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0521473241 - Social Motivation: Understanding Children's School Adjustment

Edited by Jaana Juvonen and Kathryn R. Wentzel

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How are children's social lives at school related to their motivation to achieve and how do motivational and social processes interact to explain children's adjustment at school? This volume, featuring work by leading researchers in educational and developmental psychology, provides new perspectives on how and why children tend to thrive or fail at school. The individual chapters examine the unique roles of peers and teachers in communicating and reinforcing school-related attitudes, expectations, and definitions of self. Relations of children's school adjustment to school motivation, interpersonal functioning, and social skillfulness are also explored.

The developmental and social perspectives on motivation and achievement presented in this volume provide new insights into the complex processes contributing to school success. This book will be vital reading for educators and developmental psychologists interested in the contextual as well as intrapersonal processes that contribute to social and academic competence.

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To our parents,
Ulla-Maija and Jaakko Juvonen,
Ruth and Herman Wentzel

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Preface

The idea for this book developed over the last few years, when we found ourselves at the same conferences, assigned to the same sessions, presenting research on children's and adolescents' social relationships in school. We felt that it was time to pool our efforts and invite others to join us to write about achievement motivation and social functioning, not as two distinct topics, but as interrelated aspects of school adjustment. We both believed that students' acclimation to school is colored by their social experiences – an aspect that had often been neglected, especially in educational research. Furthermore, motivational approaches open up new ways to interpret interpersonal interactions and relationships in the classroom – an observation that has not been widely acknowledged in research on social development.

While editing this book, there was an increase in interest in social influences in the school setting. We want to especially thank all our contributors for their enthusiasm. The authors were at different phases of their social-motivational thinking; some were at the planning stage, while others were in the process of compiling further data and extending their prior findings. We welcomed this variability in conceptualizations that quite accurately reflected the current state of research in this area. Throughout the editing process, we appreciated the encouragement and support from our friends at the University of Delaware and the University of Maryland. Also, we want to acknowledge the support for our own research from the National Academy of Education Spencer Fellowship Program and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement Fellows Program. Finally, thanks are extended to Bernard Weiner for his encouragement and support as well as to Khanh-Van Bui for her assistance.

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Foreword

Bernard Weiner

In the middle 1940s, David McClelland and his coworkers initiated what might be considered the first systematic experimental research pursuing issues in human motivation. An early goal they set for themselves was to develop a measure of human motives in order to identify individuals differing in motive strengths. A thermometer metaphor guided this work. It was reasoned that a “good” thermometer would register an increase when the heat was turned on. In a psychological context, the idea was to manipulate some antecedent that would produce an increase in motive strength under arousal conditions, as opposed to contexts in which there was no stimulating occurrence.

In achievement contexts, it was reasoned that failure would function to galvanize achievement needs. Thus, some individuals failed at an achievement task, whereas others succeeded or were given a nonachievement-related activity to perform. Then the thermometer was thrust into the mouth (or, in this case, in front of the eyes) of the individual to ascertain if increased motivation was registered. The measuring device selected was a projective instrument called the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Indeed, stories to TAT cards did contain more achievement imagery following failure than after success or some control experience. In this manner, it was deemed that an appropriate instrument to assess achievement desires had been developed. It therefore also followed that when persons respond to the TAT under neutral or nonaroused conditions, those with higher scores are “walking around” aroused; that is, they are more motivated to achieve than those exhibiting lower scores in this neutral context.

This conclusion led to hundreds of studies in the achievement domain, followed by many others that may not have used the TAT but nonetheless had the goal of illuminating our understanding of achievement strivings. Indeed, achievement has been the focus of research in human motivation,

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incorporating self-related affects and cognitions including pride, probability of success, ego-orientation, and the like.

This same line of reasoning was applied to the study of affiliative motivation. It was believed that if the TAT was a good thermometer to assess achievement needs, then it also should be able to register affiliative tendencies. The question then became what antecedent, what “source of heat,” in the affiliative domain would be analogous to achievement failure; that is, what would arouse affiliative concerns. The procedure selected was to gather individuals from a fraternity and have them stand before others and be rated on their desirable and undesirable qualities. After doing this, the TAT was administered and the content was scored for affiliative motivation. This proved to be a source of great heat, and the TAT did register increased affiliative concerns after this experience. The heat was so intense, however, that persons being rated by others experienced severe stress and anxiety, some broke into tears, and the ethics as well as the efficacy of the procedure was called into question. Notice that this did not happen following an achievement failure – that was merely a small blaze, not a forest fire.

A number of long-lasting effects on the field of motivation resulted in part from this early history:

1. Researchers focused their efforts on the field of achievement motivation, partially because it lent itself to experimental manipulations.
2. Researchers drew away from affiliative motivation, partially because it was perceived as not lending itself to experimental study.
3. Achievement and affiliation were thought of as very distinct motivations: their interaction and interplay were not considered.

This book begins to redress this imbalance and counter misperceptions. Here we see that achievement and affiliation are intertwined. Feelings of rejection, lack of support, and dissatisfaction of affiliative needs affect achievement motivation and school performance. For example, students lonely and isolated in the classroom are likely to give up achievement strivings, and drop out of school. In addition, one's achievements influence with whom one will affiliate. For example, students with similar achievement strivings tend to form friendships and peer groups, and those whose behavior is consistent with the values of their instructors are ap-

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proved by their teachers. Finally, peers provide students with models for appropriate academic as well as social conduct.

It also is apparent that experimental manipulations pertinent to the study of affiliation are quite possible. But even more evident is that procedures are available that can be used in field settings that enable the study of affiliation and social influences in real-life contexts.

I regard this book as a landmark volume that not only gives affiliative motivation its proper role and respect, but also should be of great benefit to researchers in the achievement field, where I believe new life-lines are necessary. Peer and other social influences cut across motivational domains, including achievement, aggression, and virtually all other motivational systems. Thus, there is potential for a general theory of motivation that has affiliation – the establishment and maintenance of social bonds – at its very core.