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**MOTIVATIONAL GOALS: A CROSS SECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

Mansfield, Caroline

*Murdoch University, Australia*

[caroline.mansfield@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:caroline.mansfield@murdoch.edu.au)

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents preliminary findings from a cross sectional study of student motivation in West Australian secondary schools. Increasingly researchers using Goal Theory have been investigating how both academic and social goals are significant to adolescent students' learning and school achievement, however, relatively little is known about how these goals may change over time. Are mastery goals as prevalent in final year secondary school students as they are in first year students? Do social goals, such as relationship goals strengthen, weaken or remain the same during the five years at school between early and late adolescence?

This mixed method study examines the academic and social motivational goals of 12/13 year olds and 16/17 year olds and makes comparisons to ascertain changes in motivational goals during secondary schooling experiences. A questionnaire using both rating scale items and open ended questions determined the nature of students' goals and why these goals were deemed important. Focus group interviews were used to investigate further why particular goals were important at particular points in time.

This study develops understandings about why academic and social goals might be prevalent at particular stages of adolescence and extends the ongoing discussion about multiple goals in learning contexts. The findings that there are significant changes in both academic and social goals during adolescence have implications for educators who aim to provide developmentally appropriate learning environments for adolescents and for researchers investigating how motivation and goals change over time.

239 words.

## **Summary**

This paper reports preliminary findings of a study investigating academic and social motivational goals of adolescent students in their first and final years of secondary school in Western Australia. Building on an earlier qualitative study showing that the motivational goals students pursue at the beginning of their secondary school experience are significantly different from those they pursue in their final year, this mixed methods study highlights changes in goal pursuit using cross sectional data from 11/12 year old (Yr 8) and 16/17 (Yr 11 and 12) year old students.

## **Aims**

There are three main aims of this study. Firstly, to investigate the nature and emphasis of the academic and social motivational goals students pursue at the beginning and the end of their secondary school careers (Yr 8 and Yr12) and secondly, to explore why students emphasise particular academic or social goals. Finally, the research identifies patterns in the relationships between academic and social goals at the respective year levels.

## **Methodology / research design**

This paper reports data from one school where the participants were 78 Year 8 students and 69 Year 11 and 12 students. Students completed a questionnaire containing both Likert scale items and open-ended questions and were invited to participate in a focus group interview. The scaled items used included those relating to achievement goals from the PALS (Patterns of Adaptive Learning Questionnaire (Midgley et al., 2000)) and those that have been developed to parallel achievement goal scales and identify social goals (as used by Anderman & Anderman, 1999). The

scales were adapted to form an interactive style questionnaire, where students rated goal statements, self-scored their ratings and then completed further open-ended questions based on their scores in each section. These open-ended questions asked students to explain why particular goals were of importance to them by explaining their rankings. Finally students were asked to write goals on a continuum of most to least important.

The data was analysed using SPSS for descriptive statistics and NVivo was used to code and organise qualitative data. Trends of prominent goals in each cohort and the reasons why particular goals were important were analysed and year group comparisons made.

### **Outcomes**

The findings of this study demonstrate some significant differences in motivational patterns of students at early and late adolescence. Use of quantitative and qualitative data revealed many more reasons students give for wanting to achieve at school than those that have been typically identified through questionnaires. Findings show that a multiple goals perspective is useful for understanding changes in motivational goals during adolescence and that reasons students give for achievement at school are influenced by the school's academic and social contexts, as well as peers, parents and for some students, altruistic reasons including a desire to contribute to the wider community in adulthood.

### **Theoretical and educational significance**

There are four key reasons this study is significant.

Firstly, there is little existing research comparing academic and social goals at early and late adolescence. Even though goals have been the focus of extensive research over the last 20 years, the majority of studies focus on early adolescence. Only a few studies have examined motivation of students in late adolescence (Smith, 2004; Smith & Sinclair, 2005; Smith, Sinclair, & Chapman, 2002). Furthermore, few studies have addressed the issue of goal development during adolescence.

Secondly, the issue of how goals may change over time is also becoming of interest to motivation researchers (Fryer & Elliot, 2007; Middleton, Midgley, & Kaplan, 2004; Smith, 2004), however such research has been largely confined to changes in achievement goals. The significance of this study lies in the investigation of how both academic and social goals change between early and late adolescence and the relationships that exist between such goals.

Many studies of student motivation have also focused on academic and achievement goals or social goals, rather than investigating multiple goals. Although the multiple goals perspective (Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988; Meece & Holt, 1993; Wentzel, 1992) was discussed in early goal theory research the issue of how multiple goals might influence engagement and achievement is still being explored. This research examines both academic and social goals and provides further insight into how multiple goals may operate in real learning contexts.

Finally, this study not only identifies students' goals, but explores reasons such goals might be important to individuals, groups and age ranges. Why particular goals are

significant for students is part of current discussion in the field (Urduan & Mestas, 2006). This study develops existing research with the advantage of focusing on a range of academic and social goals.

The findings are significant for educators as understanding how both social and academic goals may influence students' engagement at school has implications for classroom instructional practices and for how teachers support students' motivation during adolescence.

794 words.

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