an understanding of achievement-motivated behavior, and this distinction is applicable to both the antecedents of achievement goals and the goals themselves. As such, much of the forthcoming discussion will revolve (either explicitly or implicitly) around the approach–avoidance distinction.

THE ACHIEVEMENT GOAL CONSTRUCT

Achievement goal research proceeds as though there is a consensual definition of “achievement goal” in place, but a careful reader of the literature would be hard pressed to find published work that clearly and specifically explicates the nature of this central construct. Those offering definitions have typically adopted one of two basic approaches. One approach has been to describe achievement goals in terms of the *purpose* for which a person engages in achievement behavior (Dweck, 1996; Maehr, 1989). A second approach has been to characterize achievement goals as a network or integrated pattern of variables that together create an *orientation* toward achievement tasks (Ames, 1992; Ames and Archer, 1987). In the following paragraphs, we examine each of these definitional offerings in some detail (see also Thrash and Elliot, in press).

The first definitional approach is appealing in that it seems to intuitively, even colloquially, capture what achievement motivation theorists, lay and trained alike, want to know: For what purpose is the person engaging in action in this achievement situation? However, the operative word in this definition, “purpose,” can take on several different meanings, and these differential meanings (and their ramifications) have not been distinguished and discussed in the achievement goal literature to date. Turning to *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1993), one finds the

word purpose defined in two primary ways: “the reason for which something exists or is done, made, used, etc.” and “an intended or desired result; end; aim; goal.” Most theorists have implicitly employed a combination of both of these meanings as they have conceptualized the achievement goal construct. That is, most theorists have construed achievement goals as a combination of the reason for behavior in achievement settings *and* as the aim or outcome that the individual seeks to attain in that setting (Pintrich, 2000; Urdan and Maehr, 1995). Thus, in the contemporary literature, performance goals are typically conceptualized in terms of both a general self-presentation motive (highlighting the *demonstration* of competence) and the adoption of a normative standard for competence evaluation, whereas mastery goals are typically conceptualized in terms of both a general self-improvement motive (highlighting the *development* of competence) and the adoption of a task-based standard for competence evaluation.

The second definitional approach is appealing in that it seems to integrate many different achievement-relevant variables together into a coherent organizational system. Indeed, this approach emerged out of a broader integrative attempt to pull together several different research programs identifying distinct orientations to achievement (e.g., ego/task involvement, performance/learning goals). These research programs had different foci and emphases. However, Ames and Archer (1987) proposed that the similarities between the various distinctions outweighed their differences, and they recommended that the terms performance and mastery goals be used as general, all-encompassing labels for the two primary types of achievement goals. Accordingly, from this perspective achievement goals are defined broadly as general orientations toward achievement tasks inclusive of numerous beliefs and feelings about success, ability, effort, errors, and standards of evaluation (Ames and Archer, 1987; see also Anderman and Maehr, 1994; Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Within each type of goal orientation, these various beliefs, feelings, and evaluative standards are presumed to be interrelated and, therefore, are thought to provide a wide-ranging framework or schema through which achievement settings are construed and approached.

Although there is value in both of these definitional approaches, they also possess noteworthy limitations. One limitation is that they construe the achievement goal construct as an omnibus combination of variables, thus making it difficult to know exactly which aspect of the achievement goal should be considered responsible for any hypothesized or observed effects. For example, it is difficult to delineate exactly why performance goals are presumed by most theorists to undermine intrinsic motivation. Is it due to their reason component (the self-presentation motive), their aim component (the normative standard for competence evaluation), the beliefs or feelings about success or failure associated with the reason or aim components, or

some additive or nonadditive combination of the aforementioned? This lack of precision may have been functional to date, in that it has facilitated the integration process, but in the long run it threatens to stunt the growth of the literature, because avenues for further development and refinement of the achievement goal approach are obscured by a shortage of precise, clear theoretical statements.

Another, related, limitation is that no guidelines have been offered regarding how many of the numerous possible characteristics of each type of achievement goal must be present before a person can be described as having adopted that goal. Problems loom in either direction. If only *one* possible characteristic must be present for a goal to be considered adopted, the diversity of goal instantiations corresponding to a single label would be so great as to render the label essentially meaningless. If, on the other hand, *all* possible characteristics must be present for a goal to be considered adopted, the explanatory breadth of the achievement goal approach would seem inadequate to account for real world achievement strivings. Thus, for example, if performance goals are defined in terms of the self-presentation motive combined with a normative standard for competence evaluation, this eliminates from consideration other combinations of reason and aim, such as the need for achievement or the fear of failure coupled with a normative standard for competence evaluation (e.g., trying to do better than others in order to experience the pride of success or avoid the shameful experience of failure). Of course, as additional characteristics are included in the achievement goal construct beyond reason and aim, the flexibility with which one can account for various forms of motivated regulation becomes exponentially constrained.

Another limitation, primarily of the second definitional approach, concerns the conceptual blurring of motivational constructs per se and the processes/outcomes that tend to be implicated in the context of motivated action. Traditionally, the domain of motivation has been viewed as encompassing two basic aspects of behavior—its energization and its direction (see Elliot, 1997). Motivation research has typically entailed attempting to link energization- or direction-based constructs (or both) with other variables representing the domains of cognition, emotion, or observable action. By conceptualizing achievement goals as an interrelated pattern of desires, standards, thoughts, feelings, attributions, and so forth, the second definitional approach collapses these domains together to form a single omnibus construct. However, there has been little consideration in the achievement goal literature to date as to how the various types of variables cohere together to create an integrated goal orientation. In addition, from this perspective, research linking traditional motivational variables, such as aims or standards for evaluation, with other variables, such as beliefs about effort or ability

attributions, must merely be seen as construct validation rather than as an attempt to examine the predictive utility of the achievement goal construct.

A final limitation is one that is empirically based. Given the lack of clarity regarding the precise nature of the achievement goal construct and, specifically, the lack of guidelines regarding which characteristics are necessary for inclusion in the performance and mastery goal categories, it should come as little surprise that the empirical research that has been conducted in this area has often yielded unclear results. Experimental manipulations of achievement goals are highly variable; some researchers focus on a single characteristic of the goal definition, whereas others focus on several characteristics at once (Rawsthorne and Elliot, 1999). Achievement goal measures (as distinct from manipulations) are no less diverse. Different characteristics of the goal definition are undoubtedly linked to different processes and outcomes, and this is likely to be a major reason for the mixed empirical yield (particularly for performance goals). It should be noted that there has been a common tendency for reviewers of the achievement goal literature to state the general conclusion that mastery goals are linked to a broad set of positive processes and outcomes, whereas performance goals are linked to a broad set of negative processes and outcomes. However, those who have recently perused the extant achievement goal research have tended to offer a much more qualified conclusion about the state of the literature (see Harackiewicz *et al.*, 1998; Urdan, 1997; Wolters *et al.*, 1996).

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the achievement goal approach has made significant headway over the past two decades in the attempt to understand motivated behavior in achievement settings. Attending to these limitations will facilitate additional progress, and will help to keep this approach at the forefront of achievement motivation research and theory. We contend that the optimal first step in this process is to define the achievement goal construct in a more specific and precise manner.

The goal concept has a long and rich history in scientific psychology, and has typically been defined as a representation of an end state or result that an individual seeks to attain (Austin and Vancouver, 1996; Kruglanski, 1996; Pervin, 1983; Tolman, 1926). In accord with this definition, we construe goals as concrete cognitive representations that serve a directional function in motivation by guiding the individual toward or away from specific possible outcomes. Regulation in any given situation may entail multiple levels of goals (Carver and Scheier, 1981) ranging from task-specific targets (Harackiewicz and Sansone, 1991; Locke and Latham, 1990) to longer range, idiographic strivings or projects (Emmons, 1986; Little, 1983). Goals may be contrasted with reasons, which we construe as more general, affect-laden dispositions that serve an energizational function in motivation by instigating or activating desires, concerns, and behavioral inclinations, as well as goal adoption.

That is, we employ the term “reason” in a technical, rather than a colloquial fashion to denote the *psychological starting point* for action, not just any “why” that may be identified at any level of representation. Although regulation in any given situation may entail multiple reasons for behavior, these reasons, by definition, must be independent of each other, as opposed to instrumental in nature.³

An achievement goal is a specific type of goal, one in which the focal end state or result is competence. As such, “achievement goal” may be straightforwardly defined as a cognitive representation of a competence-based possibility that an individual seeks to attain (Elliot, 1999). This definition may be contrasted with the first definitional approach discussed above in that it keeps the reason for achievement behavior separate from the aim of achievement behavior; it is the aim that is construed as representing the goal construct. It may be contrasted with the second definitional approach discussed above in that it keeps the various processes associated with the aim separate from the aim itself.

On the one hand, relative to both of the aforementioned definitions, the definition that we are proposing limits the conceptual space accounted for by the achievement goal construct *per se*. Achievement goals, as we are defining them, are cognitive representations that guide behavior in a particular direction. A complete explanation of motivation must identify not only the direction (aim) of behavior, but also the energization of behavior (i.e., the *reason(s)* that one is aroused by or inclined to desire the aim). On the other hand, extricating achievement goals from the reason(s) that they are being pursued affords innumerable possibilities for reason–goal links and greatly expands the conceptual space that may be accounted for by the achievement goal approach. Thus, a person may be trying to do better than others in an achievement setting (a performance goal from our standpoint), and this goal may be pursued in order to (a) demonstrate to others that he/she has positive characteristics, (b) experience the pride of success, (c) win the acceptance or approval of others, or any of several other plausible reasons. The hierarchical model of achievement motivation that we have recently developed represents an attempt to incorporate both reasons and goals together into an integrative framework. We now turn to an overview of this model.

³Reasons, as defined herein, represent a subset of the antecedents of achievement goal adoption (see Elliot, 1999). That is, all reasons are antecedents of achievement goal adoption, but not all antecedents of achievement goal adoption represent reasons. For example, competence expectancies are important antecedents of achievement goals, but they are not reasons *per se*, because they do not instigate or activate action. In similar fashion, environmental cues may be viewed as antecedents of achievement goal adoption, but they are not, in and of themselves, reasons for achievement goal adoption. Other goals may even serve as antecedents of achievement goals; obviously, from our perspective these goals are distinct from reasons *per se*.

THE HIERARCHICAL MODEL OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

In the hierarchical model, achievement goals are differentiated on two basic dimensions: according to how competence is defined and according to how competence is valenced. Competence may be defined differently as a function of the type of standard or referent that is used in evaluation. Three standards for evaluation may be identified: an absolute standard, an intrapersonal standard, and a normative standard. That is, competence may be evaluated, and therefore defined, according to whether one has acquired understanding or fully mastered the task at hand (absolute competence), improved one's performance or fully developed one's skills or knowledge (intrapersonal competence), or performed better or attained greater skill or knowledge than others (normative competence). This dimension of competence essentially reflects the conventional mastery–performance distinction; mastery goals are focused on absolute or intrapersonal competence, whereas performance goals are focused on normative competence.

The other dimension of achievement goals is valence, which represents the approach–avoidance distinction. An achievement goal may be focused on attaining a positive, desirable possibility (an approach goal) or may be focused on avoiding a negative, undesirable possibility (an avoidance goal). This approach–avoidance distinction has, until recently, been ignored in achievement goal research, but we view it as a critical dimension on which goals differ, a dimension of equal importance to the definition dimension.

Combining the definition and valence dimensions produces six possible types of achievement goals: an absolute-approach goal, an absolute-avoidance goal, an intrapersonal-approach goal, an intrapersonal-avoidance goal, a normative-approach goal, and a normative-avoidance goal. Although each of these goals represents a unique type of competence-based representation, and although each may indeed evoke a somewhat distinct set of processes and lead to a somewhat distinct set of outcomes, theoretical and empirical work to date has focused on a subset of these six goal representations. Theoretically, we (Elliot, 1999), as well as Pintrich (2000), have offered a 2×2 conceptualization comprising mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals. A mastery-approach goal represents striving to attain task mastery or improvement; a mastery-avoidance goal represents striving not to fall short of task mastery or striving not to lose one's skills, abilities, or knowledge; a performance-approach goal represents striving to do better than others; a performance-avoidance goal represents striving not to do worse than others. Mastery goals in this framework represent a combination of absolute and intrapersonal referents. These referents are combined, at present, because regulating according to each is presumed to produce a relatively similar nomological

network. However, some differences may be hypothesized (see Elliot, 1999), and we would not be surprised if future empirical work reveals the need to relegate these two types of evaluative referents to separate goal categories.

In empirical work, the primary focus to date has been on three of the four goals in the 2×2 conceptualization: mastery(-approach), performance-approach, and performance-avoidance (see Elliot, 1999, for a review). These goals have been highlighted because they are presumed to be the most prevalent types of goals in most achievement settings. However, mastery-avoidance goals are also important conceptually; empirical investigation of mastery-avoidance goals is therefore an important issue on the research agenda. One reason for the lack of empirical attention may be that these goals are somewhat counterintuitive on first glance, given that the predominant portrait of mastery goals in the achievement goal literature to this point has been positive. Some concrete examples may help clarify the nature and relevance of mastery-avoidance goals.

Mastery-avoidance goals are likely to be quite common among the elderly. As one ages, one's physical and, at times, mental skills and abilities gradually begin to diminish. In witnessing this deterioration process, it is likely that many adopt an idiographic variant of the goal "avoid losing my skills and abilities." Star athletes or students who have focused on maximizing their potential may reach a point where they question whether they have "reached their peak," and may begin to regulate according to a mastery-avoidance goal such as "not do worse than I have in the past." Those high in perfectionism may be a prime candidate for the adoption of mastery-avoidance goals such as "make sure I don't make any mistakes" or "not get a single question wrong" (see also Pintrich, 2000). Mastery-avoidance goals may also be oft-employed regulatory tools for those who feel they have a bad memory and, in compensatory fashion, focus on "not forgetting what I have studied or learned."

The examples that we have provided not only illustrate the nature of mastery-avoidance goals, but also demonstrate the diversity of specific goals that can be classified under a single achievement goal rubric. Although achievement goals are typically investigated in nomothetic fashion, it is important to bear in mind that real world achievement pursuits actually take on a much more personalized, idiographic flavor (Elliot and Sheldon, 1997; Emmons and McAdams, 1991). In addition, within each achievement goal category there may be a great deal of variability in the representational level of the goal. For example, a mastery(-approach) goal may represent a rather high-level striving such as "learn as much as I possibly can at school this year" or a rather low-level striving such as "get at least 45 out of 50 problems correct on my math exam." The commonalities that keep the different levels

and personalized variants of goals together within the same achievement goal category are that they all define competence in the same way and that they all have the same valence. This highlights the appeal of the achievement goal approach: It is relatively simple in that it employs a minimal number of conceptual distinctions, yet it can cover a substantial amount of explanatory ground.

In the hierarchical model, achievement goals are viewed as the concrete aims through which individuals pursue their more abstract desires, concerns, needs, and motives (i.e., reasons). In our initial work on the model (Elliot and Church, 1997; Elliot and McGregor, 1999), we focused exclusively on approach and avoidance achievement motives (need for achievement and fear of failure) as the reasons behind achievement behavior, but we have subsequently discussed many additional reasons that may undergird competence pursuits, including neurophysiological sensitivities, self-validation concerns, self-esteem concerns, the need for affiliation, the fear of rejection, and the need for approval (Elliot, 1999). Many of these variables may also be conceptualized in terms of the approach–avoidance distinction (e.g., the need for affiliation/the fear of rejection, self-esteem enhancement/self-esteem protection). These abstract reasons are activated by intrapsychic or (perceived) environmental processes (see Church *et al.*, in press; Elliot, 1999), and are presumed to energize or provide the primary impetus for behavior. Although they provide the energization for behavior, they do not provide specific guidelines for how one may accomplish the desire, concern, need, or motive that has been activated. As such, individuals commonly adopt more concrete aims or goals that help guide and direct their behavior toward more specific competence-based possibilities. In this sense, achievement goals are the proximal predictors of achievement-relevant processes and outcomes, and these goals serve their underlying desires, concerns, needs, and motives, which may be viewed as the distal predictors of achievement-relevant processes and outcomes. That is, the reason that is activated in the achievement setting prompts the adoption of achievement goals, which serve as the direct regulators of achievement behavior.

A primary assumption of the hierarchical model is that conceptually, the goal and reason constructs should be construed as separate and independent entities. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that in the actual process of regulation, the reason and goal constructs work very closely together. The underlying reasons for behavior are not simply left behind once they have prompted goal adoption; rather they “remain in communication with” the goal (see Lewin, 1935, on the need–goal relationship), and exert their influence throughout the process of goal pursuit. Specifically, we view goals as the channel or funnel through which desires, concerns, needs, and motives affect

behavior. Thus, in the process of regulating behavior in a given achievement setting, the reason and goal constructs essentially become intertwined. One may view this dynamic integration as a third construct—a goal complex (see Murray, 1938, for a related discussion; Thrash and Elliot, in press).

The goal complex is construed as a context-specific regulatory construct that is formed upon adoption of a goal and is represented in memory until the goal or reason is achieved, altered, or abandoned (see Allport, 1937, for a conceptual parallel). Thus, although each goal belonging to a particular achievement goal category (e.g., performance-approach) represents the same basic aim (e.g., doing better than others), in actual achievement settings the same goal may lead to somewhat different processes and outcomes, depending on its accompanying reason. Stated differently, numerous goal complexes are possible in any given achievement setting, and each goal complex is likely to have a somewhat distinct predictive profile, even those possessing the same goal component.

The concept of goal complex is highly similar to the first definitional approach to achievement goal that we discussed earlier. In fact, in many respects, one may view the hierarchical model of achievement motivation as an attempt to lay a conceptual foundation for the standard achievement goal approach, a foundation that we believe has been conspicuously absent to date (see Dweck, 1990, for an important exception). Despite the fact that the hierarchical model and the standard achievement goal approach arrive at a similar conceptual destination, the hierarchical model offers many benefits: it more explicitly and comprehensively accounts for both the energization and direction of competence-based behavior, it provides a more precise definition of the achievement goal construct, and it affords greater conceptual flexibility in that any combination of reason and goal may be considered. As an example, particularly relevant to this special issue, the hierarchical model allows one to portray an individual's achievement motivation in terms of striving to approach success in order to avoid failure, punishment, rejection, or abandonment (see also Covington and Omelich, 1987; Covington and Roberts, 1994). Such interesting and important approach-avoidance combinations are difficult to account for with the standard achievement goal approach.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE HIERARCHICAL MODEL

The definition of achievement goal that we have proposed and the hierarchical framework that we have articulated herein have important implications for future work in the achievement motivation literature. In the following, we briefly discuss two types of implications: conceptual and empirical.

Perhaps the most important conceptual implication concerns which types of goals should be incorporated within the achievement goal approach. We have differentiated achievement goals on two basic dimensions of competence—according to how it is defined and according to how it is valenced—and it is important to consider whether additional dimensions or distinctions within the proposed dimensions are needed to comprehensively account for competence-based strivings.

Definition and valence are but two of numerous goal dimensions that have been discussed in the broad literature on goal constructs. Other dimensions include importance, expectancy, specificity, temporal range, degree of consciousness, interconnectedness, and complexity (Austin and Vancouver, 1996; Emmons, 1997; Ford, 1992; Little, 1999). Each of these dimensions has been shown to have an influence on goal-based processes and outcomes, but the more pertinent question is how integral these (and other) dimensions are to the actual nature of the achievement goal construct. At present, we do not believe that any other goal dimension is central to the achievement goal construct in the same manner as are the definition and valence dimensions. The definition and valence dimensions are not simply relevant to achievement goals; they identify the very way in which the core component of these goals—competence—is delineated. As such, these two dimensions seem sufficient to comprehensively account for the basic types of competence-based goals that may be adopted in achievement settings.

As discussed in the previous section, we view the definition dimension of achievement goals as comprising three separate categories: absolute, intrapersonal, and normative competence. Each of these categories represent a distinct standard for evaluating whether one has attained competence or not. We have found it difficult, to date, to generate other plausible categories for consideration. In our attempts to do so, the most plausible candidate that we have envisioned entails a person evaluating his/her competence according to another individual's evaluative judgment. For example, a young boy may adopt the goal of doing well at school, where "well" is construed in terms of whether or not his mother is pleased with his performance. This is a complex combination of achievement- and affiliation-based regulation that, on the surface, may seem to include a fourth variant of competence-based goal. However, in this example, the child is simply allowing his mother to evaluate his competence for him, rather than doing it directly himself. For his mother to evaluate his competence, she must make use of one (or more) of the three standards that we have already identified, and the boy is just allowing his mother to decide how competence will be defined. Thus, this example does not appear to reveal a new form of achievement goal per se, but simply illustrates how others may be used as purveyors of competence feedback. In this example (and comparable situations), it is likely that the child will

quickly discover the type of standard that his mother is using to evaluate his competence, and will begin to directly evaluate his own performance, using the same standard.

The valence dimension of achievement goals comprises two separate categories: positive/desirable (approach) and negative/undesirable (avoidance). As with the definition dimension, at present we do not see a need to expand the valence dimension to include additional distinctions. If goals indeed fall into one of two categories—approach or avoidance—how is the concept of ambivalence (literally “both valences”) to be conceptualized? Clearly, persons at times regulate according to end states that they simultaneously construe as desirable and undesirable. From our perspective, the most likely scenario in such instances is the simultaneous adoption of both approach and avoidance goals, with the approach goal focused on the positive, desirable aspects of the end state, and the avoidance goal focused on the negative, undesirable aspects of the end state. This simultaneous adoption of approach and avoidance goals is likely to produce a great deal of conflict in the process of self-regulation, because individuals variously focus their attention on incompatible possibilities. The analysis of such approach–avoidance conflicts represents a foundational part of the literature on approach and avoidance motivation (see Miller, 1944); it is clear that approach–avoidance achievement goal conflict is an interesting avenue for future research endeavors.

In sum, the definition and valence dimensions seem sufficient to parsimoniously cover the conceptual space of competence-based goal representations. Within these dimensions, the boundaries of theoretical development will likely entail a full consideration of the 3×2 framework. However, new conceptual, empirical, or methodological developments could certainly alter our viewpoint, and we remain open to such possibilities.

Before proceeding to a discussion of some empirical implications of the hierarchical model, we make brief mention of some additional types of goals that have received consideration as possible candidates for inclusion in the achievement goal approach. *Work avoidance* goals (Meece *et al.*, 1988; Nicholls, 1989; Nolen, 1988) are commonly defined in terms of trying to get away with putting minimal work or effort into achievement tasks. Conceptually, these goals seem to represent the absence of an achievement goal in an achievement setting, rather than the presence of a particular type of achievement goal. *Extrinsic* goals (Maehr, 1983; Midgley *et al.*, 1996; Pintrich and Garcia, 1991) are defined in terms of trying to earn a reward (e.g., a trophy, money) or to avoid a punishment (e.g., getting grounded, losing privileges). These goals are clearly operative in many achievement settings, but given that their focus is on a reward or punishment, rather than competence, they do not represent achievement goals *per se*. *Social* goals (Maehr and Nicholls, 1980; Urdan and Maehr, 1995; Wentzel, 1989) may be broadly defined in

terms of trying to establish or maintain interpersonal relations; they come in many variants, including social approval goals, social status goals, and affiliation goals. These goals are clearly pervasive in achievement settings, but given that their focus is not on competence, they do not represent achievement goals per se. Although the ways in which work-avoidance, extrinsic, and social goals influence regulation in achievement settings clearly warrants empirical attention, none of these goals actually represent an achievement goal proper, and, therefore, none should be considered as possible additions to the achievement goal approach.

An important empirical implication of the hierarchical model concerns how achievement goals are manipulated and measured in the research process. The conceptual definition of the achievement goal construct that we have espoused herein separates the aim of regulation from its reason. In the following, we briefly examine some of the existing manipulations and measures of achievement goals with an eye toward this issue.

To the best of our knowledge, Elliot and Harackiewicz's (1996) intrinsic motivation studies represent the only direct test of the trichotomous achievement goal framework to employ an experimental manipulation of achievement goals. Examination of the mastery(-approach) goal manipulation used in these studies reveals that it is rather weak in terms of making competence salient ("The purpose of this project is to collect data on college students' reactions to hidden figure puzzles—specifically our Nina puzzles"), and that it focuses the participant on an absolute standard for competence evaluation ("When you have completed the four puzzles, you will be provided with information regarding the percentage of the total hidden Ninas that you found in today's session"). In contrast, the performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal manipulations are much stronger in terms of making competence salient ("The purpose of this project is to compare college students to one another in their ability to solve hidden figure puzzles—specifically our Nina puzzles"), and they not only focus the participant on a normative standard for competence evaluation ("When you have completed the four puzzles, you will be provided with information regarding how you did compared to other [university] students"), but also include a reference to the demonstration of ability ("Your performance in today's session will show your level of puzzle solving ability. For instance, if you find more/fewer Ninas than a majority of (university) students, you will demonstrate that you have good/poor puzzle solving ability . . ."). Thus, from the present perspective the mastery goal manipulation seems designed to evoke a mastery (-approach) goal per se (albeit somewhat weakly), whereas the performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal manipulations seem designed not only to evoke their respective goals, but also to evoke a reason as well (the self-presentation motive). As such, these manipulations map more

directly onto the standard definition of achievement goal and our concept of goal complex, than the more specific definition of achievement goal proposed herein.

Several measures of the goals in the trichotomous framework have been developed; we focus primarily on our own measure in this discussion (Elliot and Church, 1997; see also Elliot, 1999), although the issues we raise are applicable to the other assessments as well (see Cury *et al.*, 1999; Middleton and Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997; Vandewalle, 1997). The mastery(-approach) goal items in the Elliot and Church measure are rather straightforward statements focused on absolute competence (e.g., "It is important for me to understand the content of this course as thoroughly as possible"). Most of the performance-approach goal items in the measure are relatively straightforward statements focusing on normative competence (e.g., "It is important for me to do well compared to others in this class"). However, one of the items focuses on normative competence *and* emphasizes the demonstration of ability ("I am striving to demonstrate my ability relative to others in this class"), and another implies a focus on normative competence and explicitly emphasizes the demonstration of ability ("I want to do well in this class to show my ability to my family, friends, advisors, or others"). In the performance-avoidance goal items, normative competence is clearly implied, although it is not made an explicit focus of the goal statements (e.g., "My goal for this class is to avoid performing poorly"). One of the items additionally emphasizes the demonstration of incompetence ("I'm afraid that if I ask the TA or instructor a dumb question, they might not think I'm very smart"). Thus, from the present perspective, the mastery goal scale seems to assess a mastery(-approach) goal per se, whereas the performance-approach and performance-avoidance goal scales primarily assess the goal itself, with a bit of reason mixed in (the self-presentation motive).

This examination of our manipulations and (our and others') measures is in no way meant to invalidate them; on the contrary, we have confidence that these manipulations and measures have yielded, and will continue to yield, valid and informative results in many studies. That is, although the existing measures possess some "noise" along with the "signal," it seems clear from both the item content and the results these measures have produced that the "signal" is indeed coming through rather well (see also the "noise" checks in Elliot and McGregor [1999], footnote 4; Rawsthorne and Elliot, 1999). Nevertheless, the issues raised make salient the fact that existing approaches often focus on goal complexes in addition to, or instead of, goals per se. They highlight the need to carefully inspect the devices used to manipulate and measure achievement goals, so that the results of studies employing such tools may be interpreted clearly and accurately.

One response to the above considerations may be to create a collection of manipulations and measures explicitly designed for particular goal complexes. Thus, for example, a variety of scales may be developed to assess performance-approach goal complexes, each possessing the same performance-approach goal, but with a different underlying reason. In addition, we view the development of manipulations and measures of achievement goals that more cleanly focus on the goal per se as an important part of the research agenda. Such measures should afford a more precise and thorough analysis of the influence of achievement goals themselves on various processes and outcomes. However, it is important to highlight that such manipulations and measures will *not* enable the researcher to directly examine the effects of goals, independent of their underlying reasons. When employed in self-regulation, goals become inextricably intertwined with their underlying reasons in forming a goal complex. Manipulations activate general intrapsychic processes that merge with the goal representation, and measures assess the goal that is connected to underlying reason(s). Thus, for any given individual, even the “purest” of goal manipulations and measures will invariably evoke or assess a goal complex. The benefit of utilizing manipulations and measures of the goal per se is that it enables the researcher to most clearly determine the effect of a particular goal *across* the various (and often idiosyncratic) reasons associated with them. Even if one prefers to study particular goal complexes, rather than goals per se, the development of manipulations and measures of the goal itself would seem the optimal starting point from which to develop devices focused on specific reason–goal combinations.

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During the past two decades the investigation of achievement goals has infused the achievement motivation literature with a great deal of energy and excitement. Nevertheless, this influential framework is in danger of stagnating unless some foundational theoretical issues are attended to in precise fashion (e.g., how the achievement goal construct is conceptualized, and how achievement goals and their antecedents work together to produce competence-based regulation). At minimum, these issues must be addressed for the achievement goal approach to wear the label “theory” (unless this rubric is used to refer to a specific conceptualization such as that offered by Dweck [1990] or Nicholls [1989]). We offer the present discourse as a call for open discussion of these important considerations. As highlighted in this special issue, any fruitful dialogue on these matters is likely to revolve around the approach–avoidance distinction that has been at the heart of

theoretical and empirical work in the achievement motivation literature since its inception.

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