Performance Goals Addressed to Different Audiences

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Abstract

This study examined the differential effects of performance goals addressed to different audiences on academic engagement and emotional well-being among 378 college students. Performance goals addressed to oneself (i.e., goals to validate one's ability for oneself) demonstrated some adaptive relations while performance goals addressed to others (i.e., goals to impress others) were mostly maladaptive. However, the effects of performance goals addressed to oneself dissipated once the effects of mastery goals were controlled for. These findings emphasize the benefit of endorsing mastery goals.

Introduction

Students tend to engage in achievement-related tasks for different reasons. These reasons, also known as achievement goal orientations, can substantially impact students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes and outcomes (Elliot, 2005). Among various classes of goal orientations, mastery goals and performance goals have received much attention from researchers. A person with mastery goals focuses on making progress and developing knowledge and competence, while one with performance goals seeks to demonstrate superior ability and garner positive judgment from others. Extending the current goal literature, the purpose of the present study is to distinguish sub-types of performance goals and contrast their effects to those of mastery goals. Such in-depth probing will contribute to a clearer understanding of the effects of performance goals, which have been inconsistent (Elliot, 2005). In addition, the present investigation will generate practical implications for educators and parents, as the sub-types of performance goals examined are very commonly endorsed by students and often encouraged by teachers and parents (Soenens, Sierens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Dochy, 2012).

Literature Review

Conceptualizations of performance goals vary across research programs, whereas there is a general consensus regarding mastery goals as improving one's academic competence. Performance goal constructs in early goal research included two distinct aspects: 1) *performing better* than others, and 2) *demonstrating* competence to others. In contrast, some contemporary goal theorists view these aspects as separate constructs (Elliot, 2005). Unlike performance goals focusing on the first aspect (normative ability), performance goals focusing on the second aspect (impression management) have been rarely examined (for exceptions, see Grant & Dweck, 2003; Ziegler, Dresel, & Stoeger, 2008). Thus, in the present study, we focus on the understudied second aspect, demonstrating competence to others.

Investigating this second type of performance goal is important given the prevalence of teaching or parental practices that may foster endorsement of such goals. Teachers and parents commonly use conditional positive regard based on the achievement of their students and children (e.g., love-withdrawal and guilt induction). Such psychologically controlling instructional and parenting practices inevitably foster students' use of performance goals to impress teachers (Soenens et al., 2012) and parents (Pomerantz & Wang, 2009). Since the term "audience" implies viewers outside the individual, it might be expected that parents and teachers are often the primary audience students with these goals aim to impress, but proving one's ability to oneself has also been observed (e.g., validating goals, Grant & Dweck, 2003).

These audience-specific performance goals may lead to different student outcomes. This hypothesis is not new (Urdan & Mestas, 2006), but the work of Ziegler et al. (2008) is the only existing empirical investigation of this issue. They found that performance goals addressed to different audiences (i.e., self vs. others) are empirically distinct constructs and confirmed that performance goals directed towards the self were linked to better profiles of motivation, as compared to performance goals directed to others. The current study examines this potential distinction.

The theoretical basis for this distinction lies in self-determination theory (see Reeve, 2002 for a review), which suggests that doing something to feel good about oneself (i.e., introjected regulation) is a more autonomous and self-determined form of regulation than doing something for others (i.e., external regulation). Although performance goals addressed to oneself may be more autonomous and intrinsic in nature than performance goals addressed to others, they are still based on the need for *self-enhancement* (feeling good about oneself), rather than *self-development* (furthering oneself), and thus will, theoretically, result in lower well-being. When one's competence is constantly on the line and has to be validated through performance, individuals tend to show more emotional distress and anxiety (Grant & Dweck, 2003).

In contrast to performance goals aiming to obtain favorable evaluations, mastery goals are believed to have adaptive effects, without any adverse consequences, on academic and social adjustment. Mastery goals are similar to performance goals addressed to oneself in that they do not involve concern about public appearance or interest in impression management. However, they differ as the former focuses on the extension and growth of oneself, rather than the appreciation and validation of the self, thus

enabling students to take risks, seek challenges, and engage in deep learning (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Mastery-oriented students tend to view mistakes, failure, and setbacks as a natural part of learning and hence, mastery goals do not pose a threat to the self, allowing for enhanced emotional and psychological well-being.

Such theorization is consistent with the findings from Ziegler and colleagues (2008), showing that self-addressed performance goals were linked to a more adaptive pattern of relations with various academic outcomes (e.g., self-concept, achievement, effort expenditure, depth of learning processes, task value, and test anxiety) than performance goals directed to external addressees (e.g., parents, teachers, and classmates). However, Ziegler et al. (2008) did not include mastery goals in their analysis, leaving it unclear whether the observed effects of self-addressed performance goals were, in fact, due to unaccounted mastery goals. If the benefits of self-addressed performance goals do not hold after accounting for mastery goals, there will be no need to emphasize such goals or foster them in daily life.

Thus, the current study extends Ziegler et al. (2008) by both investigating the role of different sub-types of performance goals among U.S. students – the original study examined students in Germany and research indicates the role of peer-addressed performance goals may differ across cultures (Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009) – and by including mastery goals. We propose self-addressed performance goals will have more adaptive functions than others-directed performance goals. However, we also propose the beneficial effects of self-addressed performance goals may not hold once the effects of mastery goals are controlled for. In the current study, we considered two important indicators of student adjustment: cognitive learning strategies and emotional well-being. Results are expected to provide clear guidelines for teachers and parents regarding the types of goals to promote in the classroom and home.

Method
A total of 378 college students (78.5% female, 21.5% male; 95% Caucasian; Mean age of 21.56 years) attending a university in the Midwest participated in the study for extra credit from Fall 2009 through Spring 2010. Students were assured that participation was voluntary and their answers would be kept confidential. A 7-point Likert scale was used for all measures ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). All measures have been well-validated in prior investigations.

Performance goals addressed to different audiences
Drawn from Ziegler et al. (2008), we used three items each to measure performance goals addressed to parents, teachers, and classmates. These items measure the extent to which students want these addressees to notice their good performance, be proud of them, like them, or praise them for their good performance. Three items measuring performance goals addressed to oneself measure the extent to which students desire to get a good grade for themselves without referring to others. Based on the confirmatory factor analysis results, we created two scales: performance goals addressed to *others* (e.g., parents, teachers, and classmates; 8 items, alpha of .91) and performance goals addressed to *self* (3 items, alpha of .86).

Mastery goals
We used 3 items (Elliot & Murayama, 2008) to measure the extent to which students aim to understand, master, and learn course material (alpha of .77). Two sample items are "I am striving to understand the content of this course as thoroughly as possible." and "My goal is to learn as much as possible."

Study strategies
We measured two types of learning strategies: 1) regulation of study time and environment and 2) elaboration. All items used were drawn from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991). The first strategy captures general effectiveness in managing one's study time and environment and involves scheduling, planning, and managing one's study time and environment (8 items, alpha of .73). The second strategy (elaboration) measures the extent to which students engage in quality, meaningful learning and deep processing of material through integrating and connecting new information with prior knowledge (6 items, alpha of .77).

Emotional well-being
The items were drawn from Diener, Smith, and Fujita (1995). Students were asked to rate how often they experience various positive emotions (e.g., happy, joyful, satisfied, proud, enthusiastic, etc.; 16 items, alpha of .90) and negative emotions (e.g., nervous, depressed, worried, sad, irritated, etc.; 17 items, alpha of .92).

Results
We conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses to examine: 1) differential effects of performance goals addressed to self vs. others and 2) the effect of self-addressed performance goals after adjusting for the effect of a mastery goal. Performance goals addressed to self and others were entered at step 1 and a mastery goal was entered at step 2 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Regression coefficients obtained at step 1 indicated whether the effects of performance goals addressed to self and others differed. The change in regression coefficients from step 1 to 2 indicated whether the obtained effects of a self-addressed performance goal at step 1 persisted, changed, or dissipated once the effect of a mastery goal was controlled for.

Predicting study strategies: Management of study time/environment
The final regression model was significant (overall index of regression coefficient equaled .20, F value (3, 361) equaled 30.65, *p* value less than .001). At step 1, a performance goal addressed to self positively predicted study time and environment management (standardized coefficient equaled .39, *t* value of 7.23, *p* value less than .001), while a performance goal addressed to others was negatively related to study time and environment management (standardized coefficient equaled -.13, *t* value of -2.37, *p* value less than .05). At step 2, a mastery goal positively predicted time/environment management (standardized coefficient equaled .32, *t* value of 5.86, *p* value less than .001). After the inclusion of a mastery goal, the positive effect of a performance goal addressed to self became slightly less positive (standardized coefficient equaled .24, *t* value of 4.27, *p* value less than .001).

Predicting study strategies: Elaboration
The final regression model was significant (overall index of regression coefficient equaled.15, *F* value (3, 368) equaled 21.86, *p* value less than .001). At step 1, a performance goal addressed to self positively predicted elaboration (standardized coefficient equaled .13, *t* value of 2.36, *p* value less than .05), but a performance goal addressed to others was not significant (standardized coefficient equaled .10, *t* value of 1.79, non-significant *p* value). At step 2, a mastery goal showed a strong positive effect on elaboration (standardized coefficient equaled .39, *t* value of 7.00, *p* value less than .001), and a performance goal addressed to oneself was completely non-significant (standardized coefficient equaled -.04, *t* value of -.71, non-significant *p* value).

Predicting emotional well-being: Positive emotions
The final regression model was significant (overall index of regression coefficient equaled .05, *F* value (3, 368) equaled 5.90, *p* value less than .001). At step 1, both types of performance goals did not have any effect on positive emotions (standardized coefficients less than |.08|, *t* values less than |1.40|, non-significant *p* value). At step 2, a mastery goal showed a positive effect on positive emotions (standardized coefficient equaled .23, *t* value of 3.94, *p* value less than .001). The effects of the two performance goals remained non-significant.

Predicting emotional well-being: Negative emotions
The final regression model was significant (overall index of regression coefficient equaled .07, *F* value (3, 368) equaled 9.48, *p* value less than .001). At step 1, a performance goal addressed to self negatively predicted negative emotions (standardized coefficient equaled -.11, *t* value of -2.05, *p* value less than .05), whereas a performance goal addressed to others positively predicted negative emotions (standardized coefficient equaled .28, *t* value of 5.02, *p* value less than .001). At step 2, the effect of a mastery goal did not reach statistical significance (standardized coefficient equaled -.10, *t* value of -1.76, *p* value less than .08). However, the inclusion of a mastery goal completely nullified the effect of a performance goal addressed to self (standardized coefficient equaled -.07, *t* value of -1.11, non-significant *p* value). The negative effect of a performance goal addressed to others remained significant.

Discussion
Expanding achievement goal theory, the current study aimed to unpack complex attributes of performance goals addressed to different audiences. Results add new insight into the nature and function of various sub-types of performance goals. The current results indicated performance goals addressed to self showed an adaptive pattern, as they were positively associated with the use of study strategies, such as effective time/environment management and elaboration, and negatively associated with the experience of negative emotions. In contrast, performance goals addressed to others showed a maladaptive pattern, as they were negatively associated with effective time/environment management and positively associated with the experience of negative emotions. This is consistent with Self-Determination Theory (Reeve, 2002), as the effects of performance goals may depend on the degree to which they are undergirded by autonomous motivation. Thus, current results indicate goals directed to oneself are more adaptive than goals directed to others. However, the positive effects of goals directed to oneself were significantly reduced or dissipated after the inclusion of a mastery goal in the model.

Having self-addressed performance goals does not yield any additional benefit above and beyond the positive effect of mastery goals.

Conclusion

Performance goals addressed to oneself may be beneficial in the absence of mastery goals. However, students who pursue performance goals addressed to oneself without mastery goals could be at a disadvantage. They may be less likely to develop a long-term interest in the subject matter, given that task mastery has no inherent value but serves as a means toward enhanced self-worth only. In addition, such bids for self-worth may increase effort in the short-run but can backfire, eventually leading to psychological ill-being. Therefore, we conclude with the suggestion that teachers and parents should promote the goals to improve one's competence and mastery of skills.

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