

“Stop embarrassing me!”
Relations Among Student Perceptions of
Teachers, Classroom Goals, and Maladaptive Behaviors

Jeanne Friedel
Roxana Marachi
Carol Midgley

University of Michigan

Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association
April 2002, New Orleans, LA

Why do students avoid seeking help on their schoolwork when they need it? Why might they blame the teacher when they do poorly on an exam? What might explain students' disruptive behavior during class? These are the questions that drive our current research. In this study, we focus on goal theory of motivation, basing our research on studies that have linked these maladaptive student behaviors to the goals they perceive at the classroom level. We realize, however, that goals represent only one aspect of the classroom dynamics students experience. Students' behaviors may also depend upon the extent to which they feel supported rather than embarrassed when they do not understand the lesson. As we consider the ways in which classroom environments relate to young adolescents' academic behaviors, we examine both the motivational goals students perceive in the classroom and their perceptions of teacher support and enthusiasm.

According to Covington (1992), students engage in some behaviors considered detrimental to learning, such as avoiding seeking help, in order to protect self-worth. Situations in which students are likely to be judged negatively by adults or peers, threaten self-worth, and result in students' avoidance of these situations. Thus, students may avoid asking questions if they feel that doing so would demonstrate a lack of knowledge or ability. Similarly, students may engage in projective coping (blaming the teacher when they do poorly on a test) or be disruptive in class in order to deflect attention from their difficulty and further protect self-worth.

Achievement goals, to the extent that they encourage students to focus on learning and *developing* ability (mastery goals), *demonstrating* ability (performance-approach goals), or *avoiding* showing a lack of ability (performance-avoid goals), have also been related to students' reports of maladaptive behaviors. In particular, students' perceptions of mastery goals in the classroom have been related to lower avoidance behaviors (Ryan, Pintrich, & Midgley, 2001; Turner, Midgley, et al, in press) and lower use of projective coping strategies (Friedel, Hruda, & Midgley, 2000; Kaplan & Midgley, 1999). In contrast, performance-approach and performance-avoid goals have been positively related to students' avoidance behaviors, projective coping strategies, and disruptive behavior (Friedel et al., 2000; Marachi, Friedel, & Midgley, 2001; Midgley, Kaplan, & Middleton, 2001).

Teacher support has also been found to relate to students' mastery goal orientations and their adherence to classroom rules and norms (Wentzel, 1997,1998). Others have suggested that

enthusiastic instruction may be an important motivational element in the classroom context (Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1992). In a recent multi-method study on the relation between classroom achievement goals and student avoidance behaviors, Turner and her colleagues (in press) note a qualitative distinction between teachers of high-mastery classrooms (where students exhibited low avoidance behaviors), and those of low-mastery classrooms (where students exhibited greater avoidance behaviors); teachers of high-mastery classrooms tended to express more positive affect and support, and made fewer negative comments during lessons. Because qualitative observations were limited to a small number of classrooms, these teacher characteristics were not examined across classrooms with different goal emphases. Our study expands on what Turner and her colleagues found. We investigate the relation between the students' perceived classroom environments (i.e., achievement goals and teacher characteristics) and students' maladaptive behaviors.

We pose the following research questions:

1. How are student perceptions of teacher support, enthusiasm, and care taken not to embarrass students related to students' maladaptive classroom behaviors?
2. Do classroom goals have a different relation to students' maladaptive behaviors when student perceptions of teacher characteristics are taken into account?

We predict that mastery goals will be negatively related, and performance-avoid goals will be positively related to students' avoidance of help-seeking, projective coping, and disruptive behavior. Further, we hypothesize that student perceptions of teacher support, enthusiasm, and care taken not to embarrass students will be *negatively* related to maladaptive student behaviors. When students perceive teachers as enthusiastic about what they are teaching, supportive when students need help, and careful not to embarrass students when they have difficulty, they will be less likely to avoid seeking help, disrupt class, or blame their teacher for their difficulties in class.

We also hypothesize that the relation of performance approach goals to maladaptive outcomes will depend upon the degree to which the teacher is careful not to embarrass students when they have difficulty doing the work. Students may respond differently to classroom environments in which the goal is to outperform others or demonstrate ability, depending on whether they perceive that teachers support them when they do not understand something, rather than embarrassing them or putting them down when they demonstrate a lack of ability.

Method

Participants: Students from four economically and ethnically diverse school districts in the Midwest were participants in a two-year longitudinal study to assess students' goals and avoidance behaviors in mathematics. This study utilizes data collected at one time point in the larger longitudinal study. Fifty-one percent of participants were female, and the majority were European American (29% African American, 10% came from other ethnic backgrounds). Final analyses include data from 968 students.

Measures: The measures are a subset of those included on a survey administered to students in the spring of seventh grade. All measures were specific to the subject of math.

Survey items assessed students' perceptions of classroom goals as well as their perceptions of teacher characteristics and self-reported academic behaviors. All items were on 5-point response scales, anchored with 1 = 'Not at all true' and 5 = 'Very true'. Internal consistency of scales was assessed with Cronbach's alpha and was acceptable for all scales ($\alpha \geq .76$ for teacher measures; $\alpha \geq .65$ for goal measures; $\alpha \geq .83$ for outcome measures).

Teacher Support items rated how much students felt their teachers could be counted on for help and emotional support. *Teacher Enthusiasm* and *Teacher Care Not to Embarrass Students* were two scales developed for use in this study. Items on the *Teacher Enthusiasm* scale asked students whether their math teacher expressed excitement about math, made math interesting, and was lively and energetic in class. The other scale assessed the extent to which students felt that teachers did *not* embarrass them when they make mistakes in class or did not understand the lesson.

Achievement goal measures were adapted from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS; Midgley, Maehr, et al., 1997). They assessed students' perceptions of classroom mastery goals (emphasis on learning and understanding math), performance-approach goals (emphasis on appearing able to do the work), and performance-avoid goals (avoiding looking like you can't do the work in math).

Three scales assessed student outcomes. *Avoiding Help-Seeking* was developed by Ryan (Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). High scores on this scale indicate that students do not ask for help even when math is difficult or they do not understand. The *Projective Coping* scale assessed the extent to which students placed blame for their difficulties in math on the teacher or the "unfair" nature of a test, and were adapted from scales developed by Tero & Connell (1984). *Disruptive Behavior* items assessed students' tendency to misbehave and disturb the lesson in math.

Analytic Method: Factor analysis confirmed the independence of scales used in this study. However, we found that items from the scales *Teacher Support* and *Teacher Takes Care Not to Embarrass Students* only form two factors when forced. In addition, we found these scales to be moderately correlated. For these reasons, we discuss the correlation of *Teacher Support* with student outcomes, but have excluded it from other analyses.

Correlations and hierarchical regressions were used to assess the relations between student perceptions of the classroom environment (classroom goals and teacher behaviors) and student outcomes. Each regression accounted for students' gender and prior achievement (6th grade math GPA) at step one. Ethnicity was initially examined as a predictor of student outcomes, but no significant relations were observed, and it is not included in the analyses presented. Perceived classroom goals and teacher characteristics were entered at steps two and three, respectively. Six interactions were assessed at step four of each regression (each classroom goal perception by each teacher behavior).

Results

Correlations (Table 1) indicated that when students perceive teachers to be more supportive and enthusiastic, and less inclined to embarrass them, students are less likely to report that they avoid seeking help, disrupt class, or use projective coping strategies. In addition, mastery goals were negatively related to students' maladaptive behaviors, while performance-approach and performance-avoid goals were positively related. Regarding the relation between goals and teacher characteristics, we found that while student perceptions of mastery goals were

positively related to perceptions of teacher support, enthusiasm, and teacher care not to embarrass, perceiving performance-avoid goals were negatively related. Performance-approach goal perceptions were unrelated to teacher support and enthusiasm, but negatively related to teacher care not to embarrass.

Regression analyses allowed us to assess the relations between teacher behaviors and student outcomes after accounting for student gender, prior achievement, and classroom goal perceptions. Further, we examined interaction effects to determine whether the relation between goals and student outcomes depend on students' perceptions of teacher behaviors. As predicted, we found that students' perceptions of classroom mastery goals were negatively related to avoiding help-seeking, projective coping, and disruptive behavior. Classroom performance-avoid goal perceptions were positively related to all three student outcomes. Perceptions of classroom performance-approach goals were unrelated to student outcomes, after accounting for teacher characteristics. Goal perceptions accounted for between 9% and 26% of the variance in student outcomes.

Student Perceptions of Teacher Characteristics: Teacher enthusiasm did not have a significant relation to any of the three maladaptive student outcome measures. Teacher care not to embarrass students, however, was negatively related to each outcome, after accounting for students' classroom goal perceptions, gender, and prior achievement. Thus, when students perceive that teachers do *not* embarrass students who have difficulty, they are *less* likely to avoid seeking help, disrupt class, or attribute their difficulty to the teacher or the "unfairness" of a test. Teacher behaviors accounted for a significant though relatively small amount of variance in each outcome. See Tables 2-4.

Interactions: Significant interactions emerged for two of the three outcomes we examined. We found that students' perceptions of performance-approach goals interact with their perceptions of teacher care not to embarrass students to predict avoidance of help-seeking (Figure 1). Specifically, when students perceived low emphasis on performance-approach goals, they are more likely to avoid seeking help when teachers are perceived as embarrassing students who appear to have difficulty. When students perceive higher performance-approach goals, these differences in help-seeking behavior do not emerge when teacher embarrassment of students is taken into account.

Perceived teacher care not to embarrass students also interacted with perceived classroom mastery goals (Figure 2). Students who perceived low emphasis on mastery goals reported lower levels of projective coping when teachers were careful not to embarrass students, and higher levels of projective coping when teachers did not avoid embarrassing students. When students perceived *greater* emphasis on mastery goals, they reported lower levels of projective coping, on average, than students with lower mastery goal perceptions, regardless of their perceptions of teacher care not to embarrass students.

Children's perceptions of classroom performance-approach and performance-avoid goals interacted to predict avoidance of help-seeking (Figure 3). This was the only significant interaction found among achievement goal perceptions. Students who perceived low emphasis on demonstrating ability (performance-approach goals) and high emphasis on avoiding demonstrating a lack of ability (performance-avoid goals) were most likely to avoid seeking help. Those perceiving the opposite (high performance-approach and low performance-avoid) were least likely to avoid seeking help when they needed it.

Discussion

When students perceived that their teacher took care not to embarrass them, they reported lower levels of maladaptive behaviors. In addition, students' perceptions of teacher care not to embarrass moderated the relation between mastery goal perceptions and projective coping, and between performance-approach goal perceptions and avoidance of help-seeking. It seems in these cases, students' perceptions of teacher caring were better predictors of student outcomes when classroom goals were less salient.

Student perceptions of teacher enthusiasm did not relate to student outcomes after accounting for other classroom characteristics. It may be that support, more so than enthusiasm, establishes a sense of trust and acceptance between students and teachers, decreasing students' engagement in behaviors that serve to hide their lack of knowledge or understanding. Future analyses will more rigorously test the independence of teacher support from perceived mastery goals and teacher care not to embarrass students, and will assess teacher support as a moderator of the relation between classroom achievement goals and students' maladaptive outcomes.

Our data lend further support to the findings reported by Turner et al. (in press). We found that mastery goal perceptions and teachers' affective characteristics were correlated. In addition, we found that the relation of mastery goals to students' coping strategies differs depending on students' perception of teachers' tendency to embarrass those who make mistakes.

References

Brigham, F., Scruggs, T., & Mastropieri, M., (1992). Teacher enthusiasm in learning disabilities classrooms: Effects on learning and behavior. Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, 7, 68-73.

Covington, M. V. (1992). Making the grade: A self-worth perspective on motivation and school reform. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Friedel, J. Hrudá, L., & Midgley, C., (2001). When children limit their own learning. The relation between perceived parent achievement goals and children's use of avoidance behaviors. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

Kaplan, A., & Midgley, C. (1999). The relationship between perceptions of the classroom environment and early adolescents' affect in school: The role of coping strategies. Learning and Individual Differences, 11, 187-212.

Marachi, R., Friedel J., Midgley, (2000). I sometimes annoy my teacher during math." Relations between student perceptions of the teacher and disruptive behavior in the classroom. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, WA.

Midgley, C., Kaplan, A., Middleton, M. (2001). Performance-approach goals: Good for what, for whom, under what circumstances, and at what cost? Journal of Educational Psychology, 93, 77-86.

Midgley, C., Maehr, M. L., Hicks, L., Roeser, R., Urdan, T., Anderman, E., Kaplan, A.; Arunkumar, R., & Middleton, M. (1997). Manual for the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (PALS). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan.

Ryan, A. M., Gheen, M. H., & Midgley, C. (1998). Why do some students avoid asking for help? An examination of the interplay among students' academic efficacy, teachers' social-emotional role, and the classroom goal structure. Journal of Educational Psychology, 90, 528-535.

Ryan, A. M., Pintrich, P. R., & Midgley, C. (2001). Avoiding help-seeking in the classroom: Who and Why? Educational Psychology Review, 13, 93-114.

Tero, P. F., & Connell, J. P. (1984). When children think they've failed: An academic coping inventory. Unpublished manuscript, University of Rochester.

Turner, J. C., Midgley, C., Meyer, D., K., Gheen, M., Anderman, E. M., Kang, Y., & Patrick, H. (in press). The classroom environment and students' reports of avoidance strategies in mathematics. A multi-method study. Journal of Educational Psychology.

Wentzel, K. R. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. Journal of Educational Psychology, 89, 411-419.

Wentzel, K. R. (1998). Social support and adjustment in middle school. The role of parents, teachers, and peers. Journal of Educational Psychology, 90, 202-209.

Table 1

Correlations^a between predictor and outcome variables.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Student is Female										
2. 6 th Math Achievement	.11***									
3. Classroom Mastery	.06	.07*								
4. Classroom Performance Approach	-.09**	-.09**	.15***							
5. Classroom Performance Avoid	-.14***	-.11***	-.23***	.52***						
6. Teacher Support	.00	.09*	.61***	-.04	-.26***					
7. Teacher Enthusiasm	-.03	.05	.51***	.01	-.18***	.57***				
8. Teacher Does Not Embarrass Students	.03	.09**	.55***	-.13***	-.37***	.63***	.49***			
9. Avoid Seeking Help	.06*	-.16***	-.36***	.07*	.28***	-.39***	-.19***	-.32***		
10. Projective Coping	-.07*	-.09**	-.43***	.15***	.37***	-.49***	-.27***	-.44***	.50***	
11. Disruptive Behavior	-.18***	-.13***	-.28***	.12***	.23***	-.35***	-.19***	.41***	.41***	.49***

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

a Listwise N=968

Table 2

Summary of hierarchical regression results for variables predicting students' avoidance of help-seeking. (Standardized Beta Coefficients)

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Student is Female	.07*	.12***	.12***	.11***
6 th Grade Math Achievement	-.16***	-.12***	-.12***	-.11***
Classroom Mastery		-.31***	-.27***	-.26***
Classroom Performance-Approach		.01	.00	.01
Classroom Performance-Avoid		.21***	.19***	.22***
Teacher Enthusiasm			.06	.05
Teacher Does Not Embarrass Students			-.12***	-.12***
Classroom P. Approach x Teacher Not Embarrass				.08**
Classroom P. Approach x Classroom P. Avoid				-.07*
R ²	.03	.19	.20	.21
ΔR^2	.03***	.16***	.01**	.01***

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 3

Summary of hierarchical regression results for variables predicting students' use of projective coping. (Standardized Beta Coefficients)

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Student is Female	-.06	.00	-.01	.00
6 th Grade Math Achievement	-.09**	-.04	-.03	-.03
Classroom Mastery		-.39***	-.29***	-.25***
Classroom Performance-Approach		.09**	.07*	.07*
Classroom Performance-Avoid		.23***	.19***	.19***
Teacher Enthusiasm			.02	.01
Teacher Does Not Embarrass Students			-.21***	-.19***
Classroom Mastery x Teacher Not Embarrass				.12***
R ²	.01	.27	.30	.31
ΔR ²	.01**	.26***	.03***	.01***

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 4

Summary of hierarchical regression results for variables predicting students' disruptive behavior. (Standardized Beta Coefficients)

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Female	-.17***	-.14***	-.15***
6 th Grade Math Achievement	-.11***	-.08**	-.07*
Classroom Mastery		-.25***	-.16***
Classroom Performance-Approach		.09*	.07
Classroom Performance-Avoid		.10**	.07
Teacher Enthusiasm			-.01
Teacher Does Not Embarrass Students			-.17***
R ²	.05	.14	.16
ΔR ²	.05***	.09***	.02***

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Figure 1: Girls' and Boys' Avoidance of Help-Seeking, Accounting for Perceptions of Classroom Performance-Approach Goals

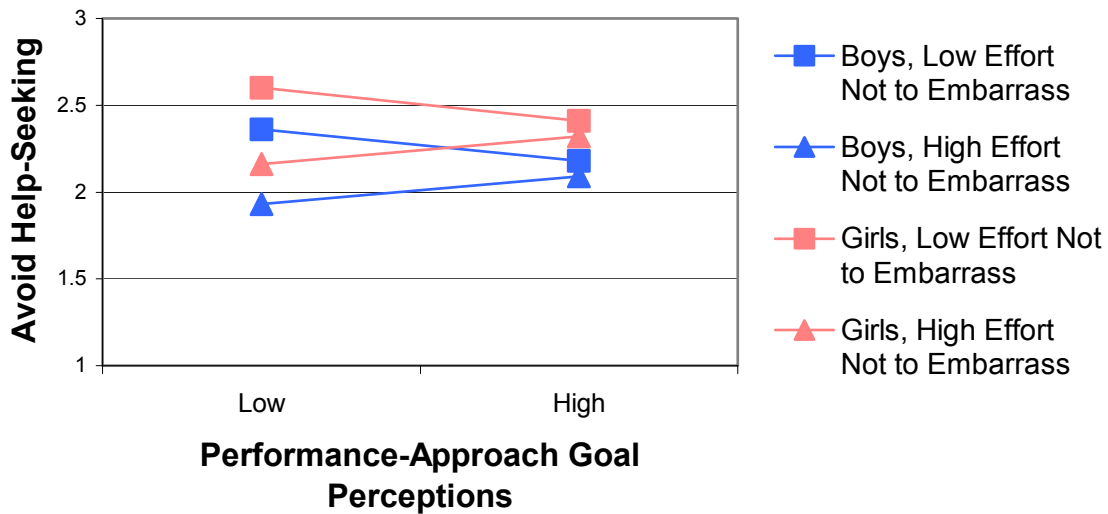


Figure 2: Seventh Graders' Use of Projective Coping Strategies in Classrooms with High vs. Low Mastery Goal Perceptions

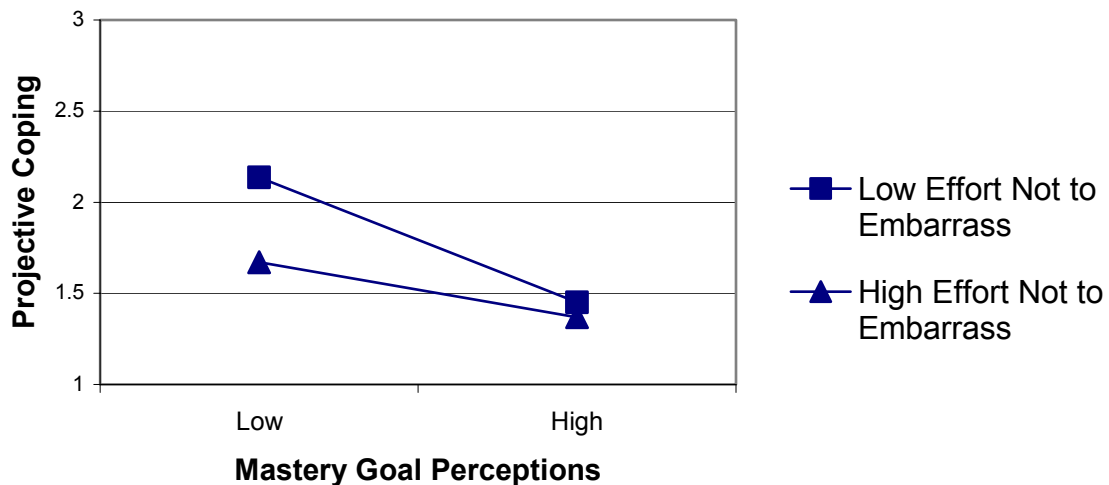


Figure 3: Girls' and Boys' Avoidance of Help-Seeking in Classrooms with High vs. Low Perceived Performance-Approach and Performance-Avoid Goals

