

Social Goals, Academic Goals, and Avoiding Seeking Help in the Classroom

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Why do some students avoid seeking help with their classwork when it is needed? Investigated in this study were the relations between early adolescents' academic and social goals and reports of avoiding help-seeking and perceiving that help-seeking is a threat to self-worth. Surveys were administered to 443 fifth graders in 12 elementary schools. Being oriented to demonstrating ability (relative ability goals) and wanting to be associated with the popular group (social status goals) were related positively to perceiving threat and avoiding help-seeking. Being oriented to developing ability (task-focused goals) was related negatively to perceiving threat and avoiding help-seeking. Wanting to form positive relationships with peers (intimacy goals) was related negatively to avoiding help-seeking. There was a significant Grade Point Average \times Relative Ability Goals interaction, indicating that lower-achieving students with relative ability goals were more likely to avoid help-seeking than were higher-achieving students.

Help-seeking is an important self-regulatory strategy that contributes to student learning (Karabenick & Sharma, 1994; Newman, 1994; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988). Self-regulation comprises three processes: observation, judgment, and reaction (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1994; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988). During academic tasks, self-regulated learners carefully observe their progress, judge their performance, and react in adaptive ways. When students encounter ambiguity or difficulty in their schoolwork

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and thus observe and judge that they need assistance, an adaptive reaction is for students to use others as a resource to secure the necessary help and continue the learning process.

As children develop into adolescents, their self-regulatory skills improve (Keating, 1990), and they are better able to observe and judge their performance and determine their need for help in academic situations (Myers & Paris, 1978; Nelson Le-Gall, 1981, 1985; Newman, 1991, 1994). In addition, self-regulatory processes may take on greater importance in adolescence, in that teachers expect adolescent students to assume more responsibility for their learning both in and outside of school. It has been documented, however, that many adolescents do not actively seek help with their academic work when help is needed (Good, Slavings, Harel, & Emerson, 1987; Newman, 1990; Newman & Goldin, 1990). If adolescents have the increased cognitive capacity to be aware of their need for help with academic work, why do many adolescents decide not to seek help? This apparent contradiction highlights the importance of considering motivational as well as cognitive factors to understand adolescent help-seeking behavior (Nelson Le-Gall, 1985; Newman, 1990, 1991, 1994; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

Investigated in this study was the relation between motivational goals and the reported avoidance of help-seeking in the classroom. Academic goals have been shown to be related to help-seeking behavior. This study further examined how goals are related to help-seeking behavior by examining both social and academic goals. In addition to student reports of help-seeking behavior, students' perceptions that help-seeking is a threat to self-worth were examined to garner a fuller understanding of why some students avoid seeking help in the classroom. In addition, the possible moderating role of prior achievement in the relation between goals and help-seeking beliefs and behaviors was examined. Finally, little is known currently about gender and ethnic differences in adolescents' academic and social goals or their help-seeking beliefs and behaviors. Nevertheless, there is evidence that achievement and friendship patterns in early adolescence are related to gender and ethnicity (e.g., Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; DuBois & Hirsch, 1990; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Stevenson, Chuansheng, & Uttal, 1990). Thus, possible gender and ethnic differences in the endorsement of goals and in help-seeking beliefs and behaviors were examined in this study.

Academic Goals and help-seeking

Previous research has found that help-seeking behavior in the classroom is related to the academic goals that adolescents endorse. Goals concern the purpose and meaning that an individual assigns to a given action (Ames,

1992). *Task-focused goals* are concerned with gaining understanding, insight, or skill; learning is seen as an end in itself. In contrast, *relative ability goals* are concerned with the desire to be judged able; ability is demonstrated by outperforming others or by achieving success with little effort.

Recent studies have found that students' perceptions of help-seeking differ according to their academic goals (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). These differential perceptions of what help-seeking represents are related to differing help-seeking behaviors in the classroom. Specifically, the perception that help-seeking is a threat to self-worth has been associated with avoidance of help-seeking (Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). When students perceive that help-seeking will be construed as evidence of low ability, thus engendering negative reactions or judgments from others, their self-worth is threatened, and they are more likely to avoid seeking help (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; Shapiro, 1983). Such self-worth concerns are relevant when students approach learning with relative ability goals. Self-worth is determined by a perception of a person's ability to perform relative to others. A consequence of such a goal is that help-seeking is construed as an admission of lack of ability and thus can be threatening (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). In contrast, when students are oriented to developing competency (task-focused goals), self-worth is determined by mastery that is based on self-referenced standards. Thus, students with task-focused goals would view help-seeking positively as an adaptive strategy for promoting learning, and they would be less likely to avoid seeking help (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997).

Social Goals and help-seeking

In addition to academic goals, students' social goals in school also may be related to their perceptions of threat regarding help-seeking and their avoidance of help-seeking. help-seeking is different from some other self-regulatory strategies in that it necessarily involves other people; it is both a learning strategy and a social interaction. Furthermore, in many classrooms, help-seeking is a public behavior. Students who ask for help in the classroom may perceive that such an action will affect the ways in which they are viewed by others. Thus, it was anticipated that students' social as well as academic goals would be related to help-seeking beliefs and behaviors. Concerns over peer relationships and popularity become particularly salient during the early adolescent period (Berndt, 1982; Brown, 1990; Hartup, 1989). In addition, some adolescents often demonstrate heightened self-consciousness in social settings, believing that their appearance and behaviors are being scrutinized closely and judged by an imaginary audience (Elkind, 1967). Thus, the

relation between students' social goals and their help-seeking behavior may be especially strong during early adolescence.

In this study, two social goals were examined: intimacy goals and social status goals. Intimacy goals concern forming and maintaining positive peer relationships in school (Hicks, 1996). These goals concern students' desire for close and intimate friendships. Students who endorse intimacy goals may view seeking help as an opportunity for legitimate peer interaction in the classroom. In addition, intimacy goals, similar to task-focused goals, do not concern competition and comparison with others. Thus, it was hypothesized that endorsement of intimacy goals would be related negatively to perceived threat associated with help-seeking and reported avoidance of help-seeking. In contrast, *social status goals* concern a desire for social visibility and prestige within the larger peer group, as evidenced through affiliation with the "popular" group at school (Hicks, 1996). Status goals are similar to relative ability goals, in that both concern maintaining a person's public image; relative ability goals concern a student's image of academic ability, whereas status goals concern a student's image of social standing. In both cases, there may be a heightened awareness of the self relative to others and a potential need to protect self-worth. Thus, it was hypothesized that endorsement of status goals would be positively related to perceived threat associated with help-seeking and reported avoidance of help-seeking.

Prior Achievement, Academic Goals, and help-seeking

The vulnerability hypothesis proposes that the need for help is most threatening at low levels of performance, self-esteem, or achievement. Previous research in academic settings has provided support for this hypothesis; self-esteem, perceived cognitive competence, and standardized test scores have been found to be related negatively to perceived threat regarding help-seeking (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990; Newman & Goldin, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). Explored in the present study was whether the vulnerability hypothesis predicted the relation between students' prior achievement, as measured by grade point average (GPA), and help-seeking threat and avoidance. It was hypothesized that prior achievement would be related negatively to perceived threat regarding help-seeking and reported avoidance of help-seeking. That is, lower-achieving students were expected to report higher levels of the perceived threat and avoidance of help-seeking.

An additional aim in this study was to examine the potential interactive effects between prior achievement and relative ability goals on help-seeking. The nature of the relation between relative ability goals and help-seeking threat and avoidance is likely to differ depending on a student's prior

achievement (Butler & Neuman, 1995). Students with relative ability goals are concerned with demonstrating their ability in comparison to their peers. It is likely that the help-seeking of lower achievers would be affected more adversely by the endorsement of relative ability goals than would the help-seeking of higher achievers. Students who define success and self-worth as outperforming others but who perform lower than most other students are likely to be threatened more by help-seeking. Thus, it was predicted that prior achievement would moderate the relation between relative ability goals and perceived threat associated with help-seeking and reported avoidance of help-seeking.

Gender and Ethnic Differences

Possible gender and ethnic differences in academic and social goals, perceived threat associated with help-seeking, and reported avoidance of help-seeking were examined. Previous studies examining gender differences in adolescent students' academic goals have yielded mixed results, with some studies (e.g., Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) reporting no differences in adolescents' endorsement of task-focused and relative ability goals. In contrast, however, there is some evidence that boys may be more likely than girls to endorse relative ability goals (e.g., Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996), whereas girls report higher levels of task-focused goals (Pintrich, Ryan, & Patrick, in press). Other studies have indicated that relations between students' gender and achievement goals are more complex. For example, Anderman and Midgley (in press) reported that girls endorsed task-focused goals more than did boys in relation to studying English, but there was no difference in relation to studying math. Similarly, in examining goals for studying science, Meece and Jones (1996) reported that among low-achieving students only, boys endorsed task-focused goals more strongly than did girls. In this study, academic goals were measured at a general level rather than for different subject area domains. Thus, gender differences in task-focused goals might not be expected to emerge. It was expected, however, that boys might endorse relative ability goals more than would girls.

Less research has been done on adolescents' intimacy and social status goals. Findings from three distinct samples have indicated that girls endorse intimacy goals more than do boys (Hicks, 1996; Hicks & Murphy, 1995; Hicks, Murphy, & Patrick, 1995). Those findings were consistent with research that has shown that the importance and prevalence of intimacy are greater in adolescent girls' relationships as compared to the relationships of boys (Berndt, 1982; Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). Therefore, girls were expected to endorse intimacy goals more than would boys. Regarding status

goals, previous studies have found that boys endorse status goals more than do girls (Hicks, 1996; Hicks & Murphy, 1995) or that there were no gender differences (Hicks et al., 1995). Related work investigating the emergence of cliques, crowds, and the importance of popularity in early adolescence has not reported gender differences (Brown, 1990). Accordingly, the investigation of gender differences in status goals was exploratory.

Most studies investigating student reports of help-seeking have found no gender differences (Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; van der Meij, 1988, 1990). Therefore, gender differences in perceptions of threat regarding help-seeking and avoidance of help-seeking were not predicted.

The authors do not know of any previous studies that have examined ethnic differences in adolescents' goals and help-seeking. Therefore, no specific predictions about differences by ethnicity were made. However, given the diverse sample, ethnic differences on all of the constructs were explored.

In summary, the current study explored whether students' academic and social goals were related to the perception that help-seeking is a threat to self-worth and reported avoidance of help-seeking in the classroom. The research questions investigated in this study were the following: (a) How are academic and social goals related to reported avoidance of help-seeking? (b) How are academic and social goals related to perceived threat associated with help-seeking? (c) How is prior achievement related to perceived threat associated with help-seeking and reported avoidance of help-seeking? (d) Does prior achievement moderate the relation between relative ability goals and the perceived threat associated with help-seeking and reported avoidance of help-seeking? (e) Are there gender or ethnic differences in adolescents' goals, perceived threat associated with help-seeking, and reported avoidance of help-seeking?

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 443 fifth-grade students from 12 elementary schools in two school districts in southeastern Michigan. These districts are in economically and ethnically diverse working-class communities. All of the schools included kindergarten through fifth grade. The schools ranged in size from 282 to 407 students and employed 9 to 17 classroom teachers. All fifth-grade students were recruited for the study. Parental permission was required for students to participate. Parental permission

included access to students' school records. Of the total, 83% received permission. The sample, which was 49% White, 40.6% African American, and 10.4% Hispanic, included 212 boys and 231 girls.

Procedure

Survey data for this study were collected in the fall of 1994 as part of a larger study. Surveys were administered to students in their classrooms by two trained research assistants. One administrator read instructions and items aloud while students read along and responded. The second administrator monitored understanding and answered individual questions. Students were told that this was not a test and that there were no right or wrong answers. Students were told that the purpose of the survey was to find out what fifth-grade students thought about school and about learning, and this was a chance for them to express their opinions. Students were assured that the information in the survey would be kept confidential. In addition, students were told that filling out the survey was voluntary, and if at any point they wanted to stop they could do so.

Measures

The format for all items in the survey was a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = *not at all true* through 5 = *very true*. Two principal components analyses with varimax rotation were conducted. First, all goal items were entered into one principal components analysis. Second, all help-seeking variables were entered into a second principal components analysis. Results supported the distinctiveness of each scale.

Academic goals. Two scales (task-focused goals and relative ability goals) from the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Survey (Midgley et al., 1996) were administered. The scales assessing goals refer to students' reasons or purposes for engaging in academic work. When oriented to task-focused goals, students' purpose or goal in an achievement setting is to develop their competence. Examples of items include the following: "An important reason I do my schoolwork is because I want to get better at it" and "I like schoolwork that I'll learn from, even if I make a lot of mistakes." When oriented to relative ability goals, students' purpose or goal in an achievement setting is to demonstrate their competence. Examples of items include the following: "Doing better than other students in this class is important to me" and "I would feel successful if I did better than most of the other students in my class." Guided by the results of principal components analysis, two scales

were created: Task-Focused Goals (six items, $\alpha = .86$) and Relative Ability Goals (five items, $\alpha = .75$).

Social goals. Scales previously used by Hicks and Murphy (1995) and Hicks et al. (1995) were adapted to assess intimacy goals and social status goals. Intimacy goals refer to students' desire to form positive relationships with their peers in school (e.g., "I would like to get to know my school friends well" and "It is important to me to form one or two really close friendships at school"). Social status goals refer to students' desire to gain social status through membership in the popular group at school (e.g., "It is important to me to belong to the popular group at school" and "I don't want to hang out with the unpopular students at school," reverse coded). Guided by the results of principal components analysis, two scales were created: Intimacy Goals (six items, $\alpha = .60$) and Social Status Goals (four items, $\alpha = .65$).

Avoidance of help-seeking. Items developed by Arbreton (1993) and Ryan and Pintrich (1997) were used to assess avoidance of help-seeking when needed. Avoidance of help-seeking refers to instances when a student needs help but does not seek it (e.g., "If my classwork is too hard for me, I just don't do it rather than ask for help" and "I don't ask questions in class, even when I don't understand the lesson"). All help-seeking items were worded in the conditional sense (i.e., "If I need help with my schoolwork") to control for the students' need for help (Arbreton, 1993; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990). Guided by the results of principal components analysis, the Avoidance of help-seeking Scale (six items, $\alpha = .75$) was created. Although the dependent variable was self-reported, for brevity, self-reported avoidance of help-seeking will be referred to as avoidance of help-seeking.

Perceived threat associated with help-seeking. Based on the work of Karabenick and Knapp (1991), Newman (1990), Newman and Goldin (1990), and van der Meij (1988), items were developed to assess the perceived threat associated with help-seeking. Items asked about the students' perceptions of threat to self-worth associated with seeking help in class. Threat to self-worth engendered by help-seeking reflects that the need for help will incur negative reactions or judgments from others. Sample items include the following: "I worry that the teacher might think I am dumb when I ask a question in class" and "I worry about what other kids might think when I ask for help with my schoolwork." The items formed one factor in the principal components analysis. Based on this result, one scale was formed: Perceived Threat Associated With help-seeking (10 items, $\alpha = .88$).

TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations for Gender, GPA, Goals, and Help-Seeking Variables

Variable	\bar{X}	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Task-focused goals	3.96	.96							
2 Relative ability goals	3.05	1.07	.10**						
3 Intimacy goals	4.14	.72	.22**	.10*					
4 Social status goals	2.51	1.08	-.13**	.28**	.05				
5 Avoidance of help-seeking	2.12	.90	-.28**	.17**	-.21*	.22**			
6 Threat associated with help-seeking	2.01	.92	-.11*	.23**	-.04	.22**	.61**		
7 Gender ^a			.00	-.13**	.18**	-.15**	-.12*	.04	
8 GPA ^b	7.69	2.46	-.12*	-.13*	.12*	-.21**	-.25**	-.21**	.21**

a. Gender is coded 0 = male and 1 = female.

b. GPA = grade point average from previous school year and is coded from 1 = E through 13 = A+.

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

Prior academic achievement. Students' grades in the academic core subjects (English, math, science, and social studies) for the final semester of fourth grade were collected from their school records. The grades were coded E = 1 through A+ = 13. An overall GPA was then computed by calculating the arithmetic mean of those scores for each student.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables are shown in Table 1. An expected pattern of correlations was found among the goals and help-seeking variables. Task-focused goals had a significant negative correlation both with the avoidance of help-seeking and the perceived threat associated with help-seeking. Intimacy goals had a significant negative correlation with the avoidance of help-seeking. Relative ability and social status goals had significant positive correlations with the avoidance of help-seeking and the perceived threat associated with help-seeking. Prior academic achievement (GPA) was related negatively to the avoidance of help-seeking and the perceived threat of help-seeking, indicating that the students who needed the most help were most threatened and least likely to ask for help.

To examine possible gender differences in all variables, independent sample *t* tests were conducted. There were significant gender differences on

relative ability goals, $t(432) = 2.68, p < .008$; social status goals, $t(432) = 3.84, p < .000$; intimacy goals, $t(433) = -4.07, p < .000$; and avoidance of help-seeking, $t(433) = 2.47, p < .014$. Boys reported higher levels of both relative ability goals ($\bar{X} = 3.19, SD = 1.07$) and social status goals ($\bar{X} = 2.75, SD = 1.06$) than did girls ($\bar{X} = 2.92, SD = 1.07$, and $\bar{X} = 2.36, SD = 1.06$, respectively). Girls reported higher levels of intimacy goals ($\bar{X} = 4.38, SD = .63$) than did boys ($\bar{X} = 4.10, SD = .78$). Boys were more likely to report avoiding help-seeking when needed ($\bar{X} = 2.23, SD = .94$) than were girls ($\bar{X} = 2.02, SD = .85$).

One-way analyses of variance were conducted to test for possible ethnic differences on all variables. There were no ethnic differences on any of the variables.

Regression Analyses

Two separate hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the independent and joint contributions of gender, GPA, academic goals, and social goals in predicting the avoidance of help-seeking and the perceived threat associated with help-seeking. In each case, gender and GPA were entered at the first step. Academic and social goals were entered at the second step. To test the hypothesis that GPA moderates the relation between relative ability goals and help-seeking, a GPA \times Relative Ability Goals interaction term was entered on the final step (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The interaction term was a cross-product term computed with students' GPA and the scale assessing relative ability goals. Both predictor variables were centered at their means to reduce multicollinearity (Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990). The presence of interactions between students' gender and the other predictors was examined because the t tests indicated there were gender differences on many of the constructs. None of the gender interaction terms were significant, however, so the regression analyses were rerun without the gender interaction terms to reduce error.

Predictors of avoidance of help-seeking. Results are shown in Table 2. Students' academic and social goals accounted for 14% of the variance in the avoidance of help-seeking beyond that explained by GPA. GPA was a negative predictor, indicating that lower-achieving students were more likely to avoid seeking help. Gender was not a significant predictor. Espousing task-focused goals was the strongest negative predictor of the avoidance of help-seeking ($\beta = -.31, p \leq .001$), whereas relative ability goals positively predicted the avoidance of help-seeking ($\beta = .11, p \leq .05$). Thus, students who

TABLE 2: Hierarchical Regression Analyses Using Gender, GPA, and Academic and Social Goals to Predict Help-Seeking Variables

	<i>Analysis 1: Avoidance of help-seeking</i>			<i>Analysis 2: Threat Associated With help-seeking</i>		
	β Step 1	β Step 2	β Step 3	β Step 1	β Step 2	β Step 3
Step 1						
Gender ^a	-.05	.00	.00	.09	.12*	.13*
GPA ^b	-.23***	-.23***	-.24***	-.23***	-.21***	-.21***
Step 2						
Task-focused goals		-.30***	-.31***		-.16**	-.17**
Relative ability goals		.11*	.10		.17***	.16**
Intimacy goals		-.10*	-.10		.01	.02
Social status goals		.11*	.11*		.13*	.12*
Step 3						
GPA \times Relative Ability Goals			-.10*			-.10
F^2	.06***	.20***	.21***	.05***	.13***	.14***
Change in R^2		.14***	.01*		.08***	.01

NOTE: β indicates standardized regression coefficient.

a. Gender is coded 0 = male and 1 = female.

b. GPA = grade point average from previous school year and is coded from 1 = E through 13 = A+.

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

were concerned with developing their competence were more likely to seek help when they needed it. On the other hand, students who were concerned with demonstrating their competence were less likely to seek help when help was needed.

As hypothesized, social goals also predicted help-seeking behavior. Intimacy goals negatively predicted the avoidance of help-seeking ($\beta = -.10$, $p \leq .05$), whereas social status goals positively predicted the avoidance of help-seeking ($\beta = .11$, $p \leq .05$). Students who were concerned with forming and maintaining close friendships were less likely to avoid seeking help when they needed it. In contrast, students who were concerned with their social image or status among their peers were less likely to ask for help when it was needed.

There was a significant GPA \times Relative Ability Goals interaction ($\beta = -.10$, $p \leq .05$; $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p \leq .05$), indicating that the relation between relative ability

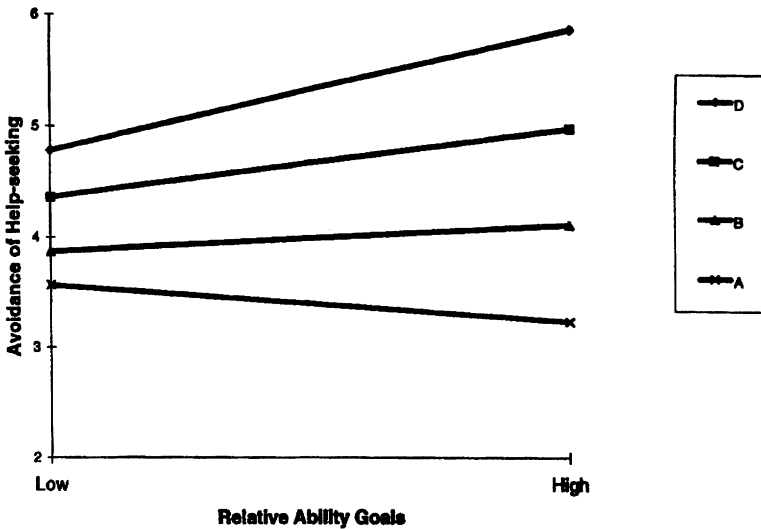


Figure 1: Interaction of Relative Ability Goals and GPA in Predicting Avoidance of Help-Seeking

goals and the avoidance of help-seeking was moderated by prior achievement. The predicted values of the avoidance of help-seeking were graphed for various values of GPA and relative ability goals to aid in the interpretation of this interaction, as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Jaccard et al. (1990). Specifically, four lines were graphed, representing students with GPAs of A, B, C, and D at values of 1 and 5 on the Relative Ability Goal Scale. This is depicted in Figure 1. The graph illustrates that the relative ability goals and help avoidance relation was not constant over different values of prior achievement. Endorsement of relative ability goals had little effect on the help-seeking behavior of high-achieving students but had an increasingly adverse effect as GPA decreased.

Predictors of perceived threat associated with help-seeking. Results are shown in Table 2. Students' academic and social goals accounted for 8% of the variance in the perceived threat of help-seeking beyond the variance explained by gender and GPA. GPA was a negative predictor, indicating that lower-achieving students were more likely to perceive a threat regarding help-seeking. Interestingly, gender was not a significant predictor in the first step, but when the academic and social goals were added in the second step,

gender emerged as a positive predictor ($\beta = .12, p \leq .05$). Thus, when controlling for academic and social goals, girls were more likely to perceive a threat associated with help-seeking than were boys. Relative ability goals and status goals were positive predictors of the perceived threat associated with help-seeking ($\beta = .17, p \leq .001$ and $\beta = .13, p \leq .05$, respectively). Task-focused goals were a negative predictor ($\beta = -.17, p \leq .01$), whereas intimacy goals were unrelated to a perceived threat of help-seeking.

The GPA \times Relative Ability Goals interaction term was not significant ($p = .055$). The predicted values of the perceived threat associated with help-seeking were graphed for various values of GPA and relative ability goals, as described previously, to investigate the nature of this trend. Again, it appeared that endorsement of relative ability goals had little effect on the perceived threat associated with help-seeking for high-achieving students but had increasingly adverse effects as GPA decreased.

DISCUSSION

In discussions with teachers, they described students who obviously needed help yet failed to approach them or their peers for assistance. They were puzzled by the tendency of some students to avoid seeking help when it was needed. This problem seems to be especially notable when children are approaching adolescence. It is a serious problem. If children need help but do not seek it, then their performance surely will suffer. This study examined whether students' goals were associated with a perception that help-seeking is a threat to self-worth and students' reports that they avoid help-seeking in the classroom.

The findings support the contention that students' perceived threat regarding help-seeking and reported help avoidance in the classroom are influenced by social as well as academic goals. In terms of perceived threat associated with help-seeking, task-focused goals were related negatively, and intimacy goals were unrelated to the perception of threat associated with help-seeking. Thus, when students are focused on mastering the academic material at hand rather than on demonstrating academic ability relative to others, help-seeking is perceived as an acceptable or even desirable behavior. Furthermore, when students are focused on forming relationships as opposed to maintaining a social reputation, help-seeking is not perceived as a threat to self-worth. In contrast, relative ability and social status goals were positive predictors of the perception of threat associated with help-seeking. This indicates that

when students pursue goals that concern maintaining a certain image in front of others, either an image of academic ability or social reputation, the need for help is construed as a threat to self-worth. Relative ability and social status goals may reflect a single, more general motive toward social comparison. However, these two constructs were correlated only moderately with one another ($r = .28, p < .01$), which underlines the distinctiveness of the academic and social domains.

It is interesting to think about these results in terms of adolescent egocentrism. It is at this age that individuals have increased potential to appreciate other people's perspectives. As discussed by Elkind (1967), the early adolescent continually is constructing and reacting to an imaginary audience. One consequence of this egocentrism is a tendency to focus on the potential reactions of others in social settings. The goals to appear able and popular may exacerbate the negative effects of egocentrism. The early adolescent may think, *I want to show that I'm smart, and if I ask for help, others may think that I am dumb*, or *I want to belong to the popular crowd, and if I ask for help, others may think less of me*.

The findings for students' perceptions of threat associated with help-seeking were reflected also in their self-reported avoidance of seeking help. Relative ability and social status goals were related positively to the avoidance of help-seeking, whereas both task-focused and intimacy goals were related negatively to the avoidance of help-seeking. It is interesting to note that intimacy goals, although unrelated to perceived threat, emerged as negative predictors of help-seeking avoidance. Students who endorse intimacy goals may seek help when they need it because they value peer interactions and view help-seeking as an acceptable and valued activity in the classroom. These results illustrated the importance of considering students' social and academic goals in an attempt to understand help-seeking in the classroom. They also indicated one mechanism through which students' social goals may affect their beliefs and behaviors in the academic domain.

The results also clarified the ways in which the relation between relative ability goals and help-seeking behavior depend on the level of achievement. The goal of demonstrating ability by outperforming others was related to help-seeking avoidance differently, depending on students' actual level of prior achievement. As GPA decreased, the endorsement of relative ability goals was related to higher levels of avoidance of help-seeking. Thus, when students' goals are to outperform others but they are receiving information that they are not achieving that goal, students are more likely to avoid help-seeking. The interaction representing GPA and relative ability goals was

not a significant predictor of perceived threat associated with help-seeking ($p = .055$). However, the trend was the same as the one found for the avoidance of help-seeking.

These findings are particularly disturbing. First, lower-achieving students are more threatened and report more avoidance of help-seeking when they need help than do higher-achieving students. Furthermore, when lower achievers endorse relative ability goals, the discrepancies become even greater. The very children who need help the most seek it the least, and the pursuit of relative ability goals appears to exacerbate that situation.

Similar to the finding that actual academic achievement moderated the relation between relative ability goals and the avoidance of help-seeking, a student's social situation might moderate the relation between social status goals and help-seeking. The desire to be popular might relate to help-seeking threat and behavior differently, depending on whether a student actually is liked and respected by his or her peers. Adolescents' sociometric status was not measured in this study, so this possibility could not be investigated, but this is an interesting question for research in the future.

This study adds to the understanding of ethnic and gender differences in adolescents' goals and help-seeking. In this ethnically diverse sample, no ethnic differences emerged in social and academic goals, perceived threat regarding help-seeking, or avoidance of help-seeking. Regarding gender differences, boys endorsed relative ability goals more strongly than did girls, although there was no gender difference in endorsement of task-focused goals. These findings are in keeping with some previous studies (e.g., Roeser et al., 1996), but the question of gender differences in achievement goals remains complex. In this study, achievement goals were measured at a general rather than a subject area level for consonance with the other variables under consideration. Thus, a full picture of gender differences in achievement goals may not have emerged in the current data.

There were gender differences in adolescents' social goals. The finding that girls reported higher levels of intimacy goals is consistent with previous research that has investigated intimacy in relationships (Berndt, 1982; Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). Girls seem to value and desire intimacy in peer relationships more than do boys. Boys reported higher levels of social status goals than did girls. Given that boys were higher also in relative ability goals, it may be that boys are more concerned with their public image across domains. Surprisingly, few studies have investigated gender differences in these two goals. Research in the future could add to understanding in this area. However, as Buhrmester and Furman (1987) have suggested, boys and

girls may achieve intimacy in peer relationships in differing ways. The measure in this study could not address that issue.

There were mean-level gender differences in reported avoidance of help-seeking. Girls reported lower levels of avoidance of help-seeking than did boys. This is an interesting finding, given that most studies that have investigated student reports of help-seeking have not found gender differences (Newman, 1990; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997; van der Meij, 1988, 1990). However, it is important to note that in the regression analyses, when controlling for GPA, gender was not a significant predictor of avoidance of help-seeking. In this sample, gender was correlated positively with GPA ($r = .21, p < .01$), indicating that the girls were more likely to have higher grades than were the boys. Therefore, the relation between gender and avoidance of help-seeking in this study may reflect just the influence of GPA. Interestingly, there were no mean-level gender differences in the perceptions of threat associated with help-seeking. However, in the regression analyses, when the academic and social goals were added to the model, gender emerged as a positive predictor. Thus, when controlling for academic and social goals, the girls were more likely to perceive threat associated with help-seeking than were the boys.

Although this study indicated that academic and social goals contributed significantly to variance in the perceived threat regarding help-seeking and help-seeking avoidance, much of the variance was not explained by the variables in this study. Very recently, researchers (e.g., Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996) have noted that the avoidance component of relative ability goals has been ignored in empirical studies. Originally, Nicholls, Patashnick, Cheung, Thorkildsen, and Lauer (1989) suggested that in addition to striving to demonstrate superiority (an approach goal), individuals strive to avoid the demonstration of inferiority (an avoidance goal). It may be that the avoidance dimension of relative ability goals is related more strongly to the avoidance of help-seeking in the classroom than is the approach dimension used in this study. Research in the future should examine other factors that may be associated with the perceived threat regarding help-seeking and help-seeking avoidance.

There are several limitations of this study. First, measurements were gathered at only one point in time. Longitudinal research will be necessary to examine the stability of adolescents' goals and help-seeking beliefs and behaviors. Second, self-report measures were used. It would be informative to replicate this study with other methodological approaches, such as interviews or classroom observations. Third, this study did not include informa-

tion about the classroom contexts within which students were situated. Additional research is needed to determine how teachers' instructional practices and approaches to learning affect the relations between goals and help-seeking beliefs and behavior. This may vary by subject domain, which this study did not examine. Further, teacher support and encouragement of help-seeking and the use of cooperative learning approaches in the classroom could influence students' perceived threat toward help-seeking and their help-seeking behavior.

Despite the limitations noted, the current findings add to an understanding of early adolescent help-seeking behavior. Young adolescents are vulnerable to perceptions of threat regarding seeking help when needed with their academic work. Whether they feel comfortable about asking for help in the classroom appears to be affected both by their social and academic goals. Teacher practices that draw attention to the relative ability of students are likely to foster concern about negative judgments for seeking help, particularly in lower-achieving students. Thus, in classes that emphasize competition and normative evaluation, low achievers may be unwilling to solicit the help they need with their academic work. Similarly, instructional practices that make help-seeking especially public or unusual are likely to increase the perceived threat to students' social reputations and status in some classrooms. In contrast, teacher practices that emphasize doing work for intrinsic reasons and encourage students to use self-referenced standards are likely to foster positive feelings about seeking help. Furthermore, practices that allow the formation of positive relationships and that legitimize mutual help and task-related interactions among peers should support students' efforts to seek aid actively when help is needed.

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