

Abstract

Four studies applied goal systems theory to explain the effects of mastery and performance goals on educational outcomes. It was hypothesized that mastery goals would be strongly connected to many study behaviors (the fan pattern), and that the connections between performance goals and study behaviors would be highly differentiated (the uniqueness pattern). It was also hypothesized that the fan and uniqueness patterns would mediate the effect of achievement goals on interest and grades. In Study 1, the importance of a set of study behaviors was more differentiated for performance than mastery goals. Study 2, a longitudinal, correlational study, established that students' self-set mastery goals were characterized by the fan pattern and their self-set performance goals were characterized by the uniqueness pattern. In addition, the uniqueness pattern mediated the effect of performance goals on grades. In Study 3, achievement goals were manipulated within an environment that stressed performance, using an innovative computer program. The results of Study 3 suggested that assigning participants a performance goal increased how much they differentiated between a set of study materials (the uniqueness pattern), and that this differentiation mediated the effect of performance goals on test score. Study 4 used methodology similar to Study 3, but reduced the degree to which performance was emphasized. The results of Study 4 suggested that assigning participants a mastery goal increased the overall importance of the study materials (the fan pattern), and the importance of the study materials mediated the effect of mastery goals on interest. In addition, behavioral observations of studying behavior suggested that participants with performance goals favored a set of test relevant study materials whereas participants in the mastery goal condition favored a set of exploratory study materials. Implications for achievement goal theory, goal systems theory, and educational policy are discussed.