Predictors of Avoidance of Help-Seeking: Social Achievement Goal Orientation, Perceived Social Competence and Autonomy

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Abstract: *Aim*: The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between help-seeking avoidance on social achievement goal orientation, perceived social competence and autonomy. *Method*: Participants were 150 (80 females and 70 males) university students majoring in Economics, Accounting and Management. All participants completed a self – determination scale, behaviour of seeking help and social achievement goal orientation questionnaires as well as Harter questionnaire. The data were analyzed by using multiple linear regression. *Results and Discussion*: The findings demonstrated that social achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension had a significant negative correlation with and was the best predictor of, avoidance of help-seeking. Our finding confirms Ryan model to explain avoidance of help-seeking. Theoretical implications such as extending the Ryan model to social achievement goal orientation were considered.

Key words: Help-seeking · Social Achievement Goal Orientation · Perceived Social Competence · Autonomy · Ryan model

INTRODUCTION

A relatively new branch of social psychology and motivation has been investigating 'seeking help'. Newman defines 'seeking help' as 'seeking others' help' at the time when one faces difficulties or uncertainty in the course of his/her education [1]. Ames sees it as a person's attempt to make use of all available facilities in order to achieve his goal [2]. In both viewpoints 'seeking help' is deemed as a strategy of motivational learning and a kind of social interaction.

Some studies have shown that a number of students who need help refuse to seek it. This has drawn attention towards motivational factors and the role these factors may play in help-seeking behaviour. Newman maintains that help-seeking decision originates from our motivation and affective system; this system consists of achievement goals, perceived competence and the students' attitude towards seeking help [3].

Ryan, Pintrich and Midgley argue that a two-dimensional framework can explain why students avoid seeking help [4]. One side of it involves autonomy and perceived competence and the other side involves academic goal orientation (Table 1).

Table 1: The Framework of 2 dimensional reasons to the avoidance of help seeking

Achievement Goal Orientations	Autonomy Concerns	Competence Concerns
Mastery Goal Orientation	Desire independent mastery will learn / enjoy more if persist alone	Asking for help is evidence that one didn't master the task, didn't learn
	"I wouldn't ask for help because I'll learn more if I do it alone"	*"I wouldn't ask for help because it would mean that I don't understand the task"*
Performance Goal Orientation	Desire self – reliance – means more capable if do alone.	Asking for help is evidence that one lacks ability.
	"I wouldn't ask for help because I want to show that I can do it myself"	*"I wouldn't ask for help because it would make me look stupid"*

*Source: Ryan, Pintrich, and Midgley, 2001, p. 107 cited with permission

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According to the studies of Ryan, Gheen and Midgley the students' perception of the structure of mastery is related to lower levels of avoidance of help-seeking [5]. On the other hand, the structure of performance is related to higher levels of avoid seeking help. In the revised model of achievement goals, performance goals are categorised as Performance Approach and Performance Avoidance. Researchers who follow this distinction register that while mastery goals are negatively related to help-seeking avoidance, performance avoidance goals are positively related to avoidance of help-seeking [1, 4, 6-9].

In his study, Pakdaman states that in the course of problem solving, the perceived competence negatively predicts the quantity of seeking help and goal orientations predicts the quality of seeking help; that is, the students in the performance structure will seek less help than those in the mastery structure [10]. Thus, it can be argued that a low perceived competence coupled with performance orientation adds to the intensity of help-seeking avoidance. Of course, pervious researches, only confirm part of this argument. For instance, some studies have reported that external goals are the best predictors of avoidance of help-seeking while perceived social competence and task - oriented goals best predict acceptance of seeking help [11, 12].

Although past studies have considered the role of goal orientations, what they seriously lack is an absence of attention to social goal orientations. Recently some theorists of goals have pointed out that 'achievement goals' are indeed a sub-category of 'competence goals' which is what happens in everyday life and which is applied to the execution of enterprises and jobs of great importance [13]. Competence goals are related to individual orientations. For instance, the social mastery goal orientation is to expand the perceived competence in relationships [14] and the social performance goal orientation is to affirm the perceived competence in social relationships (social acceptance). Based on such views we can extend Ryan's 2x2 framework of goal orientation, perceived competence and autonomy so that we can replace Academic Achievement Goal Orientation with Social Achievement Goal Orientation. Nonetheless, many of theorists believe that in order to realise the dynamism of motivation in individuals we have to bring together both social goals and academic goals [15 -22]. This study has extended one dimension of that framework to the Social Achievement Goal Orientation. It has been assumed that the behaviour of help-seeking avoidance can be caused by both Academic Achievement Goal Orientation and Social Achievement Goal Orientation. The basis of such argument is the studies which mix social and academic goals in order to understand motivational behaviours. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate how Ryan's model can be extended to dimension of social goals orientation.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Participants: 150 university students (80 females and 70 males) majoring in Economics, Accounting and Management at Azad University –Tehran branch.

Tools: Self – Determination Scale (SDS): this scale was designed by Sheldon and Deci to measure individual differences with regard to each person's autonomy and control; this scale has two dimensions. The first dimension involves awareness of self ('how much they are aware of their emotions') and the second dimension is about the perception of the power of choice ('how much control they have over their behaviour). This scale has 10 items and is graded on a five-point scale. In a pilot study, Sheldon and Deci's focused on working out the initial questionnaire where the reliability coefficient in all scales is estimated to be 0.86 to 0.92 [23 -24]. The validity of this questionnaire was investigated by factor analysis. In this study the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of total scale was estimated 0.63.

Social Achievement Goal Orientation Questionnaire: Ryan and Hopkins designed this questionnaire in 2003 [25]. It was created parallel to Academic Achievement Goal scale; that is, it measures the three dimensions (Mastery, Performance Approach and Performance Avoidance) in the Social Achievement Goal dimension. It has 22 items all of which are graded based on Likert's five-point scale from 1 (It absolutely applies to me) to 5 (It does not apply to me at all). In this research, the reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.75, 0.67 and 0.64 for mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance, respectively. In a study, the factor structure upon which this questionnaire was based was reported to have three factors [26].

Help-Seeking Behaviour Questionnare: According to Ryan and Pintrich Help-Seeking Behaviour is realised either in the form of acceptance or avoidance [8]. The questionnaire has 14 questions equally divided to questions about acceptance (7) and avoidance (7); the items are graded based on Likert's five-point scale from 1

(Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Reliability for Help-Seeking Avoidance and Help-Seeking Acceptance was reported to be 0.76 and 0.81, respectively. In his research, Ghadampour has reported that the factor structure of this questionnaire consists of two factors [11]. According to his research, the reliability in both acceptance and avoidance of seeking help is reported to be 0.68.

Harter's Perceived Competence Questionnaire: The Perceived Competence Scale subsumes two subscales: social and cognitive. The questionnaire has 14 items (7 of them are about the perceived cognitive competence and the other 7 are about the perceived social competence. Each question has a four-point Likert grading from 1 to 4. In this study, the perceived social competence was used. The reliability of this scale is 0.87 for the perceived social competence [27]. Ghadampour reported reliability coefficient 0.64 for the perceived social competence [11]. In this study, the reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha was estimated for the perceived social competence scale 0.43.

Procedure: All the students of Management majoring in Microeconomics, Macroeconomics and Statistics modules completed all the questionnaires. The average time for completing the questionnaires was 20 minutes; the data were gathered in a two-week time span.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the mean of social achievement goal orientation regarding mastery, performance approach and performance avoidance is greater than the midpoint scale. The dispersion of mastery scores is less than other aspects of social achievement goal orientation. Scores range presenting perceived social from 1 to 4 and the mean of this variable is greater than the midpoint scale. The same applies to autonomy. Yet, when it comes to help-seeking avoidance, the mean score is lower than the midpoint scale (Table 2).

The findings showed that there was a negative correlation between help-seeking avoidance and the social mastery goal orientation (r = -0.22, p<0.05). There was no significant correlation between help-seeking avoidance and other aspects of the social goal orientations, perceived competence and autonomy.

Moreover, there was a positive correlation between the social performance goal orientation and the perceived social competence. Autonomy did not show any significant correlation with other variables. This study used multiple regressions to examine its four hypotheses on basis of theoretical model:

Hypothesis 1: The social mastery goal orientation and autonomy, do not predict help-seeking avoidance.

Hypothesis 2: The social mastery goal orientation and perceived social competence do not predict help-seeking avoidance.

Hypothesis 3: The social performance goal orientation and autonomy, do not predict help-seeking avoidance.

Hypothesis 4: The social performance goal orientation and perceived social competence, do not predict help-seeking avoidance.

Statistical Assumptions: The maximum variance inflation factor in all models was 1.004 which repudiated multi co linearity between variables. Residuals were distributed normally.

To examine hypothesis No. 1, the social mastery goal orientation and autonomy were simultaneously put into regression model (Table 3, Model 1). The results demonstrated a significant regression model ($F_{2, 145} = 4.74$, p<0.01). This model predicted 6% of avoidance of help-seeking. On examining regression coefficients it was found out that the social mastery goal orientation with the standard weight of -0.22 conversely and significantly predicts avoidance of help-seeking. In this model, autonomy did not have a significant role in predicting avoidance of help-seeking.

Table 2: Means, Standard deviations, reliability estimates and pearson correlations among variables (n = 150)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social mastery orientation	4.3	0.61	0.76[a]	0.35**	0.41**	0.07	0.06	-0.22**
2. Social performance – approach orientation	3.2	0.76		0.64	0.50**	0.20*	-0.07	-0.09
3. Social performance – avoidance orientation	3.6	0.81			0.66	-0.08	-0.02	-0.08
4. Perceived social competence	2.8	0.49				0.43	0.14	-0.13
5. Autonomy	3.5	0.65					0.63	-0.12
6. Avoiding seeking help	2.1	0.76						0.80

Note. * P<0.05 **P<0.01

a. Main diagonal is coefficient alpha reliability estimates.

Table 3: Summary of regression of avoiding seeking help on social achievement goals orientation, autonomy and perceived social competence

Model /Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	R^2	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the estimate
1. Autonomy	Regression	5.18	2	2.59	4.74**	0.06	0.05	0.74
Mastery orientation	Residual	78.67	144	0.55				
2. Perceived social competence	Regression	5.35	2	2.67	4.94**	0.06	0.05	0.74
Mastery orientation	Residual	78.53	145	0.54				
	Total	83.87	147					
3. Autonomy	Regression	2.05	2	1.02	1.81	0.02	0.01	0.76
Performance orientation	Residual	82.04	145	0.57				
	Total	84.09	147					
4. Perceived social competence	Regression	1.82	2	0.91	1.62	0.02	0.008	0.76
Performance orientation	Residual	82.27	146	0.56				
	Total	84.09	148					

Note: **$P < 0.01$

Table 4: Regression coefficients of social mastery goal orientation, autonomy and perceived social competence

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	
Predictor variables	B	Std. Error	β	t
1. Intercept	3.81	0.54		7.07**
Mastery orientation	-0.27	0.10	-0.22	-2.68**
Autonomy	-0.13	0.95	-0.11	-1.35
2. Intercept	3.87	0.55		7.08**
Mastery orientation	-0.27	0.10	-0.22	-2.68**
Perceived social competence	-0.18	0.12	-0.11	-1.42

** $P < 0.01$

To examine hypothesis No.2, the social mastery goal orientation and perceived social competence were simultaneously put into regression model (Table 3, Model 2). The result demonstrated a significant regression model ($F_{2, 145}$=4.94, P<0.01). This model predicted 6% of help-seeking avoidance. On examining regression coefficients it was found out that the social mastery goal orientation with the standard weight of -.22 conversely and significantly predict help-seeking avoidance (Table 4). In this model, perceived social competence did not have a significant role in predicting help-seeking avoidance.

To examine hypothesis No. 3, the social performance goal orientation and autonomy were simultaneously put into regression model (Table 3, Model 3). The results demonstrated that regression model is not significant ($F_{2, 145} = 1.81$, p > 0.05).

To examine hypothesis No. 4, the social performance goal orientation and perceived social competence were simultaneously put into regression model (Table 3, Model 4). The results demonstrated that regression model is not significant ($F_{2, 142} = 1.62$, p > 0.05).

To explain help-seeking behaviour, Ryan *et al* suggested the use of the 2x2 framework [4]. In this framework, achievement goal orientation is put as one dimension and perceived competence-autonomy as another. The ultimate aim of this research was to extend Ryan *et al*'s model to the dimension of achievement goal orientation. Basing itself on 2x2 framework for explaining seeking help, this study extended achievement goal orientation to social dimension; keeping the perceived competence - autonomy unchanged, the study attempted to re-examine Ryan's model. The first evidence showed that the social mastery goal orientation conversely predicts avoid seeking help; however, autonomy did not have any role in this prediction. This finding demonstrates that in achievement goal orientation dimension, Ryan *et al*'s model is extendable to social aspects, but by interaction with autonomy it is not expected to intensify help-seeking avoidance. Moreover, contrary to Ryan *et al*'s claim, autonomy had no role in predicting help-seeking avoidance. Thus, parts of the findings of this study have added to the findings of previous studies.

Previous studies held that academic achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension is negatively related to help-seeking avoidance [3, 8-9, 28-29], the present study extended this relation to the level of social achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension. Furthermore, it was revealed that autonomy has no role in

predicting help-seeking avoidance, no matter whether it is on its own or in combination with social achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension. However, Ryan *et al*'s findings claimed that academic achievement goal orientation in mastery and autonomy dimensions predicts help-seeking avoidance [4].

Another finding of this study shows that when the social achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension is combined with perceived social competence, it was only the social achievement goal orientation which predicted help-seeking avoidance. Perceived social competence had no role in predicting help-seeking avoidance whether on its own or in combination with the social achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension.

This finding in some parts contradicts previous findings. People with a high perceived social competence are comfortable about interacting with others and try to play an important role in the classroom [8, 27]. Since they can comfortably interact with others, they can communicate their needs to others and ask for help. Perhaps due to such effective interaction, they can reveal their vulnerability and problems; thus they end up seeking help even more. As seeking help is both a learning strategy and a social interaction, Ryan and Pintrich maintain that social competence plays a very important role in youth's initial decision to seek help for their homework [8]. Ryan and Pintrich found out that those who are not cognitively and socially confident (particularly those who feel threatened by their peers) are more likely to avoid seeking help. However, in this study perceived social competence did not show any relation with help-seeking avoidance. It is possible that the combination of social dimension of achievement goal orientation with perceived social competence has ended up with the social variance being measured as part of social achievement goal orientation and thus making perceived social competence a less effective player. Another possible explanation may be the low reliability of perceived social competence scale. Although the reliability of this scale in previous studies had reached a reasonable level (for instance in Harter), in this study it was nowhere near satisfaction.

There were two other instances where the findings of this study contradicted those of Ryan *et al*. Neither the social achievement goal orientation in performance and autonomy dimensions nor the social achievement goal orientation in performance dimension and perceived social competence had an effective role in predicting avoid seeking help. In other words, only one dimension of the 2x2 framework to explain of seeking help was confirmed and extended by this study. Although Ryan and Pintrich have stated that performance orientation is followed by negative beliefs and viewpoints about seeking help (such as threats from classmates and the teachers towards one's value), this study could not find any evidence to extend this explanation to the level of the social achievement goal orientation in performance dimension. At any rate, the findings of this study demonstrated that although Ryan *et al*'s model in explaining seeking help can be extended to the social achievement goal orientation in mastery dimension, the social achievement goal orientation in performance and autonomy dimensions and perceived social competence as well as their two-dimensional combination cannot be generalised. It so seems that this framework needs to be revised.

The first limitation of this study is its being a correlative type of study; thus, it is not possible to put forward causative statements regarding relations between variables. The second limitation is due to the measuring tools which did not have that much reliability, particularly with regard to perceived social competence. On the other hand, data were gathered in the form of self-report; this means that a good number of criticisms expressed against this method (such as lack of sufficient self-insight, errors of measurement, etc) can indeed affect the results.

For future studies we suggest that frameworks of the social achievement goal orientation be experimentally designed in order to observe the frequency of help-seeking avoidance behaviour. It is probable that the findings of this kind would further clarify the causative relations between constructs. It is also recommended that the researchers use more reliable measuring tools or employ methods of direct assessment of behaviour in their study.

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