

Implications of College Peer Culture on Achievement Motivation

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The study of goals has recently become a leading focus of researchers and theorists working in the study of achievement motivation. Much has been revealed regarding the types of goals that students adopt and implement in achievement settings, in addition to the processes and outcomes that result from the pursuit of such goals (Ames, 1992; Renn & Arnold, 2003). Furthermore, despite the extensive attention allotted to goals in achievement motivation literature, it is surprising that there has been very little discussion among achievement goal theorists concerning the complex nature of the achievement goal construct. While the author's previous research study, "Perceived Pathways of Success," focused on the factors that influence students' early development of their personal source of motivation, namely through cultural background and values, the current study focuses on the impacts of peer culture during the college years on students' further development of these concepts. A particular focus was placed on the role of ambivalence in making decisions regarding achievement motivation as well as on personal definitions of academic success, as a means of determining its roots and importance to the process. This emphasis stems from the previous study's results, which reveal a strong theme of ambivalence in such decisions among students. Data derived from the interviews revealed several models of achievement motivation development, which are then analyzed in terms of the many different ways that peer culture influences students.

With respect to development, there are imperative changes in a person's motivation as they grow up. In terms of achievement motivation, which refers to motivation related to performance on tasks in which standards of excellence are in effect, the leading pattern of change with respect to achievement motivation for most children is a decline over the school years (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). This can be explained by the tension that students feel as they are pulled between varied types of goals as options to them as they begin to define what success in school means to them. They can strictly adhere to getting "good" grades and nothing else; they can focus on their actual performance in the classroom and retention of information; they can choose to direct their attention to studying subjects that are of genuine interest to them; or decide to do the opposite, and instead place their efforts on competing with classmates and work to constantly come on top through their work. These are only some of the academic goals that students can choose to incorporate into their work ethic, which exposes how complicated and varied the factors are that must be considered when making these decisions about academic success. One could even say that the many options to consider can be overwhelming to some, causing them to simply lose their motivation to work hard in school at all. Regardless of the pathway that a student chooses, it is clear that each person is presented with many perspectives and values to consider in their academic journey, which can cause one to fluctuate between ambivalence and ambiguity. Entering college provides students with the opportunity to pursue areas of study that they have genuine interest in, redirecting them towards the initial purpose of

education: to have a genuine desire to learn for learning's sake. Therefore we ask, does this factor of ambiguity in defining academic success carry over from high school into college? If so, why is this the case, and what are its implications? If not, what is it that created this change? These are questions that can be answered by this study of student ambivalence in defining academic success in the context of college peer culture.

Ambivalence and Achievement Motivation

Ambivalence in the educational journey that students experience is becoming a more dominant factor in this pathway. A relatively novel concept, student ambivalence as documented up until this point stems mostly from being culturally biracial or multiracial, as cultural backgrounds most explicitly lend themselves to ambiguity in one's education. What this means is that for those students who identify with more than one culture – for example, Asian American or African American students – there are conflicting standards and models of academic achievement that create tension in one's educational journey. For example, for African American students, some minority students who succeed in school are criticized by their peers as “trying to act white,” so that a positive identification with black peers, for instance, may include not doing well in school. Some previous researchers have also found that in particular, black people identify largely in opposition to those who are white; so if success in school is labeled as a “white” activity, this may discourage black people from pursuing academic goals (Clark, 1983; Ogbu, 1991). This is only one example of cognitive dissonance when it comes to academic achievement in America, a country held on a pedestal for being a place for people of all backgrounds and cultures to come to and succeed; but if that diversity in itself is responsible for creating uncertainty in one's values, then perhaps it needs further examination in order to fully understand what is being influenced in the academic realm.

Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that cultural differences are the only context in which academic achievement ambivalence develops. While traditional culture appears to be the most discussed in existing literature, other factors have influence on academic achievement development, and further research in this area will allow us to explore these and more fully understand these intricate constructs.

College Peer Culture as an Ecological Model

Researchers of college outcomes have previously accumulated empirical evidence of peer influence on learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991), but student development researchers have not yet discovered sufficient theoretical support to explain these effects. Therefore, the ramifications of peer culture can be explicated through an ecological model of student development that places the student at the center of concentric rings of environments, ranging from immediate (microsystem) to most distant (macrosystem) contexts, which is shown below in Figure 1 (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 1993). Furthermore, the interactions among immediate environments (mesosystems) create the forces of campus peer cultures. While the ecology model allows the possibility of understanding the development of individual students, it is even more beneficial in its ability to analyze the processes and effects of peer culture.

While many classifications and descriptions of students and peer culture have been previously developed (Holland, 1985; Horowitz, 1987), the mechanisms by which peers influence learning and development have yet to be efficiently understood (Kuh, 1995). Although there is a plethora of information regarding “peer pressure” and the influence of peer attitudes on a number of adverse behaviors – such as binge drinking, sexual harassment and assault, incivility and cheating, among others – there is surprisingly little research linking peer culture with college student academic behavior and outcomes (Renn & Arnold, 2003). This is why an exploration of the interactions between students and their environments will provide a lens for understanding individuals in multiple, layered, and interacting contexts, only some of which they encounter in a direct manner. This paper therefore examines peer culture at the level of individuals within like-minded groups who share characteristics and personality traits, as opposed to cohort-based youth culture. Kuh has provided a comprehensive analysis of the history of quantitative and qualitative analyses of peer culture, concluding that “before student cultures can be influenced, they must be discovered and understood (Kuh, 1990).” Kuh (1995) has repeatedly called on higher education researchers to study student culture, and argues that we need “knowledge about peer group effects on learning that occur inside and beyond the classroom and a redistribution of institutional effort (faculty, administration, staff, and students) in order to engage students in types of behavior that are more congruent with the goals of higher education.”

Bronfenbrenner’s Model as Applied to a Postsecondary Environment

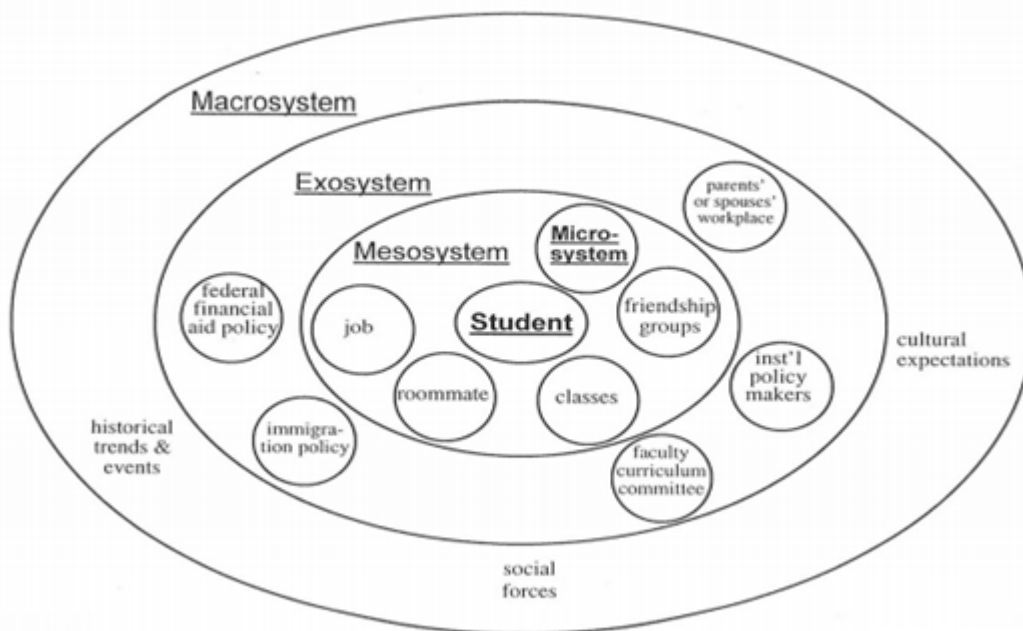


Figure 1

Perceived Pathways of Success and the Current Study

It is important to describe the focus and outcomes of the prior research completed that inspired this study's focus. The study “Perceived Pathways of Success” was conducted as a

means of delving into the conflicting motivations and cognitive dissonance that arises from these in the realm of academic success for students (Haque, 2013). In this previous study, the emphasis was on the factors during a child's social and cultural development that impacted their later behavior in institutional settings regarding how they defined academic success for themselves, and therefore how they shaped their conduct through achievement motivation to reflect these beliefs. However, while the social and cultural parts of the conversation appears to be the most discussed in existing literature, there are certainly other factors that play a role in this concept, which must be explored further in order to fully understand where this ambivalence comes from and how it is prolonged and influenced throughout a student's academic experience. This is where the current study comes in, as it aims to delve deeper on the frontier of both social and cultural psychology, by aiming to consider a completely different kind of socialization on students. By researching college peer culture, we are able to go further into the inner workings of how students develop ideas of academic success and motivation to achieve it, allowing us to have more informed discussions in this realm of psychology.

METHOD

Participants

Twenty-six individuals, ranging in age from 20 to 25 years, participated in the interview, and all were included in the analysis. This included 21 females and 5 males. Of the 26 participants analyzed, 3 were international students, while the remaining 23 were domestic to the United States. In terms of ethnic backgrounds, 10 identified as White American, 4 as Jewish American, 2 as Hispanic American, 1 as Japanese American, 2 as Indian American, 1 as Sri Lankan American, 1 as Serbian American, 1 as Filipino American, 1 as Chinese American, 1 as Mozambican, 1 as Canadian, and 1 as Singaporean. Based off of this data, 13 of the 26 participants identified themselves as bicultural or multicultural, with the remaining 13 categorizing themselves by a single cultural background. Participants volunteered to partake in the interview process, and no compensation was provided.

Procedure

This study involved the use of an interview with 12 questions asked (see Appendix A). Basic demographics were obtained along with information pertaining to what success means in the contexts of college as a whole, the classroom, and life after college; the specific ways in which success should be demonstrated; how parents play a role in influencing these beliefs; and whether or not ambivalence existed in these decisions regarding academic success.

Participants for the interview were found through fliers posted around Clark University's campus describing the nature of the study and asking for interested volunteers. Similarly, the same flier was displayed on social forums online to gain participants from other colleges and universities, who were interviewed at the convenience of both the researcher and the volunteers. The study targeted participants either currently in college or those who recently graduated, as a means of focusing on those considered to be in the stage of life referred to as "emerging adulthood" – which is the crossroads between leaving adolescence and entering adulthood – and is described as a period of time in which young adults "often

explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews (Arnett, 2000).” The importance of addressing the participants as being categorized as living through this life stage is that the volatility and frequent change that often accompanies decisions made at this time has a connection to the existence of ambivalence in one’s views on academic success. These relationships will be further deliberated in the Discussion section.

Interviews were conducted privately and in person whenever possible to ensure that any questions the participants had could be addressed, and to assure confidentiality and promote honest responses. They were recorded via voice recorders, and were later transcribed and coded. If volunteers were recruited online, they conducted the interview online. Coded categories of data included catalytic conditions (parents’ support, parents’ values, social comparison, and personal interest), motivational conditions [both extrinsic (competition, high grades, need to impress others, desire to look better than others) and intrinsic (genuine interest and desire to master their field)], and goals (degree, career, financial security, maintaining a drive to succeed, happiness, and balancing professional and personal life). This model of codes is meant to illustrate various trajectories to the catalytic conditions and be used in a qualitative analysis of how grades orientation is modulated by the motivational promoter(s) and ultimate goals to be achieved.

Coding

For coding, grounded theory was used in order to identify the different processes within the data received (Stern, 1980). When categorizing participants’ responses to the interview questions, they were coded for three different groupings meant to illustrate their individual trajectories of their development of academic success: the first inductive category, “catalytic conditions,” is meant to represent what social or internal aspect pushes them into being involved in their academic pursuits. The options within this category include “parents’ support,” “parents’ values,” “social comparison,” and “personal interest.” The next code is that of “motivational conditions,” which represents the force that keeps participants driven to reach success; this includes extrinsic motivation seen through “competition,” “high grades,” “need to impress others,” and “desire to look better than others,” in addition to two intrinsic motivational conditions of “genuine interest” and “desire to master field.” These codes are shown in Table 1 below as an example of the coding process for this study. Lastly, the third code is that of “goals,” which were what interviewees identified as being what they aspire to gain as an indicator of having achieved success in their futures. This code included “degree,” “career,” “financial security,” “maintaining a drive to succeed,” “happiness,” and “balancing professional and personal life.” When analyzed, as later shown, the goals of “degree,” “career,” and “financial security” were considered tangible goals, while “maintaining a drive to succeed” and “happiness” were seen as emotional goals. The goal of “balancing professional and personal life” in itself encompasses this combination of tangible and emotional goals. Furthermore, because of the complex nature of this data and the topics addressed in the interview, interviewees could and often did provide multiple answers in terms of goals, and so it was very common to see both tangible and emotional goals mentioned by the same person. Overall, the possibilities for trajectories of academic success and achievement motivation resulted in 9 separate models illustrating these pathways.

Table 1 <i>Coding Guide for Motivational Conditions</i>			
Name	Type of Motivation	Definition	Example
Competition	Extrinsic	Driven to succeed by competition with others in academic settings, such as peers and friends.	"I am very competitive and seeing other people who have their stuff together and are actively working forwards with a clear vision and goal in mind does make me resentful in a really strange way. But I try to take that energy and turn it into inspiration and motivation." (010)
High Grades	Extrinsic	Achieving high grades is what pushes one to succeed academically, in order to use those grades to achieve another goal.	"My parents and high school experience have instilled in me that good grades lead to getting into a good college, and good grades in college lead to a good job." (026)
Need to Impress Others	Extrinsic	The desire to appear impressive and notable is what propels one to be motivated to achieve academically.	"My peers have influenced me the most in showing me the image of success. I have felt the pressure to do what they are doing because it fits their definition of success and I want to impress them as well and not seem like a slacker." (005)
Desire to Look Better Than Others	Extrinsic	Pushed to be academically successful by being academically superior to others, comparably.	"...in the context of the classroom, I need to be academically superior to the rest of the class." (017)
Genuine Interest	Intrinsic	The intrinsic desire to pursue academic material due to genuine interest in the topic is predominant.	"My major is something that is so important to me, so really learning as much as I can is what propels me into working as hard as I can to achieve my goals." (001)
Desire to Master Field	Intrinsic	Compelled by the desire to have as much mastery	"I want to be the master of my field of study."

		in one's chosen field as they can possibly have.	(022)
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RESULTS

Below are two charts that illustrate the prevalence and distribution of ambivalence in interviewees' trajectories of development, shown first in Chart 1 as a breakdown between all of the figures of such pathways, and then more specifically in Chart 2 in terms of peer culture influences. To help understand the results discussed below, peer culture can be defined as a "stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that [individuals] produce and share with peers (Corsaro, 2012)." The developmental pathways developed to categorize participants all include an initial catalyst (not shown in the chart), leading to the individual's type of motivation underlying their actions, ultimately arriving at their desired goal they hope to achieve as a result of their academic successes. Chart 1 reveals the even distribution between participants with ambivalence and those without ambivalence (13/26 for each group), however, the distribution among the various trajectories of development (and peer culture influences, shown in Chart 2) is much more varied, which is further deliberated in in the Discussion section.

Following the charts are brief descriptions of each trajectory of development as outlined in Chart 1, as well as an example of a participant who is categorized by that particular model for the four structures that were most commonly used to categorize participants - this includes models one, two, four, and eight. This is done as a means of exemplifying what that specific pathway looks like. Upon establishing this example, an analysis of it is included in order to gain a stronger understanding of how peer culture influences students' motivation.

Chart 1

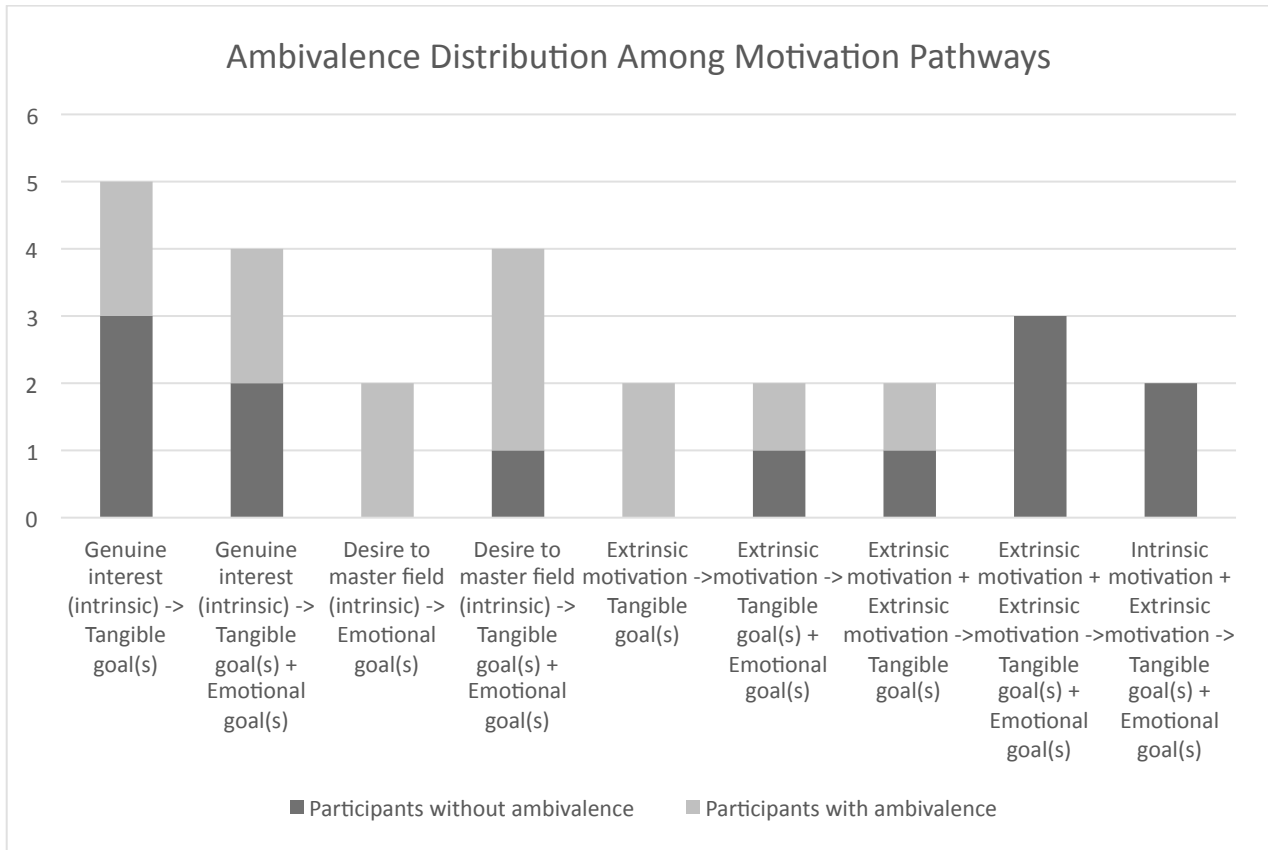


Chart 2

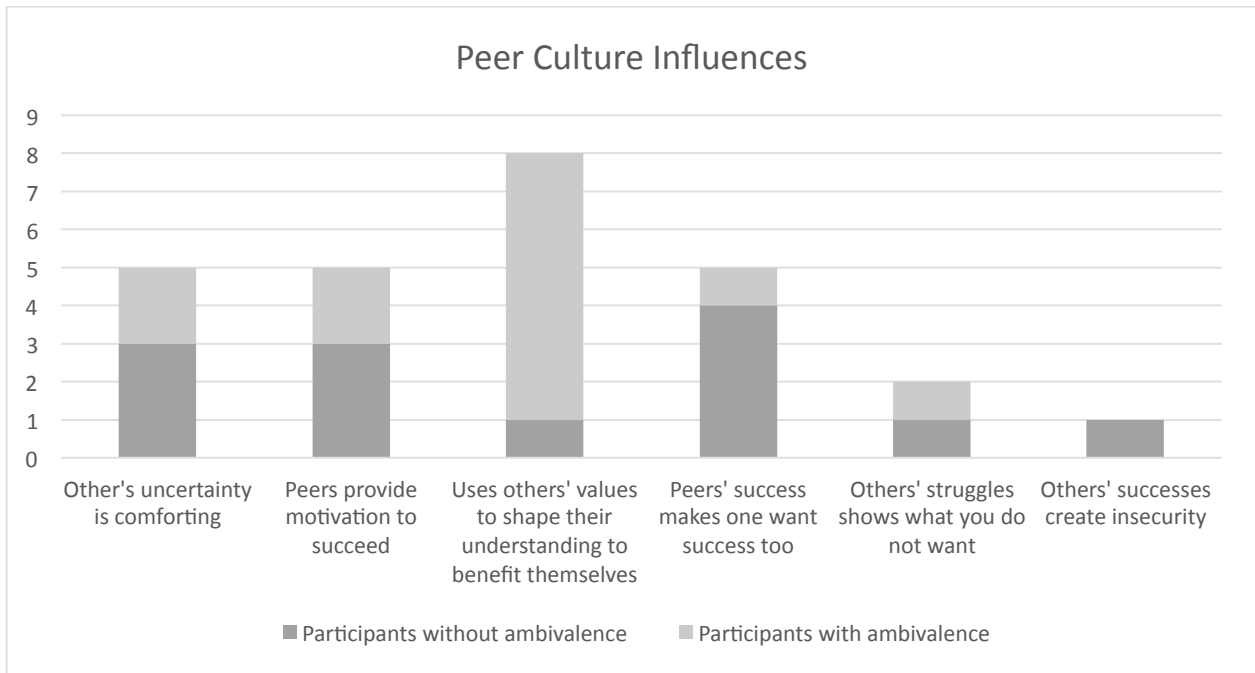


Figure 1 shows the scenario where one is intrinsically motivated by genuine interest to achieve one or more goals that are tangible – once again, this includes a degree, a career, and financial security.

014: This participant is a 21 year old male whose personal pathway shows his genuine interest in his studies motivating him to achieve both a fulfilling career as well as financial stability. In his words, he says, “I just want to get a job in order to benefit and [provide for] my...future family and myself.” He also describes going to graduate school as a point in his pathway to success, and explains that because of this, “I will prioritize whatever is more important for it, which is retaining learned knowledge to my best ability.” This interviewee describes how ambivalence played a significant role in his definition of academic success, therefore revealing its impact on his achievement motivation: “When I was younger, I thought I had to look better on paper with my grades, maybe because I was getting ready for applying to college, and maybe because everyone else was doing that too...but then in college I focused more on getting to know myself without realizing that would happen automatically. And as a result, my grades got better naturally. I prioritized wrong in the past.” He also attributes a great deal of his beliefs regarding academic success and achievement motivation to his cultural background, explaining that as a second generation Mexican-American, he wants to work hard to dispel and break stereotypes that exist and represent his community in a better light. He addresses peer culture in college, as he says that “there are people who have definitely affected me negatively, mostly peers and relationships. However, I try to see these positively and think that I grew from that and they made me realize that I do want to be more successful in school, to overcome previous and future struggles.” As a result, this interviewee is influenced by the peer culture effect of using others’ values to shape his own understanding to benefit himself.

Figure 2 illustrates a similar structure with genuine interest being the intrinsic motivator, but in this case, it drives the individual to achieve both tangible and emotional goals. This means that it not only includes one or more of the aforementioned tangible goals, but one of the following as well: maintaining a drive to achieve, and happiness. Similarly, if a participant identifies the goal of balancing professional and personal life, this in itself is a representation of the combined tangible and emotional goals.

021: 21 years old and female, this participant’s trajectory shows genuine interest motivating her towards both happiness and a career in the future. She explains, “after college, success means finding a job that I love and that can support me as well as getting settled in an independent life and finding happiness.” She describes her parents as being supportive throughout her schooling, as they stressed to her to do her best regardless of the situation. In terms of ambivalence in her decisions regarding academic success, she states that “at times, I would take the easy way out or not put in as much effort as I knew I could because I simply lost motivation in school and realized there is a lot more to life than grades, or just because those were the values of those around me and I got confused.” She goes on, saying “I would look at people who put so much unnecessary stress on themselves and worked themselves to the point where they would freak out over a B...they reinforced the fact that I never want to be one of those students that takes hard work for granted or one that is hard on themselves.” As a result, she can be categorized into the peer culture

influence option of others' struggles showing her what she does not want in her academic experience.

Figure 3 represents those who are intrinsically motivated by their desire to master their field to ultimately achieve one or more emotional goals.

Figure 4 shows the same intrinsic motivation by the desire to master one's field, but an objective of both tangible and emotional goals in this case.

009: This interviewee is a 21 year old female, and her trajectory of achievement motivation shows a desire to master her field pushing her to achieve the goals of happiness and financial security. She is quick to discuss how ambivalence regarding academic success has played a role in her education, explaining, "I have changed my behavior to match others' expectations rather than my own at times, because they were important to people who are important to me. I'm influenced the most by roommates and friends, and I benefit because it sets a norm to use time to do work and to turn in high quality work." Consequently, she can be identified by the peer culture influence category of peers providing her with motivation to succeed.

Next are figures that now focus on extrinsic motivation as a part of the equation. Figure 5 illustrates those who are extrinsically motivated to achieve one or more tangible goals. Figure 6 includes an extrinsic motivation to attain both tangible and emotional types of goals. Figure 7 shows multiple extrinsic motivators working towards one or more tangible goals. There are two interviewees who are categorized by it, and one of the two described ambivalence as being an integral part of the decision-making process regarding defining academic success.

Figure 8 exemplifies individuals who are motivated by numerous extrinsic forces to ultimately gain both tangible and emotional goals. In this case, none of the people who are categorized by this figure experienced ambivalence in defining academic success.

025: 22 years old, this female participant has a trajectory that shows the motivator of high grades pushing her towards achieving the goal of balancing her professional and personal lives. Ambivalence in her beliefs regarding academic success has never been an issue. She states that her parents are largely influential in her decisions that she makes about her education, saying that they "provided the opportunities and financial support to pursue my academic endeavors, so I'm grateful for that and feel the need to gain their approval and pride through my grades." When discussing the culture of competition that exists in a university setting, she mentions that "sometimes I have pushed myself harder than I would want to because of the influence of a tough professor or my competitive nature with another student." This means that she can be categorized by the peer culture influence group of using others' values to shape her understanding to benefit herself. She goes on to say that "some people know exactly what they want to do and how they want to get there, while others want to live in the moment and hope they will get to where they are meant to be. This has changed, considering what a competitive high school I went to and the different atmosphere at Clark. I feel like I'm constantly changing my mind about the path I want to take, but that's okay."

And finally, Figure 9 represents those who are pushed by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators towards tangible and emotional goals. Among the participants who fall under this category, none of them described ambivalence as playing a role in their development of a definition of academic success.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to analyze the contextual and social influences that exist in college peer culture that impact student development regarding academic success and achievement motivation. Overall, what was discovered was that exactly 50% of the interviewees, 13 out of 26, described experiencing ambivalence in their personal development of definitions of academic success, which is significant in itself. This result is indicative of how strongly prevalent this aspect of ambivalence is among students, regardless of whether it comes from earlier schooling or their time in college. Furthermore, it is important to note that in the college peer culture category of using others' values to shape one's own understanding of academic success – which has the highest prevalence among all of the interviewees – all but one of the participants that fell into this category are also marked with ambivalence in these decisions. This is crucial to note, as it reveals the influential nature of peer culture, and how it appears to potentially have a connection to the ambivalence in students' decision-making processes regarding academic success and achievement motivation.

While the study sample was small, this does not mean that there are no conclusions that can be drawn from these results. Several questions can begin to be answered by the data derived from this study, beginning with what we can assume about the role of ambivalence in decision-making on the bases of results of this study. The first important construct to consider is Arnett's previously mentioned concept of "emerging adulthood," and how its characterization as a volatile time period in a young adult's life can have strong influences on decision-making. On a similar note, these results expose the likelihood that it is not necessarily background culture and home socializers that play a significant role on the development of this ambivalence, but rather that the factors that exist within a university setting could potentially be more responsible for its existence. Even if these perspectives of our peers in college are not drastically different from our own, these variations can still impact how we think and behave – and so we discuss college peer culture and its place in the human ecology model when contextualizing it with student achievement. Next, a widely found result in the data pointed out a sense of comfort many students found in others' uncertainty, which can be explicated further by analyzing the results in the context of social comparison theory. This directly connects to the analyses of peer culture playing a role in the development of achievement motivation. Finally, it is important to also consider what conclusions can be reached from the fact that respondents had intrinsic or extrinsic motivation in their pathways. This is the most basic distinction in different types of motivation, separating doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, which is intrinsic, and doing something because it leads to a separable outcome, which is extrinsic. Nearly three decades of research have shown that the quality of experience and performance can be very different when one is behaving for intrinsic versus extrinsic reasons (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore understanding the implications of varied behaviors stemming from both types of motivation will help to fully comprehend what creates this

difference in students, and what it means for academic development. Together, all of these factors will help to gain a greater understanding of achievement motivation ambivalence.

Emerging Adulthood and Academic Success Beliefs

Arnett's work researching the relatively recently developed concept of "emerging adulthood" can help us begin to explain the prevalence of ambivalence in decision-making on academic success in young adults. Due to the shift in demographics over the past half century, the late teens and early twenties have morphed into a distinct period of life in which change and exploration of possibilities in life are rampant. Paired with this is a relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations (Arnett, 2000), which could potentially create doubt and fluctuation when it comes to making decisions regarding life choices, big and small. This can account for how significant the percentage of participants in the study who discussed ambivalence is, at exactly half, at fifty percent. Furthermore, the many intricate pathways included in the data analysis also reveal the complex nature of participants' decision-making processes, which can also be explained by the many changes and influences that exist in one's life during emerging adulthood. Experiencing life in this day and age means that people young, old, and everywhere in between are exposed to a variety of ideas, methodologies and perspectives, which make it increasingly difficult to make firm and decisive judgments without experimentation and variability over the course of time. As one ages and has the opportunity to make choices and watch them materialize – or not, in some cases – their personal perspectives and values will shift, presumably less and less as time goes on and they grow to understand themselves more with every passing day. But during the time of emerging adulthood, when the freedom to flex one's independence becomes a new experience for many, the degree to which we change our mind is much higher and more malleable, as this study's results reveal.

Role of Ambivalence and College Peer Culture

Lawrence Kohlberg's research indicates that most college students are in the conventional stage of moral thinking and as a result, they are somewhat reliant on upon the opinions and values of their peers (Kohlberg, 1971). This is further supported with evidence ratifying the concept of the "freshman personality" which is described as a very conformist kind of behavior that first years in college seem to take on: "they are ready to work hard, to conform with what they take to be the pervading standards of behavior (Sanford, 1964)." For most students, those entering college are usually away from home for the first time in their life, which means that they are still, to some extent, rigid and fixed in their beliefs and values. At the same time, they are susceptible to others' judgments and tend to look to their classmates and friends for characterization and measurement of themselves. Ambivalence can emerge from this relationship between one's belief system that those of their peers which surround them in a college setting.

All of these various aspects of college peer culture relate us back to Bronfenbrenner's human ecology model (shown in Figure 1) and the importance of analyzing the actual environment and context of a university campus. The ecology model, and the mesosystem in particular, are potent tools for investigating college student peer culture. The model takes into account the specificity of individual life history, the campus life and norms, and

the larger societal and historical context of development. Therefore, it provides a strong infrastructure for understanding how peer culture influences academic development through practices occurring within microsystems. Ambivalence therefore has the potential likelihood of being a result of processes that exist in college peer culture such as peer communication of family-influenced ambition; exchange of information, ideas, and tacit knowledge about advanced study; and finally, belief systems about talent and future possibilities (Astin, 1993). These are all aspects that are discussed in the participants' interviews in this current research study. Interviewees deliberate their parents' influence on their values; they explain how their work ethic can be inspired or deterred by their peers' behavior; and these students have even gone on to describe how confusing it has been for so many of them to have questioned their beliefs at times, taking on the standards of others, causing them to experience such an ambivalent period of their life in regards to academic success.

Clearly, the many different forms of social influence that exist in this ecological model of student achievement are diverse and vary in impact on instigating change – and as a result, the likelihood of these various social influences being responsible for student ambivalence is high. However, because this area of research has only recently begun to gain momentum in the field, more extensive studies must be conducted as a means of making more definite conclusions regarding student ambivalence when defining academic achievement. A future study could perhaps search for a correlation between student achievement (identified through GPA) and whether or not ambivalence is a significant factor in one's method of defining academic success, as a starting point for further research in this area.

Role of Social Comparison

Another consistent result in the data related to peer culture was a commonly found sense of comfort that participants gained from knowing that their peers were uncertain about their futures and academic pathways. Social comparison theory can be helpful in understanding these results, as it has previously revealed a connection between improved performance and the tendency to view the self as better than others (Blanton, Buunk, Gibbons & Kuyper, 1999). Social comparison theory theorizes two ways in which social comparison can potentially influence performance. The first is that of comparison-level choice; this paper will focus on the second, which is one's comparative evaluation, or the evaluation of one's own ability relative to others. By definition, those who have a high comparative evaluation view themselves as more proficient than others, and this makes it appear probable that they would approach tasks with a sense of high performance expectations; this should translate into improved performances. There is some evidence that shows a high comparative evaluation benefiting performance; Klein (1997) found that participants facing a laboratory task were more likely to predict their own success when their past performances were labeled better than average. This finding suggests that the evaluation of one's self relative to others is an important component of task self-efficacy (Marsh & Parker, 1984). However, the ways that different people utilize social comparison can vary greatly, meaning that there could potentially be a benefit to performance for those who have low comparative evaluation as well.

Generally, it is accepted that due to social comparison's variety of functions, people alter their strategies of comparing themselves to others according to their current motivations (Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Inherent in this line of research is the notion that people choose different comparisons because they believe that social comparison "matters." What this means is that people calculate these decisions because they expect different outcomes depending on their comparison strategies. This is very clearly illustrated in the results of this study; while some interviewees describe feeling resentful of seeing peers who "have their stuff together," as participant 010 states, others are happy to know even just a portion of their future plans when they see that others have no idea whatsoever. What this indicates is that while some use social comparison to put themselves below others and therefore motivate themselves to achieve others' level of success, others will use it to put themselves above their peers, which in some cases seems to cause them to pause for a moment and slow down their motivation to continue succeeding, because comparably, they are already successful. These results question the validity of previous research that has suggested that only high comparative evaluation can benefit one's performance. As a means of researching this further, it could be a possibility to conduct a follow-up study that measures actual student success (eg. grades, GPA) in the context of whether they use social comparison as a motivational incentive. If students show higher achievement if they compare themselves with others by viewing themselves as better than them, such results can provide a significant real-world demonstration that social comparison is a determinant of performance level.

Role of Intrinsic versus Extrinsic Motivation

Another important result shown in the data collected is the intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation dichotomy among students. What can be concluded from the fact that respondents had either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation? For the majority of participants, they were driven by one or the other, rather than both types of motivation (a condition seen in only two interviewees). In order to understand what the results of this study mean in the terms of kinds of motivation, it is important to observe the trends in both motivational orientations in regards to academic achievement.

There is a widespread belief that positive correlations exist between intrinsic motivation and academic achievement, as several studies have suggested this relationship (Gottfried, 1985, 1990; Harter & Connell, 1984). However, previous research has also revealed a strong progressive increase in extrinsic motivation over the school years as opposed to that of intrinsic motivation (Lepper, Corpus & Iyenger, 2005). Due to the substantial usage of extrinsic contingencies and incentives in the majority of American classrooms, as well as the increasing importance attributed to grades and test scores by American schools as students get older, this increase in extrinsic motivators in students' environments makes sense (Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Kohn, 1993). If there is substantial evidence proving this idea that extrinsic motivation is increasing, this suggests that a possible solution may involve reducing the reward systems and extrinsic contingencies rampant in American school systems. However, as students in college, it is impossible to work towards the goal of one's transcript and diploma without keeping in mind the impending necessity of finding a job post-graduation – and this is perhaps the biggest and most inevitable extrinsic motivator for one to succeed academically. While most literature discussing student

motivation describes engaging in a task to receive good grades as inherently extrinsic, the situation is clearly more complicated. Grades also have the potential of providing valuable information about competence and mastery, and yearning this sort of feedback may reflect an intrinsic interest in the material rather than a strictly extrinsic orientation. Students who exhibit this kind of behavior – which does appear in the results of this study several times – reveal a more complicated motivational construct that needs further attention in the realm of achievement motivation in college. In order to fully understand the motivational pathways of college students, we must consider framing the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation differently in this context, as a means of making deeper analyses regarding achievement. Perhaps conducting longitudinal studies that observe the changes and shifts in one's types and sources of motivation over the course of high school and college can allow us to more efficiently analyze these constructs.

To conclude, the results of this study provide several insights into the influences on students' formation and development of achievement motivation in relation to college peer culture, and ultimately, how their personal perceptions of academic success continue to grow during the college years. Based on the findings of this research, many previous theories were supported, most significantly that of the human ecology theory, which can be used more heavily in future research that focuses on these themes in student learning and achievement. As we have clearly discovered through this study, the world of student academics is one that is vast, and requires a great deal of attention from researchers, educators, and learners alike in order to be understood to the fullest capacity. A potential space for further research on this topic could be in the realm of how emerging adulthood is a culturally constructed, not universal, concept. Because culture plays a role in limiting the extent to which emerging adults are able to use their late teens and twenties, not all people in this age period can freely utilize these years for independent exploration – and so a place to continue with research in this area could extend into studying the development of academic success and achievement motivation constructs in different countries, among different cultures. Doing so can allow researchers to have a more encompassing understanding of the role of ambivalence in academic achievement motivation. With the knowledge of student achievement and academics that will come from further research in this field will come the possibility of effective educational reform that will make information retention and application, as well as greater future successes, more attainable for students across the globe.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Zora Haque is a recent college graduate, having completed her B.A. in Psychology at Clark University in the United States. Her research in cultural and educational psychology is being placed on hold as she pursues further research experience through work in psychological labs at various universities. She is aiming to ultimately pursue a doctoral degree in Organizational Behavior or Social Psychology as a means of continuing with research in relation to education and motivation.

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APPENDIX A

Interview questions administered to participants. Crucial questions are #6-8, 10

- 1) What is your age?
- 2) What is your gender?
- 3) What is your area of study?
- 4) What does success mean to you in college? In the context of the classroom?
- 5) What about success after college?
- 6) Is it more important to you to demonstrate success and expertise through grades and your transcript, or through performance in your future career/field?

- a. Are the two related? How?
 - b. What influences in your life have caused you to develop these ideas regarding success?
- 7) How do your parents play a role in influencing the ways that you view your own academic success? If not, why is that the case?
- a. Are there others who have influenced you in this area? Who and how?
 - b. Were there ever instances where you practiced beliefs in relation to academic success that were not your own? Why or why not?
- 8) At what point did you define exactly what it means to succeed academically for yourself?
- a. In which ways did other people's values have influences on your academic success?
 - b. Who were these specific people? Why do you believe you benefited from interacting with them? Why or why not?
 - c. Do you find that you agree with their ideas and values? How have these ideas of others become used by you in your daily life?
- 9) What area of study do you feel the most passionate towards?
- a. Imagine a situation where you had the opportunity to really strengthen your skills in this chosen field of study, but you would not get any academic credit or recognition of this on your transcript or resume. What would you do, and why?
- 10) Thinking about others that you know – peers, friends, classmates – would you say that they generally have an explicit sense of direction when it comes to making decisions about academics? In other words, do they seem to know what they want and what they're doing to get there?
- a. Do you think that changed between high school and college? If so, how?
 - b. How does seeing how others function in this setting make you feel? Does it change the way you look at your own decisions about your future?
- 11) Do you think it is possible to have it all? Why or why not?
- 12) Is there anything else you would like to mention or say regarding this topic?