Achievement Goals: A Social Influence Cycle

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Abstract

Achievement goals have been defined as the purpose of competence-relevant behavior. In this respect they connect one of the basic human needs, i.e., competence, to one of society's core values, i.e., achievement. We propose to look at achievement goals through the lens of social influence. We review both the influence that cultural, structural and contextual factors have on achievement goal endorsement, and the influence that endorsing achievement goals allows people to have within their social space. The review allows us to propose a circular model of the influence on and of achievement goals: The culture, social structures and contexts that are typical of a certain society shape the specific environments in which individuals develop their achievement goals, which in turn has an influence on the expression and circulation of these achievement goals into society, in a social influence cycle.

Keywords: achievement goals, social influence, culture, social value, competence, evaluation

Introduction

Achievement goals have been defined as the "purpose (…) of competence-relevant behavior" (Elliot & McGregor, 2001, p. 501). In this respect they connect one of the basic human needs, i.e., competence (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000), to one of society's core values, i.e., achievement (e.g., McClelland, 1961). Given the centrality of such matters in psychology and social psychology, it is not surprising that the study of achievement goals has attracted a wealth of research, with several meta-analyses and comprehensive reviews that delineate the properties, antecedents and consequences of these goals (e.g., Harackiewicz et al., 2002a; Huang, 2011; Hulleman et al., 2010). Achievement goals have been divided in mastery goals, with an intrapersonal focus (e.g., improving learning), and performance goals, with a normative and comparative focus (e.g., outperforming others), and a number of finer distinctions have emerged from research in this domain (e.g., Elliot & Hulleman, 2017).

Although early work has treated achievement goals mostly as an individual-level construct (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984), the history of motivational psychology is punctuated by numerous efforts to document the contextual (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2001; Meece et al., 2006), interpersonal (Poortvliet & Darnon, 2010) and cultural (Zusho & Clayton, 2011) aspects of these goals (Darnon et al., 2012). The present article provides an integrative framework of such aspects, and proposes to look at achievement goals through the lens of social influence. Indeed, the psychology of social influence studies "the mechanisms through which individuals and groups transform, maintain, and diffuse their modes of thinking and action when interacting with other individuals and groups" (Butera & Mugny, 2001, p. 1). In this respect, consideration of the social influence processes that surround achievement goals allowed us to review both (1) the influence that cultural, structural and contextual factors have on achievement goal endorsement, and (2) the influence that endorsing achievement goals allows people to have within their social space.

We will start with a brief account of the research conducted on achievement and achievement goals, as brief as the account of an extremely prolific line of research can be. We then turn to our proposition of a social influence approach to achievement goals. We will argue that the culture, social structures and contexts that are typical of a certain society shape the specific environments in which individuals develop their achievement goals, which in turn has an influence on the expression and circulation of these achievement goals in society, in a social influence cycle (Figure 1).

Achievement and Achievement Goals

In her book titled "Achievement", philosopher Gwen Bradford writes that "achievements of one kind or another are one of life's greatest sources of meaning" (Bradford, 2015, p. 2). In philosophical analysis, achievement is indeed a fundamental feature of human life. In her book, Bradford distinguishes two important lines of analysis that need to be followed in order to understand achievement. The first is a descriptive line that consists in identifying the common features of achievements. What is common to climbing a mountain, getting a university degree, and solving a crossword puzzle? According to this analysis, in all achievements there is a process related to a product: The product (the climbing or the degree) does not just exist, but it is reached by some actor through a process. The link between the process and the product is important, because products occurring by luck (winning in a lottery) are not considered as achievements. The consequence—and this will be important when we move to psychology—is that the actor must display some competence and effort for the process to culminate in the product.

The second line of analysis is evaluative: The process culminating in a product is an achievement when it is valuable (to the actor and/or meaningful others). This is also a point that we want to highlight from the outset, as we will see that achievement requires an evaluative process (e.g., writing a book is considered an achievement if somebody evaluates

this feat as valuable), and therefore social consensus on what is valuable. Thus, competence and the evaluation of such competence are at the core of a philosophical analysis of achievement. We will now see that competence and evaluation have been at the core of several streams of psychological analysis of achievement.

Achievement and Achievement Motivation in Psychological Research

Recognition of the importance of achievement for human life is a longstanding feature of psychological research. In early work by McClelland, Atkinson and colleagues, achievement is described as a fundamental need of human beings, a desire for competence, accomplishment, and superior performance (e.g., McClelland et al., 1953; see McClelland, 1987). The fundamental nature of the need for achievement is also recognized in White's theory (1959), and described as emerging from effectance motivation. A similar perspective can be found in early work on social comparison, which assumes that the evaluation of one's competence (abilities) is a fundamental motive (drive) in human beings (Festinger, 1954, hypothesis I).

Interestingly, in both perspectives such a fundamental human motivation to achieve is linked to the importance that society attributes to achievement. On the one hand, McClelland has compiled a great deal of economic and sociological data in a famous book, "The achieving society", in which he argues that achievement motives of inhabitants are strongly linked to a country's economic achievement (McClelland, 1961). Such a relationship has later been widely criticized (e.g., Beugelsdijk & Smeets, 2008), but it is remarkable that achievement motivation has been quite early defined as fundamental not only because it appeared as definitional of human beings, but also because it was highly valued by and functional in society. A similar feature can be found in social comparison theory, which argues that societal values, especially in the Western world, explain that people are motivated to continuously increase their abilities: "…a value set on doing better and better which means

that the higher the score on performance, the more desirable it is." (Festinger, 1954, Hypothesis IV, pp. 124-125; see also Butera & Darnon, 2017 for a discussion).

Content of Achievement

Competence (or abilities) is a core ingredient of achievement, but so is effort. As noted above, an actor's product can be evaluated as an achievement if the actor has displayed some competence and effort (Bradford, 2015). This is one of the central tenets of Weiner's attributional theory of achievement motivation, in which the author reviewed the (then) extant investigations on people's perceived causes of success and failure in the achievement domain (Weiner, 1985). Following the influential work of Heider (1958) on common-sense psychology, Weiner remarked that, although the number of potential explanations is virtually infinite, the dominant causes that people report are ability and effort (Weiner, 1985, p. 550; see also Brun et al., 2021 for a recent meta-analytical confirmation of the validity of Weiner's model).

A stream of intercultural research has pointed out some consensus across cultures in perceiving ability as an antecedent of success, although individualistic cultures appeared to emphasize effort (hard work) as an anteceded of success to a higher extent than collectivistic cultures (Triandis et al., 1973). More recent research, however, has found different results, for instance that East Asians prioritize effort over abilities, whereas North Americans do the opposite (Stevenson & Stiegle, 1992). In addition, some authors, as for instance Yu and Yang (1994), argued that it is the very definition of achievement that changes between East Asian and North Americans/Europeans, with collectivistic cultures locating the key to success in cooperation and the role of family. While the jury is out, we wish to note that there is today a growing number of evidence and models in psychology that recognize the importance of achievement for individuals, groups and society, and emphasize that the definition of achievement—and achievement motivation—is fundamentally influenced by the specific

culture and social structures of a given society (see King, 2022 for a recent comprehensive model). We will come back to this issue in the dedicated section on culture.

The Societal Role of Achievement

One may ask why achievement is such an important feature for society. System justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) provides an interesting suggestion that will be helpful in the final part of our argument. This theory claims that, through their institutions, societies develop, communicate and implement powerful ideologies that serve the purpose of justifying the political, cultural and economic system already in place. In other words, such system justification ideologies help the dominant powers and ruling classes to maintain social cohesion and social order. Importantly for the present discussion, Jost and Hunyady (2005) list a series of system-justifying ideologies, among which we find meritocracy, according to which competence (abilities) and effort are the key to reach success (achievement). As noted above, achievement can be defined through an evaluative process based on social consensus, here a societal ideology. Thus, meritocracy defines achievement and at the same time the justification process through which domination takes place: If competence and effort are the key to reach success, people who do not succeed are considered to have lacked competence and effort (e.g., Batruch et al., 2019). They therefore do not deserve a better position in society. Within this perspective, meritocracy thus helps justify the *status quo*—for instance existing social inequalities—and recent studies with multi-national samples indeed showed that belief in meritocracy (Mjis, 2021; 23 countries) and in school meritocracy (Batruch et al., 2022; over 40 countries) reduces the perceived unfairness of economic and social class inequalities in society.

Approach and Avoidance

It is important to note that, although it may seem natural to associate achievement motivation to the pursuit of success, psychological research has traditionally maintained that

achievement motivation is concerned with both the approach of success and the avoidance of failure. In a seminal article, Elliot (1999) compiled a long list of theorists, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, who have utilized the approach/avoidance distinction (see Elliot, 1999, Table 1). In this article, Elliot provides an influential definition of achievement motivation "as the energization and direction of competence-based affect, cognition, and behavior" (p. 169). He also summarizes an equally influential program that recommends to systematically consider valence, i.e., approach and avoidance, when studying achievement motivation.

In summary, achievement has been described as a fundamental feature of human life, both at the individual and collective level, one that strongly motivates people to pursue success and avoid failure. Psychological research has shown that achieving success and avoiding failure are highly valued in society—although different societies may provide different definitions of success and failure. Psychological research has also shown that the pervasive nature of evaluation processes in social settings is one of the key elements which make concern for achievement a pervasive feature of human life. Let us now move to achievement goals, the focus of the present article. Achievement goal research has been reviewed in previous volumes of the *Annual Review of Psychology*, with integrative articles on the motivational factors that affect school achievement (Covington, 2000; Winne & Nesbit, 2010), the role of classroom structures on the development of goals (Meece et al., 2006), and the articulation of research on motivation, beliefs, values, and goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The following section is not intended to provide an exhaustive review of more recent work on achievement goals, but wishes to present that work to set the stage for the proposed social influence approach to achievement goals.

Achievement Goals

Social actors—e.g., teachers, coaches, bosses—evaluate achievement based on visible outcomes— e.g., problem solving, speed, productivity. The question of the link between motivational dispositions and outcomes is an ancient one in psychology, and Elliot and Church (1997) remarked that since the beginning of scientific psychology several authors have proposed hierarchical motivational models in which goals are an intermediate construct between motives and outcomes. Motives energize behavior and orient individuals in a certain direction—in the case of achievement motives, toward attainment of success or avoidance of failure. Goals represent some specific purpose, and in this respect are a more proximal regulation process than motives (Maehr, 1989). Hence, the characterization of achievement goals "as cognitive-dynamic manifestations of two underlying competence-relevant motives—the need for achievement and the need to avoid failure" (Elliot & Church, 1997, p. 219). In other words, achievement goals translate into purpose individuals' knowledge about the value of achievement.

Varieties of Achievement Goals

Achievement goals were first divided in two constructs: mastery and performance goals (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984; other terms have been used to refer to the same constructs, but we will use mastery and performance goals for simplicity, and because they are utilized the most). Mastery goals refer to the desire to develop competence through task mastery, whereas performance goals refer to the desire to demonstrate competence relative to others. However, the importance of the aforementioned distinction between approach and avoidance in motivational constructs led to finer distinctions in the characterization of achievement goals. Such distinctions then led to more complex models that allowed researchers to consider the antecedents of achievement goals in a more precise fashion, and to predict consequences with greater consistency.

The approach/avoidance distinction was first applied to performance goals (the "trichotomous model"; Elliot & Church, 1997), and then to both mastery and performance goals (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). In the latter article, a 2 x 2 model of achievement goals is laid out. The pursuit of competence—the "conceptual core" of achievement goals (Elliot & McGregor, 2001, p. 501, see Figure 2)—is differentiated as a function of two dimensions, namely definition and valence. Definition distinguishes mastery from performance goals. In mastery goals, competence is evaluated with an absolute (command of a task) or intrapersonal standard (improved performance over time); for instance, whether a child can objectively solve five math exercises without mistakes, or an athlete has improved their time in the marathon. In performance goals, competence is evaluated with a normative standard, as compared to others (for instance, the relative standing of a pupil in their class's math ranking). Valence refers to the approach/avoidance dichotomy, and allowed the authors to derive four achievement goals from the mastery/performance goals distinction. On the positive end of the dimension, approaching success, mastery-approach goals refer to the desire to master a task, to acquire knowledge, to learn; performance-approach goals refer to the desire to outperform others, to distinguish oneself positively, to succeed in a group. On the negative end of the valence dimension, avoiding failure, mastery-avoidance goals refer to the desire to avoid failing a task; performance-avoidance goals refer to the desire to avoid being outperformed by others.

In later developments, the absolute and intrapersonal standards of mastery goals have been distinguished, to reflect that mastery goals may be either task-based (absolute) or self-based (intrapersonal; Elliot et al., 2011). Moreover, recent work has incorporated reasons to pursue achievement goals in the construct, in what has been called "goal complexes" (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2001; Liem & Senko; 2022; Sommet et al., 2021; Vansteenkiste et al., 2014). As goals can be adopted for different reasons, the goal complexes framework proposes to

measure not only the achievement goals one is pursuing, but also the reason why one is pursuing them (e.g., based on the autonomous-controlled motivation distinction; see Vansteenkiste et al., 2014). These refinements represent important advances in achievement goal research; however, as they are not central to the development of the present circular model of the influence on and of achievement goals, they will not be presented in greater detail.

Antecedents and Consequences of Achievement Goals

These four achievement goals have provided goal theorists with coherent constructs that have an identifiable set of antecedents and consequences (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). Mastery-approach goals have antecedents such as need for achievement, workmastery, self-determination and competence valuation, and consequences such as interest and deep processing. Mastery-avoidance goals have antecedents such as fear of failure, belief that intelligence is fixed and low self-determination, and consequences such as disorganization and worry. Performance-approach goals have antecedents such as need for achievement, competitiveness and fear of failure, and consequences such as surface processing and positive exam performance. Performance-avoidance goals have antecedents such as fear of failure, low self-determination and belief that intelligence is fixed, and consequences such as surface processing, disorganization and negative exam performance (see also Elliot & Hulleman, 2017, and Sommet & Elliot, 2016, for reviews).

Importantly, several meta-analyses have confirmed the factorial and conceptual coherence of the dichotomous, trichotomous and 2 x 2 models of achievement goals (Baranik et al., 2010; Cellar et al., 2011; Huang, 2011; Huang 2012; Rawsthorne & Elliot, 1999; see also the recent review of meta-analyses by Jansen et al., 2022), even when exposing conceptual and methodological differences (Hulleman et al., 2010). They have provided cumulative evidence on the antecedents of achievement goals, with specifications regarding

cognitive ability and self-esteem (Payne et al., 2007). In addition to antecedents related to motivation, beliefs and self-perception, Elliot and Thrash (2002) have conceptually distinguished between approach temperament (a personality variable related to extraversion, positive emotionality and motivations that facilitate behavior) and avoidance temperament (neuroticism, negative emotionality and motivations that inhibit behavior). Interestingly, these authors have shown that approach temperament predicts both mastery-approach and performance-approach goals, whereas avoidance temperament predicts performance-avoidance goals (and to a lower extent performance-approach).

Moreover, several meta-analyses have provided cumulative evidence on the consequences of achievement goals, with specifications regarding competence perceptions and self-regulation processes such as self-monitoring, self-evaluations, self-reactions, and self-efficacy (Cellar et al., 2011; Senko & Dawson, 2017), as well as feedback seeking (Payne et al., 2007). In addition, the work by Pekrun and colleagues has provided a systematic account of the emotions occurring in achievement situations such as educational settings, organized along two dimensions (Pekrun et al., 2002; see Pekrun et al., 2023, for a refined version of the model). Achievement emotions can differ in terms of valence (positive negative) and in terms of focus (task, prospective outcome, retrospective outcome). For example, enjoyment, hope and pride are positive emotions, with a focus on, respectively, task, prospective outcome and retrospective outcome. Boredom, anxiety and shame are negative emotions, with a focus on, respectively, task, prospective outcome and retrospective outcome. Interestingly, Pekrun et al. (2006) showed that achievement goals systematically predicted corresponding emotions: mastery goals ➔ enjoyment (positively), and boredom and anger (negatively); performance-approach goals ➔ hope and pride (positively); performance-avoidance goals ➔ anxiety, hopelessness and shame (positively; see also Huang, 2011, for a meta-analytical account with some specifications).

Overall, the conceptual foundations and the network of associated antecedents and consequences of achievement goals proposed by achievement goal theorists has received consistent support. However, it is important to mention the exception of the consequences related to performance, which we will discuss separately hereafter.

The Question of Performance.

In their quality of proximal variables, achievement goals are supposed to predict performance. This is important from a theoretical point of view, but also for practice, as social actors (e.g., teachers, coaches, bosses) infer achievement from the evaluation of performance. However, the general pattern of results, especially the one that emerges from the meta-analyses, requires some specifications. Overall, mastery-approach goals appear to be positively related to performance, and this in the main domains in which this relationship has been studied, namely education, sport, and work (e.g., Lochbaum & Gottardy 2015; Payne et al. 2007; Van Yperen et al. 2014). This was especially the case when mastery-approach goals were based on task-referenced standards (Noorzij et al., 2021). However, both Huang (2012) and Hulleman et al. (2010) noted that such relationship was inconsistent and its effect size small. Mastery-avoidance (e.g., Baranick et al. 2010) and performance-avoidance goals (e.g., Murayama & Elliot, 2012; Payne et al. 2007) do not seem to require specifications, as they quite consistently appear to be negatively related to performance, also in different domains (but see Senko & Freund, 2015, for a case in which mastery-avoidance goals are not maladaptive, and Bruno et al., 2019, for moderators of the maladaptive effect of performance-avoidance goals). Mixed findings, on the contrary, emerge from the study of the performance-approach goals—performance relation. Reviews and meta-analytical results revealed sometimes positive, sometimes weak to non-existent effects, which also varied as a function of domain—education, work or sports (Crouzevialle & Butera, 2017; Lochbaum & Gottardy 2015; Murayama & Elliot; 2012 Payne et al., 2007; Van Yperen et al., 2014). These meta-

analyses are too different to conclude, but an interesting specification comes from the meta-analysis by Hulleman et al. (2010), who coded the phrasing of the items that operationalized achievement goals in the various studies. Results showed that performance-approach goals operationalized through normative items (e.g., "I try to do better in my courses than other students") were positively related to performance, whereas performance-approach goals operationalized through appearance items (that refer to the self-presentational goal of trying to look good to others; e.g., "I like school work that lets me show how smart I am") were negatively related to performance (see Senko & Dawson, 2017, for an extension).

Summary

Achievement is a fundamental feature of life in society and achievement motivation is a fundamental feature of social beings, living in family, educational and professional environments in which they are evaluated to determine their degree of success and failure. Achievement goals are the intermediate mechanism that transforms motivation to attain success and avoid failure into purpose, directed toward some competence-relevant behavior. In this respect, they are also fundamental features of life in society.

The section that ends here, however, has been mainly concerned with individual processes. Traditionally, achievement goals have been characterized as an individual-level construct (e.g., Dweck, 1986; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Nicholls, 1984), and we have reported above a wealth of research that studied individual-level antecedents such as motivation, emotion, beliefs, self-perception, temperament and dispositions. This is by no means a weakness, as the characterization of such central goals required a stringent analysis to be carried out at the same level of explanation (Doise, 1986). Having said that, we have noted above that achievement goals translate important societal values and functions into purpose, and several authors have already proposed to adopt a social psychological perspective in the study of achievement goals (e.g., Darnon et al., 2012). In this article, we

wish to be more specific. We first review the cultural, structural and contextual factors that shape achievement goals. We then review the effects that achievement goals allow people to yield when interacting with other people. Finally, we propose that these effects may be represented under the form of a social influence cycle, whereby societal forces shape achievement goals, which in turn influence the expression and circulation of those achievement goals in society (Figure 1).

A Social Influence Approach to Achievement Goals

Achievement is assessed through evaluation, either self-evaluation (e.g., a mechanic observes that the engine she has repaired is now running) or evaluation from an external source (a student receives the grade to her final exam from her teacher). Value, however, requires social consensus, because it is hard to find objective measures of value (Is it enough that the engine runs for the car to be repaired? Is it enough for the student to get a good grade to enter graduate school?). In social comparison theory, Festinger (1954) had already noted that the evaluation of competence (abilities) requires a social standard, and more recent analyses have noted that "competence-relevant settings are socially relevant settings" (Sommet et al., 2015, p. 580). This is also apparent in the definition of achievement goals (cf. Elliot & McGregor, 2001). It is obvious for performance goals, where competence is assessed through interpersonal comparison. But even in mastery goals, where competence is assessed through intrapersonal comparison, one needs internalized (social) standards to be able to determine if one is progressing, stagnating or regressing. A child does not need external feedback to observe that he is making less mistakes than yesterday in playing the sonata he is learning. But what a sonata is and what constitutes a mistake are socially-defined concepts. Social consensus thus influences the definition of achievement and the adoption of achievement goals. Let us see how.

Social Influence

Since we argue that achievement goals vary as a function of social influence, we should start by defining what we mean by it. Many definitions have been given in social psychology (see Harkins et al., 2017 for a handbook, or Spears, 2021, for a recent review). Given the circular model that we wish to propose in this article, we settled for the definition presented in the opening paragraph: Social influence is a set of "mechanisms through which individuals and groups transform, maintain, and diffuse their modes of thinking and action when interacting with other individuals and groups" (Butera & Mugny, 2001, p. 1).

The Effect of Social Influence on Achievement Goals

Several lines of research have pointed to the cultural, contextual and interpersonal factors that influence achievement goals. Let us consider these factors in this order, from the more distal to the more proximal.

Culture

Culture is "a set of structures and institutions, values, traditions, and ways of engaging with the social and nonsocial world that are transmitted across generations in a certain time and place" (Oyserman & Lee, 2007, p. 255). This is not the only definition available of culture, but it is an interesting one in the framework of the present discussion. Indeed, these authors view culture as a form of situated cognition and propose that culture not only influences the content of thought but also its processes. Several studies highlight the influence of culture on achievement goals and their relation to achievement, in particular the influence of communities and countries (e.g., Murayama et al., 2009). Before we review the relevant work, let us discuss what such an influence might be.

Drawing on anthropology and intercultural studies, Zusho and Clayton (2011), and more recently King and McInerney (2019), noted that it is possible to adopt three distinct approaches to culture, based on Berry et al.'s (2002) classification. One is the absolutist approach, which contends that theories and constructs developed in one culture are valid in

and generalizable to other cultures. In this case, culture has little influence on the definition of constructs. The opposite approach is the relativist one, which contends that a specific construct can only be defined and understood within a specific culture. Here, the influence of culture is total. Zusho and Clayton (2011) point out that integration is possible in the universalist approach, which contends that some key constructs are common to all countries, with culture acting as a moderator of either meaning or endorsement. This classification is informed by the etic-emic distinction (e.g., Goodenough, 2003), according to which research should make explicit whether the definition of relevant constructs has been provided by the actor (emic) or the observer (etic). Both Zusho and Clayton (2011) and King and McInerney (2019) argue that such distinctions are relevant for the study of achievement goals too, and adopt a universalist approach.

Since Maehr's (1974) seminal article on culture and achievement motivation, a great deal of research has been carried out on the influence of culture on achievement goals, with a great deal of diversity in results. The diversity is such that Urdan and Kaplan (2020, p. 4) recently declared that "Clearly, there is more work to be done, both conceptually and methodologically, to understand how the meaning, endorsement, and effects of achievement goals may differ according to cultural and contextual characteristics." Overall, there is consensus that the constructs developed in the framework of achievement goal theory are relevant in several countries, not only Western and in the global North. King (2015) found that achievement goal questionnaires maintain their psychometric validity in the Philippines, and achievement goal questionnaires were successfully used in culturally relevant research by, for instance, Bong (2004) in Korea, Biddle et al. (1996) in Zimbabwe, Law (2011) in Hong Kong, and Liem and Nie (2008) in Indonesia. The most recent example is a study by Guo et al. (2022) with mastery-approach goals and a sample of over half a million adolescents in 77 countries/regions drawn from the PISA survey. The results revealed relations with

antecedents, consequences and performance similar to the traditional studies reviewed above and conducted with Western samples.

Differences appear when considering the degree to which goals are endorsed, and the specific relationships between achievement goals and other constructs. As for endorsement, Dekker and Fisher's (2008) meta-analysis showed that students adopted mastery goals to a higher extent, and performance-approach goals to a lower extent, in more developed countries (development was measured with the Human Development Index). Lochbaum et al. (2016), in a meta-analysis of studies in the domain of sports, found that participants from individualistic countries endorsed mastery goals more than participants in collectivistic countries. And Guo et al.'s (2022) aforementioned study found that students endorse mastery approach goals less when they belong to long-term-oriented and uncertainty-avoiding societies. As for relationships between achievement goals and other constructs, Hulleman et al. (2010) found that nationality was a significant moderator of the relationship between mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance and performance-avoidance goals on the one hand and performance outcomes on the other hand. King (2015) showed that achievement goals are more strongly correlated in the Philippines, showing that they are less distinct, a difference also pointed out by Hulleman et al. (2010).

Differences also appear when conducting research with a clear focus on the definitions given by local actors (an emic approach). For example, in such studies—that often use qualitative, ethnographic methods—Kim and Park (2006) revealed that Korean students are particularly high in filial piety and feel indebted to their parents, which in turn renders guilt and external pressure favorable for academic achievement. Similarly, with a Chinese sample, Li (2002) observed that mastery goals are described in terms of seeking knowledge and cultivating passion, but also in terms of diligence, enduring hardship, and feelings of shame and guilt in case of lack of desire to learn. Such reliance on family bonds in the expression of

achievement goals, and its positive effect on performance, consistently appears in several studies, both in Asian and Latin American cultures (e.g., Fuligny et al., 1999; Lee & Bong, 2016).

In sum, this literature has accumulated consistent results that point to a cross-cultural tendency to pursue achievement goals, with similarities in terms of structure and validity, and differences in terms of endorsement and relation with other constructs. In other words, a universalistic approach to achievement goals seems to suggest that culture has an influence on goals in that it moderates their endorsement and meaning in different populations. However, these differences are not consistent across studies and several authors have called for a stronger focus on the role of culture in the study of achievement goals (e.g., Guo et al., 2022; Liem & Senko, 2022)

Values

Arguably, values are part and parcel of culture (e.g., Hofstede, 1991). However, values can also be defined as "trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group" (Schwartz et al., 2012, p. 664). In particular, achievement is one of such goals and refers in this research tradition to demonstrating competence according to social standards. In this framework, the finer distinctions presented above are not considered (although research has shown a significant positive link between self-enhancement values including achievement and performance-approach goals; Pulfrey & Butera, 2013), but it is interesting to remark that achievement can be considered as a guiding principle to such an extent that it becomes a "trans-situational goal". This might explain the relative consistency of achievement goal effects across life domains (education, sports, work, see Van Yperen et al., 2014).

Even more interestingly, a study compared the endorsement of the value of achievement (importance of success and ambition) in 20 capitalist countries (Schwartz, 2007).

The author correlated the achievement score of respondents of these countries with an index that classifies national economies on a continuum ranging from competitive market coordination to strategic coordination. The results showed a large correlation whereby the higher the competitive market coordination in one country, the more its respondents prioritized the pursuit of achievement. Thus, society-level values—here, a nation's adherence to deregulated competitive market coordination—appear to influence individual-level trans-situational goal—here, under the form of the pursuit of achievement.

Social Structures

At a more proximal level, individuals are embedded in social structures that may yield significant influence on their goals.

Goal Structure. In this respect, a prolific area of research has been that of goal structure. Ames (1992) defined goal structure as the set of instructional and institutional practices put in place in a classroom. Five dimensions are relevant in her TARGET model: task assignments (T), authority relations (A), recognition systems (R), grouping procedures (G), evaluation practices (E), and use of time (T). Subsequent research has confirmed that indeed students detect the goal structure put in place by their teachers (Midgely et al., 2000; Urdan et al., 1998; see Daumiller et al., 2023 for research showing that teachers' achievement goals may also vary across time and contexts). Most importantly, Meece et al. (2006) reviewed the accumulating literature and showed that students who perceive that their teacher promotes a particular achievement goal (e.g., performance-approach), then develop the same achievement goals for themselves. More recently, Bardach et al. (2020) provided a meta-analytical test of the goal structure-achievement goals relations. In a study with 68 samples, the authors reported that student ratings of mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goal structures were most strongly related

to the personal endorsement of, respectively, mastery-approach, mastery-avoidance, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals.

It is important to note, as far as the E of TARGET is concerned, that although some evaluation practices may be specific to a certain teacher, in most educational settings evaluation practices are determined by the school system. In particular, the vast majority of learners are evaluated through normative assessment (grades of one sort or another), notwithstanding the variety of other existing forms of assessment (Butera et al., 2021). In this respect, Pulfrey et al. (2011) found that students who expected an evaluation with a grade reported a higher level of endorsement of performance-avoidance goals than students who did not expect a grade. They also found that students who expected an evaluation with a grade (normative assessment) or a grade and detailed comments (normative + formative assessments) reported a higher level of endorsement of performance-avoidance goals than students who expected detailed comments (formative assessment only). The vast majority of the work on goal structures has been conducted in the domain of education, but the above mechanism could be fruitfully studied in other domains such as sports and work/organizational psychology.

Competitive Structures. There are a number of studies on the effect of competitive structures on achievement goals. Murayama and Elliot (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of studies including some form of competition, both performance goals and a measure of performance. Their results revealed that competition—which included trait competitiveness, but also, more relevant for the present contention, perceived environmental competitiveness and structural competition—positively predicted both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals. These results were later replicated by Elliot et al. (2018), and extended in a study in which perceived competitiveness produced by more or less unequal environments (based on the Gini index of the ZIP-code area were the participants lived)

predicted both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals (Sommet et al., 2019; see Sommet & Elliot, 2023, for a review).

Sources of Socialization. Socialization is the process by which the agents of a system (family, school, organizations) exert influence over time on individuals that are at a developmental stage (children, students, trainees; e.g., Baumrind, 1980). In a series of studies, Sommet et al. (2017) investigated the influence that the performance-approach goals endorsed by supervisors—in this study, soccer coaches, PhD supervisors, video-game team leaders and schoolteachers—yielded over time on the performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals of their followers—respectively, soccer players, PhD students, video-game players and pupils. Their results revealed that the higher a supervisor's performance-approach goals, the stronger the effects of time on followers' performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals

As for parents, there is evidence that children's perception of their parents' achievement goals is related to the children's own self-report of corresponding goals (Gonida et al., 2007). Likewise, parents' fear of failure has been shown to predict their children's adoption of performance-avoidance goals (Elliot et al., 2004). Several authors have provided accounts of the socializing influence of parents in the domain of achievement motives, both at a general level (Eccles, 2007) and with specific focus on STEM disciplines (Šimunović & Babarović, 2020). There is also evidence for correlations between perceived peer goals and the endorsement of the corresponding goals, although both sets of goals were measured simultaneously (Hemi et al., 2023, study 1). In sum, all the classic socializing agents (teachers, parents and peers) appear to yield a socializing effect on achievement goals, as formalized in Liem and Elliot (2018) and Liem and Senko's (2022) model. The latter model also provides the basis for an important observation. Liem and Senko note that academic goals depend on the socializing effect of teachers, parents and peers, which in turn depend on

their cultural context surrounding them (values, norms, aspirations, …; Liem & Senko, 2022, Figure 2). This implies that cultural differences in how children are socialized has an impact on the development of students' achievement goals. For example, there is now a wealth of research showing that upper/middle-class and working-class children are socialized to develop, respectively, culture-specific independent vs. interdependent selves, which has an impact of their adaptation to educational institutions, especially when they reach higher education (e.g., Stephens et al., 2012; see Stephens et al., 2014, for the role of homes, schools and workplaces in the development of social class culture; and Goudeau et al., 2023, for a comprehensive model of the consequences of social class-specific adaptation). And, indeed, research has shown that working class students report performance-avoidance goals to a higher extent than middle-class students (Jury et al., 2015).

Experimental contexts. One of the clearest tests of whether social context can influence goal endorsement can be found in experimental studies, where persuasive messages are provided in order to orient participants toward different goals. These experimental studies support the hypothesis that goals can be manipulated by explicitly giving students specific instructions (e.g., "Your goal should be to acquire new knowledge (…) to learn." or "Your goal should be to perform better than the majority of students") and have been conducted in this literature from the beginning (e.g., Crouzevialle & Butera, 2013; Crouzevialle & Darnon, 2019; Darnon et al., 2007a; 2007b; 2010; Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Senko & Harackiewicz, 2005). The effectiveness of such manipulations in producing different levels of task performance has also been documented in meta-analytic work (e.g., Van Yperen et al., 2015). However, surprisingly enough, there are actually fewer experimental studies than correlational studies in the field. In addition, the relatively small effect size of goal manipulation on self-report goals (e.g., Darnon et al., 2007a) suggests that such goal manipulations may not produce similar effects on all students. Another possibility is that the

manipulation of goals takes some time and requires longer sessions or repeated manipulations. In this sense, conducting larger-scale longitudinal experimental studies in which goals are explicitly manipulated may help to clarify the causal role of the contextual antecedents of achievement goals.

In this respect, and more recently, there has been a call to use targeted interventions (Harackiewicz & Priniski, 2018) to address the question of large-scale, durable change in achievement goals (Urdan & Kaplan, 2020). These authors note that several whole-class and whole-school interventions have been conducted in this area, but that achievement goal research might yield a more global impact by adopting the methods and procedures of intervention research.

Summary.

The reviewed literature shows that achievement goals display a rather stable structure and construct validity across cultures and social contexts. Their endorsement and relation with other constructs, however, is influenced by cultural, structural and contextual factors that refer to the evaluation of competence.

The Expression of Achievement Goals as Social Influence

In the previous section on the effects of social influence on achievement goals we have focused on a rather classic approach in social psychology, which consists in studying how the social environment has an impact on individual constructs. Interestingly, and perhaps less discernibly, there is also research that points to the fact that people can endorse or express achievement goals in order to obtain some influence on their environment, in particular to effectively adapt to their social environment. In this case, achievement goals are treated as (potential) sources of social influence rather than as targets.

Selective Goal Hypothesis

In reading the previous section, one may conclude that, given certain social- or individual-level antecedents, people endorse a specific set of achievement goals, which then drive the corresponding consequences. In fact, a stream of research has argued and documented that people may adopt multiple goals (e.g., Barron & Harackiewicz, 2000; Darnon et al., 2010), an idea also supported by the view of motivation as malleable and dynamic (Kruglanski et al., 2002). As for achievement goals, much of this research has been devoted to showing that the adoption of multiple goals—mastery and performance goals— provides the optimal predictor of performance (see Harackiewicz et al., 2002a, for a theoretical perspective). In this section, however, we will focus on the hypotheses that can be formulated as per the relation that binds multiple goals. The "additive goal hypothesis" proposes that mastery and performance goals independently and positively predict achievement outcomes. The "interactive goal hypothesis" proposes that mastery and performance goals interact to predict achievement outcomes. The "specialized goal hypothesis" proposes that mastery and performance goals predict different and specific achievement outcomes. And the "selective goal hypothesis" proposes that individuals can purposefully endorse achievement goals that appear to be best suited for a particular situation. Indeed, "when individuals have the option of pursuing multiple goals, they can better negotiate their achievement experiences by focusing on the achievement goal that is most relevant at a particular time" (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001, p. 708). A student can, for instance, report performance-approach goals (desire to outperform others) to a higher extent when selection (e.g., high-stakes testing) is salient (Jury et al., 2017), and report mastery-approach goals (desire to learn) to a higher extent when in need to garner the teacher's appreciation (Dompnier et al., 2009).

This is the most relevant hypothesis for our contention that people can endorse specific achievement goals to effectively adapt to their social environment. Indeed,

Harackiewicz and Linnenbrink (2005) noted that each set of achievement goals might prove more adaptive in some contexts than others. For instance, Ziegler et al. (2008) showed that students endorsed different achievement goals to a different degree depending on whether they were addressing teachers, parents, peers or themselves. Such differential pattern of endorsement also resulted in different relations between goals and learning outcomes.

Language

When people fill in an achievement goal questionnaire, they are not only self-reporting their actual goals, but also telling something about themselves (to somebody, see Ziegler et al., 2008, above). In their meta-analysis, Hulleman et al. (2010) have coded the phrasing used in the items that composed various achievement goal questionnaires. Commenting their results (see the section on the question of performance, above), they asked an important question: "*why* appearance-framed performance-approach goals have negative relationships with performance outcomes whereas normatively-framed performance-approach goals have positive relationships" (p. 442, their emphasis). These authors remarked that a focus on appearance (e.g., when answering on items such as "It's important that others know that I am a good student") may create a confusion between goals and self-worth, thereby prompting the participants to express what they think would benefit their image. On the contrary, a focus on normative social comparison (e.g., when answering on items such as "At school I try to score higher than other students") may activate the need to succeed, thereby prompting the participants to express goals that may be instrumental to attain such success. Such considerations support the possibility that, when answering an achievement goal questionnaire, participants are indeed in a process of communication. In sum, the linguistic framing of the questions asked would activate in respondents specific social norms (here, the importance of appearance vs. social comparison) to which respondents may try to adapt.

The Social Value of Achievement Goals

We have begun this article by emphasizing that judgements related to achievement require an evaluative process, and therefore social consensus. We have also seen that achievement goals emerge in competence-relevant environments (education, work, sports), that is, environments in which the attribution of value is a pervasive activity. The literature on achievement goals that we have reviewed documents (a) that people do indeed pursue goals that are dependent on the attribution of value (either compared to others or compared to oneself), and (b) that it is possible that people may also endorse specific goals to communicate their own value. In the remainder of this section we will present a theory of social value and then report research that shows how people can use achievement goals to communicate their social value (i.e., provide a positive or negative image of themselves).

Social Value. According to Beauvois (1984), in everyday life people develop evaluative knowledge about objects, events, themselves and other people. Unlike descriptive knowledge—that of a scientist who observes reality with (supposedly) unbiased methods— evaluative knowledge proceeds from people's attempts to make sense of the function that objects, events and people (including themselves) have within a certain social system (see Dubois & Pansu, 2021, for a recent summary of Beauvois' work). In other words, evaluative knowledge allows people to attribute value, which, in this framework, can be expressed as either social desirability or social utility (Beauvois, 2003; Dubois & Beauvois, 2005). It is now important to look at the definition of these two constructs. "Social desirability is the transmittable knowledge we have of a person's more or less great capacity (1) to elicit positive (versus negative) affect in others or (2) to act in accordance with (versus oppose to) their main motivation. Social utility is the transmittable knowledge we have of a person's more or less great capacity (1) to function in accordance with the rules of society and (2) to feel comfortable with those rules" (Dubois & Beauvois, 2008, p. 1748). This definition is interesting because it clearly expresses the notion that when we attribute some social value to

people, we assess the extent to which they can influence their social environment, by eliciting

either appreciation or perceptions of fit with the social environment and therefore of potential

success. Or both. Indeed, we may consider a student as high in social utility because she or he

is very competent and competitive, but low in social desirability because such

competitiveness generates a great deal of hostility among fellow students. Or we may

consider a worker as high in both social utility and social desirability because he or she is

both skilled and an empathic team member. In sum, social value expresses a form of

adaptation to the social environment (see applications of this theory to several social

environments, such as education, e.g., Matteucci, 2014, sports, e.g., Clément-Guillotin et al.,

2013, and intergroup relations, e.g., Iatridis, 2018).

Social desirability and social utility share several features with other distinctions in the

area of social judgment, such as for instance warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2002),

communion and agency (Abele & Wojciszke, 2018), or friendliness and dominance (Wiggins,

1979). Recently, the authors of five models of social judgement have engaged in adversarial

collaboration to develop a common conceptual framework (Abele et al., 2021). The result is a

common model with a horizontal dimension that refers to communion, warmth, "getting

along" on the one hand, and a vertical dimension that refers to agency, competence, "getting

ahead" on the other hand.

Although both the social desirability-social utility distinction and the collaborative

framework (Abele et al., 2021) share a focus on social evaluation, the emphasis differs. In

particular, the collaborative framework stresses the role and the processing modes of the

perceiver, and appropriate properties that are used by perceivers to evaluate different types of

targets. The social desirability-social utility distinction, on the other hand, puts an emphasis

on the relationship between an actor and his or her social environment. In particular, an actor

is conceived of as a social agent (Dubois & Pansu, 2021), which means that the relevant

evaluations are those that concern his or her function within the social system. The consequence is that, in this framework, social judgment is aimed at assessing the extent to which an actor can adapt to his or her social environment, either being liked or having success. In this respect, the social value framework is particularly appropriate to study if and how people can use achievement goals to adapt to their social environment.

Social Utility and Social Desirability of Achievement Goals. We have noted that achievement goals are not adopted in a social vacuum, as these goals are endorsed in social environments that promote individual achievement, such as work, sports or educational systems. In particular, educational systems pursue two main functions related to student achievement: an educational function that requires students to improve their knowledge and skills, and a selection function that requires students to be selected on a meritocratic basis, through social comparison, to steer them to the place they deserve in society (Dornbusch et al., 1996). In this respect, the educational system promotes and socially values the pursuit of achievement goals that enable the fulfillment of these two functions (Darnon et al., 2009), namely mastery goals (i.e., educational function) and performance-approach goals (i.e., selection function).

Students are well aware of the social value that the educational system in general, and teachers in particular, attribute to achievement goals. Such a bold statement is based on a series of studies conducted to investigate the social value of achievement goals (Darnon et al., 2009). These authors showed that mastery goals, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals were all valued. However, mastery goals were valued both in terms of social desirability and social utility, which is very sensible because reporting a high level of desire to learn is valued by teachers and perceived as something that facilitates success at university. Performance-approach goals were not valued in terms of social desirability (the desire to outperform others doesn't make one nice), but they were in terms of social utility (see also

Dompnier et al., 2008). And performance-avoidance goals were not valued in terms of social utility, but they were in terms of social desirability. The same value-goal associations were found when respondents judged another student. In sum, students are aware of the social value of achievement goals and they are able to self-report these goals in a way that allows them to be valued in terms of social desirability and/or social utility, or attribute social value to others.

Judgments of social desirability and utility are contingent upon understanding the requirements of the social structure in which one is embedded. If it is true that social value expresses a form of adaptation to the social environment, then judgments should vary as the social environment varies. Dompnier et al. (2008) tested this assumption and showed that, indeed, students understand that social value depends on the point of view they take. From the point of view of students, other students were judged low in social desirability when these students declared to be highly motivated by performance-approach goals. Indeed, a student with a high desire to outperform others is a threat to other students. However, high performance-approach students were judged high in social utility when participants judged them from the point of view of their teachers. Indeed, a teacher is an agent of the educational system, and as such should attribute social utility to persons who satisfy the requirements of the system (see also Dompnier et al., 2007, on the importance of social utility for teachers' judgment). In a similar vein, Jury et al. (2017) showed that students especially endorse performance-approach goals when selection is the salient norm at university, precisely because in that case they consider that performance-approach goals afford high social utility. In sum, social desirability and utility of achievement goals appear to be transparent to students, who seem to be able to endorse them, or judge people who endorse them, as a function of the structure and requirements of their social environment.

Social Value and the Achievement Goals-Performance Relationship. In addition to moderating endorsement and judgment of achievement goals, the knowledge that people have of achievement goals' social desirability and utility also moderates the relationship between achievement goals and performance. We have noted above the inconsistent and small relationship between mastery approach goals and performance, as well as the debate on the conditions under which performance-approach goals predict performance. Dompnier et al. (2009) reasoned that such inconsistency may stem from the fact that people detect what is valued in a given social environment, and may fake their reported desire to learn (mastery goals, a highly valued set of goals). They found that mastery-approach goals positively predicted performance to the extent that their social desirability was low; when their social desirability was high (when students endorsed mastery-approach goals to garner teachers' appreciation) these goals no longer predicted performance. The opposite relationship was found for social utility: the higher the social utility of mastery-approach goals, the more positive the goals-performance relationship. These findings where later replicated with high-school students and a performance measure independent from their teachers (Smeding et al., 2015), as well as with primary school children (Smeding et al., 2022).

These results suggest that social utility has a facilitating effect and social desirability an inhibiting effect on the relationship between mastery-approach goals and performance. Knowing that mastery goals are socially useful—that learning help succeed in the educational system—reinforces the relationship between these goals and performance. However, knowing that mastery goals are socially desirable—that expressing the desire to learn is positively viewed by teachers—debilitates the relationship between these goals and performance. If this is indeed the case, then it should be possible to design intervention studies to influence the representation of achievement goals that students have in terms of social desirability and utility. This is what Dompnier et al. (2015) did: They found that convincing students that

mastery-approach goals are not particularly desirable and high in social utility resulted in a more positive association between mastery-approach goals and performance as compared to other combinations, especially for low-achieving students. Moreover, the same reasoning can be applied to performance-approach goals, and indeed Dompnier et al. (2013) showed that social utility has a facilitating effect and social desirability an inhibiting effect on the relationship between performance-approach goals and performance.

Summary.

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that achievement goals can be reported with a social influence purpose: communicate that one possesses the qualities that one believes are important for adapting to one's social environment. Social value of achievement goals can be related to one's ability to adapt to the desires and preferences of relevant others (social desirability), and to one's ability to adapt to the criteria of success of one's relevant environment (social utility). Thus, people can endorse and express specific achievement goals as a function of the impression they want to induce, either as people who have the qualities needed to be appreciated, or as people who have the required competences to succeed in their environment (e.g., Dompnier et al., 2013).

Concluding Remarks

The literature reviewed above depicts achievement as a fundamental feature of individual and social life. It is a fundamental need for the individual, and a fundamental component of societal ideologies. Achievement goals then translate into purpose, and eventually behavior, the value that society bestows to achievement and that motivates people to achieve. It should be noted at this point that, in describing the various antecedents and consequences of achievement goals, the majority of models have proposed a linear path: antecedents, achievement goals, consequences. In the conceptual framework proposed here, we have delineated a circular model based on social influence (Figure 1). We have reviewed

the existing research that makes this model plausible, and in this final section we will speculate about research that does not exist yet but could contribute to the development of such circular model.

Linear and Circular Models

Most achievement goal models are linear. They represent the path that, through achievement goals, leads from motive dispositions to achievement-relevant outcomes (Elliot & Church, 1997), from temperament to exam performance (Elliot & Thrash, 2010), from competition to performance (Murayama & Elliot, 2012), or from cultural contexts to several affective, behavioral and cognitive outcomes (Liem & Elliot, 2018; Liem & Senko, 2022). Linearity is not at all a weakness, in fact it is a strength: It has allowed achievement goal theorists to characterize what achievement goals are and what they do.

The circular model of achievement goals proposed here has a different goal, no pun intended. It is circular because it aims to account for the circulation and diffusion of achievement goals through society. We have reviewed the sources of social influence that shape achievement goals, namely cultural, structural and contextual factors (the "promotion" arrow in Figure 1). We have also reviewed the work that led us to consider that the expression of achievement goals may be a source of social influence, to the extent that people can differentially endorse achievement goals as a function of the requirements of their social environment (the "adaptation" arrow in Figure 1). And when people adapt to their social environment, they may strengthen the cultural, structural and contextual factors active in a social environment through their conformity (the "reproduction" arrow in Figure 1). However, so far, no research has tested the latter statement, which remains a hypothesis. Moreover, it is also possible that this stage of the model results in change of the cultural, structural and contextual factors active in a social environment (the "change" arrow in Figure 1). As the two options are plausible, we will consider both of them, hereafter.

Before we do so, in view of the speculative nature of these links, we take the opportunity to make a general recommendation: We believe that future research may benefit from increased use of experimental and longitudinal studies. We discussed earlier in the article the importance of developing experimental research to examine how and when persuasive messages and/or crafting specific contexts can affect goal endorsement. This issue is essential to shed light on what can be done and said in achievement-relevant contexts (work, sports, education) to promote some goals instead of others. Achievement goal research has used longitudinal designs in the past (e.g., Harackiewicz et al., 2002b), but for future research we suggest studies in which the influence source is later studied as the influence target. For example, a study that investigates the effect of classroom goal structure on achievement goals may also investigate the effect of adoption (or rejection) of achievement goals on classroom goal structure. This could also take the form of targeted interventions (Harackiewicz & Priniski, 2018), in which researchers could assess not only the target behavior (say, deep study), but also the extent to which the change in study strategies affects the structure in which the behavior is displayed (say, a school or an educational system). Indeed, provided that the intervention concerns a sizeable sample of a population, and it is carried out for a sufficiently long time, it is possible to hypothesize that changes in behaviors may lead to changes at the structural level.

Reproduction

In a recent article, Butera et al. (2021) have illustrated how competition circulates from society's ideologies, values and norms, through the educational system, to the students, and back to the functioning of society when students become active citizens. If the circulation encounters little resistance—e.g., educational structures are built on society's values and norms, educators work in agreement with these structures, and students are successfully socialized—then it is likely that a process of reproduction of society's values and norms

occur. In the present article, we have adopted a similar, but broader, perspective. We have proposed that specific cultures, social structures and contexts shape specific achievement goals, which are then endorsed and communicated in a way as to conform to the requirements of the social environment. In this way, people influence their environment by contributing to the normativity of the social value attributed to achievement goals (Darnon et al., 2009). It is then most likely that this process results in the reproduction of *status quo*.

Future research is invited to produce a more integrative picture of such influence, that so far has only received fragmented attention. The "promotion" leg of the circle in Figure 1 has been widely researched, and the results that emerge, for example, from the literature on the effect of goal structures (e.g., Bardach et al., 2020) can be interpreted in terms of conformity effects (e.g., Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The "adaptation" leg as well can be interpreted in terms of conformity, to the extent that targeted expression of achievement goals is calibrated to help the sources of influence fit in their social environment (Darnon et al., 2009). The "reproduction" leg might need future research that integrates insights from psychology, sociology and modeling, to the extent that in order to study how conformity perpetuates, large-scale phenomena need to be considered.

Indirect evidence for a reproduction effect comes from research suggesting that group membership, in particular being a member of a high vs. low status group, can induce specific goal endorsement that is congruent with—and therefore validates—group membership. For example, Butler (2014) argues that in school, boys develop an orientation towards demonstrating and promoting their abilities (the motivation "to prove", i.e., performance-approach goals), while girls are more interested in working, striving and improving their performance (the motivation "to try and to improve", i.e., mastery goals). Similarly, working-class students, as well as women, are more likely to endorse performance-avoidance goals than upper-middle class students or male students (Dupeyrat et al., 2011; Jury et al., 2015).

Performance-avoidance goals are the most deleterious to performance (Huang, 2012; Van Yperen et al. 2014) and the least valued in terms of social utility (Darnon et al, 2009). Consequently, they may contribute to maintaining and reproducing the achievement gap between lower and higher status groups. Similarly, we have discussed the fact that the very functioning of the education system attributes social utility value to performance-approach goals. These goals are more likely to be endorsed by male students and higher status groups (Butler, 2014; Jury et al., 2018). Consequently, the social utility value attached to performance-approach goals can also contribute to maintain, reproduce and even increase the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Crouzevialle & Darnon, 2019; Smeding et al., 2013).

Interestingly, we previously discussed the fact that avoidance goals lead to emotions like anxiety, hopelessness and shame (Pekrun et al., 2006). In the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002; see also the aforementioned synthesis by Abele et al., 2021), such emotions are typically attributed to groups who elicit pity, namely, groups high in warmth and low in competence. Conversely, enjoyment, hope and pride, which result from the endorsement of approach goals, are more likely to elicit envy or admiration, which are typical of higher status groups in the Stereotype Content Model. This parallel supports the idea that goal endorsement is likely to give rise to different social judgements and to reflect the social value associated with individuals or groups in society; this may in turn contribute to reproduction.

In sum, reproduction occurs when the fit between endorsed achievement goals and the achievement goals valued in the existing culture, structure or context is better than the fit between endorsed achievement goals and the achievement goals valued by a new culture, structure or context, in case they are available or salient. This has been represented by $F_e > F_n$ in Figure 1, where F_e is the fit in the existing context and F_n the fit in the new context.

Change

It is also possible that alternative values, norms and ideologies concomitantly influence the expression of achievement goals, which may, in the long run, result in change in societal-level social value of achievement goals. How can change come about? Social impact theory (Latané, 1981) is a theory of social influence that considers the fact that we are all the targets of countless sources of influence (see also Latané 1996, for an application to the creation of cultures). According to the theory, these sources have an impact that depends on three characteristics: Strength (power, importance), Immediacy (their spatial distance from or relevance to the target) and Number. Social impact is then defined as a multiplicative function of these characteristics: $I = f(SIN)$. If the various sources of influence (e.g., school programs, teachers, bosses, coaches, parents, peers, …) converge in the values and norms they promote, reproduction should ensue. If the various sources of influence diverge, however, the theory implies that the most impactful source(s) will prevail. It is then possible that the value attached to achievement goals changes because new cultures become more dominant, new organizational or educational structures are put into place following reforms, or because closer sources (e.g., a dissident teacher) have more impact than overarching but distal sources (e.g., the educational system in place).

There is also another possible outcome in case of diverging or dissenting influence sources: integration. The work conducted on sociocognitive conflict (Doise & Mugny, 1984; Perret-Clermont, 2022) reveals that, when a divergence in points of view arises, people can regulate this conflict in two ways (see also Pérez & Mugny, 1996, for a general theory of conflict elaboration). A relational regulation, focusing of who is right and who is wrong, would lead one side to prevail. However, an epistemic regulation of conflict would lead people to focus on the knowledge that might explain the origin of such divergence. In this case, it is possible to observe an integration of the various points of view and possibly the

emergence of a synthesis (see Butera et al., 2011; 2019; Darnon et al. 2007a; 2007b, for incorporation of achievement goals in this perspective). Integration may therefore be a step toward change, in the direction of more integrative and inclusive social systems. In sum, change occurs when the fit between endorsed achievement goals and the achievement goals valued by a new, emerging, dissident or integrative culture, structure or context is better than the fit between endorsed achievement goals and the achievement goals valued by the existing culture, structure or context. This has been represented by $F_n > F_e$ in Figure 1.

Conclusions

More than forty years of research on achievement goals have generated an impressive amount of interest and knowledge on this central construct. Interest is justified by the position of achievement as a fundamental feature of human life, for individuals and society, as achievement motivates people to pursue success and avoid failure. And by the position of achievement goals as an intermediary that translates individuals' knowledge of the value of achievement into purpose, and eventually action. The knowledge generated in this domain has been synthesized in the models we have reviewed, that identified cultural, structural and contextual antecedents that shape achievement goals, which in turn predict achievement-relevant outcomes. We have noted that such models are linear (antecedents, achievement goals, consequences), which was instrumental to characterize where achievement goals come from and what their outcomes are. In this article we have proposed a complementary approach, a circular model whose objective is to formalize the circulation of achievement goals through society. The above sections have argued for the plausibility of a circular model; it is now time to reflect upon its possible added value.

The first contribution of circularity pertains to a question we have asked at the beginning of this article: why is achievement such an important feature for society? One possible answer is that effort and ability, two important defining features of achievement, are

also the ingredients of a major self-justification ideology, namely meritocracy. We have seen

that meritocracy posits that students, workers and athletes are rewarded based on their

achievements, not based on their social background, that is on their effort and ability. As

meritocracy assumes equal opportunities, underachievement is therefore attributed to lack of

effort or ability, thereby justifying observed inequalities, and the *status quo* in terms of

dominant and dominated groups. Such circular reasoning is what allows meritocracy to be a

system-justification ideology. We believe that a circular model of achievement goals may

help researchers reflect upon the possible system-justifying role of achievement goals. Such

possibility has not been addressed so far because linear models have studied the question of

social influence *on* achievement goals. The work we have reviewed on the social value of

achievement goals allowed us to tackle the question of the social influence *of* achievement

goals, thereby opening the way to the elaboration of a circular model. Group norms, values

and ideologies need the consensus of their members to be perpetuated, but consensus is not

just acceptance, but also reproduction. The proposed circular model may help future research

to explore uncharted territory such as for example studying how selection structures—such as

tracking in education or bonuses in organizations—foster adherence to performance-approach

goals, whose social utility contributes to keeping in place those selection structures.

The second contribution of circularity pertains to the question of the evolution of

social structures. How can social structures transform themselves if there is not a source of

social influence to initiate change? Change, of course, may proceed from top-down processes

such as school reforms, changes in parliamentary majorities, or organizational restructuring.

A circular model, however, allows to conceive social change as also proceeding from a

change in the endorsement and communication of the value of achievement goals. Take for

instance the case of the debate concerning inclusive education. Political and institutional

discourse has not produced substantial change in the inclusion of children with disabilities in

regular classes, to the point that UNICEF declare on their website that "children with disabilities are often overlooked in policymaking" (https://www.unicef.org/education/inclusive-education). The question of the definition of achievement and ability is at the core of the debate on inclusive education (Khamzina et al., 2021). It is then possible that change in the value attributed to competitive goals, may lead to a reflection on normative assessment, and eventually a change in assessment structures. All these ideas are speculative, but they are grounded in thriving areas of investigation; we hope that future research will take up one or the other of these challenges.

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Figure 1

The Cycle of Social Influence in the Development and Transmission of Achievement Goals
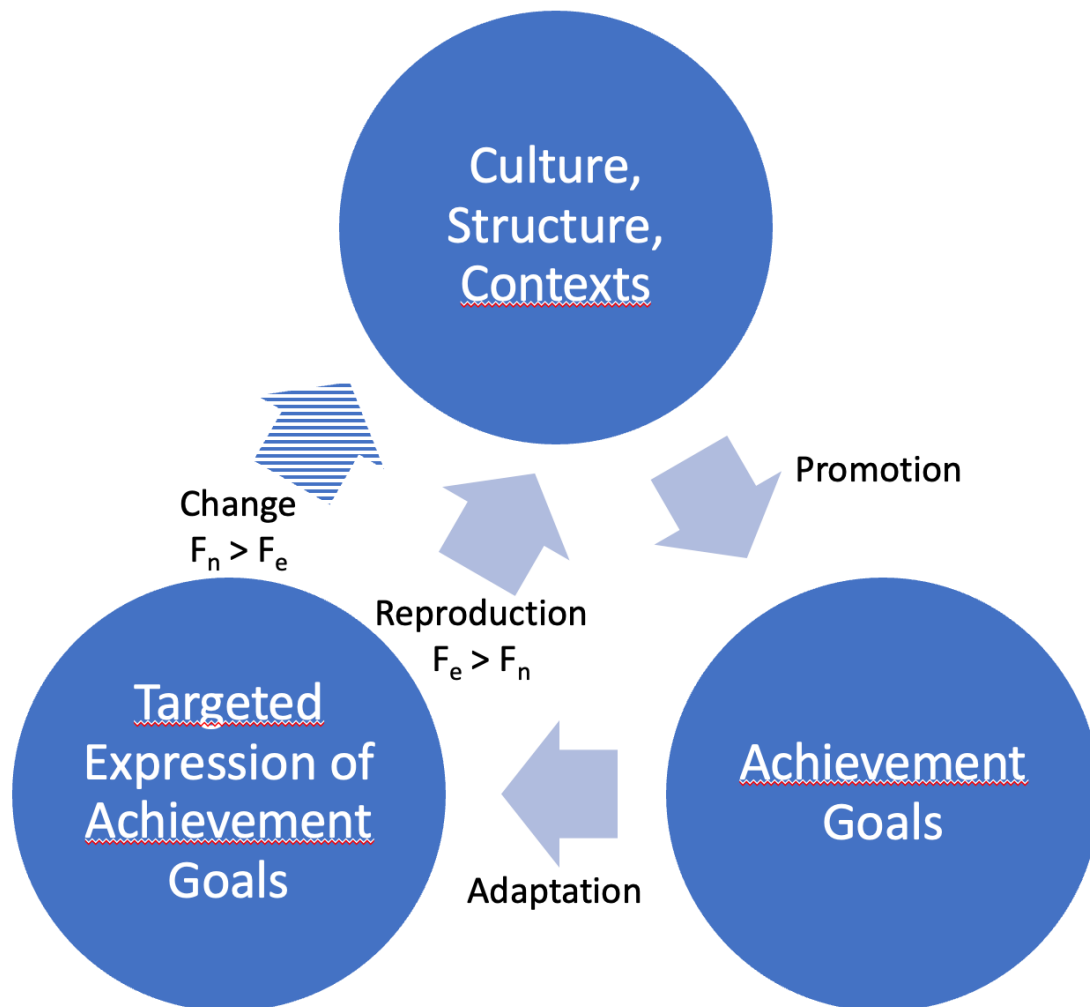
Note. $F_e > F_n$: Reproduction occurs when the fit between endorsed achievement goals and the achievement goals valued in the existing culture, structure or context (F_e) is better than the fit between endorsed achievement goals and the achievement goals valued by a new culture, structure or context (F_n), in case they are available or salient. $F_n > F_e$: Change occurs when the relation between fits is reversed.

Table 1

The 2 X 2 Achievement Goal Framework, Reproduced with Permission from Elliot and

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		Definition	
		Absolute/intrapersonal (mastery)	Normative (performance)
Valence	Positive (approaching success)	Mastery-approach goals	Performance-approach goals
	Negative (avoiding failure	Mastery-avoidance goals	Performance-avoidance goals