

# A Preliminary Look at Gender and Cultural Differences in Achievement Goals\*

Mimi Bong

*Department of Educational Technology, Ewha Womans University*

## *Abstract*

*Korean middle school students' achievement goals, self-efficacy, and help-seeking avoidance in math were compared to those of U.S. students. Korean students demonstrated significantly stronger performance-approach goals compared to European American students. Math self-efficacy beliefs of Korean students were significantly weaker than those of European American and African American students. Whereas performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals of European American students were not significantly correlated, those of Korean and African American students were. In particular, performance-approach goals correlated positively with mastery goals and self-efficacy for Korean students. Findings were more consistent with the predictions generated from the learning environment research than the individualism-collectivism contrasts. The results suggest that each goal may function differently across cultures.*

---

\* An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA, April 2004. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mimi Bong, Department of Educational Technology, Ewha Womans University, 11-1 Daehyun-dong, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul 120-750, Korea.

*Key words: Achievement goals, gender differences, cultural differences*

## I. Introduction

Achievement goals refer to the underlying reasons and purposes for engaging in achievement-related behavior (Ames, 1984; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Pintrich, 2000). Research to date has demonstrated that achievement goals students pursue in given learning contexts influence the quality of their effort, criteria they use to evaluate their competence, and nature of strategies they employ to obtain desired outcomes. The importance of achievement goals in academic pursuits has been more or less clearly established with diverse student populations.

Investigators have identified three achievement goals, namely, mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals, that are particularly consequential for K-12 and college students' cognition, affect, and behavior in achievement situations. Mastery goals, also referred to as learning or task goals, represent learners' orientations toward learning new things and mastering given academic tasks. Students who pursue mastery goals tend to gauge their accomplishments against the task itself. These students consider individual progress, attainment of new knowledge, and improved competencies as indicators of their success. Students with performance- or ego-oriented achievement goals, in contrast, focus on their relative standings within their respective reference groups. Students pursuing performance-approach goals strive to document their superiority by outperforming their peers, whereas those

pursuing performance-avoidance goals engage in academic activities mainly as an attempt to conceal their relative inferiority. For students with either type of performance goals, definition of success and competence depends heavily on social comparative cues such as grades, within- and between-classroom ranks, and public recognition of superiority or inferiority compared to their peers.

Each of the three achievement goals demonstrates a distinct pattern of relationships with important indicators of achievement and progress. Mastery goals are typically associated with positive outcomes such as self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and use of cognitive and self-regulatory learning strategies. Findings regarding the function of performance goals are mixed, ranging from positive associations with grades and test scores to negative associations with the use of deeper cognitive strategies (e.g., Anderman & Midgley, 1997; Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carter, & Elliot, 2000; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988; Wolters & Pintrich, 1998). Nevertheless, investigators generally agree that the avoidance form of performance goals is more detrimental for student motivation and learning than the approach form of performance goals. Researchers also acknowledge that performance-approach goals may even prove beneficial for certain types of tasks or within certain kinds of achievement contexts (e.g., Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998).

The question arises as to whether these findings, obtained primarily with Western (i.e., predominantly European American and middle-class) students adequately represent motivational patterns of those in different cultures. There is reason to suspect the role of achievement goals in instigating and sustaining positive

or negative affect, motivation, and learning behaviors might be different, depending on the salient culture in the environment. A quick glance at the literature on cross-cultural comparisons provides a few leads to the potentially different psychological mechanisms and meaning systems used by participants of the Western and East Asian cultures (e.g., Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Heine et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oishi & Diener, 2001), which likely creates disparity not only in the types and strengths of achievement goals but also the consequences of achievement goal adoption for students in different cultures. Learning environment research also suggests that the salient norms and classroom cultures channel students into different achievement goals. Typical classroom and school cultures in East Asian countries are known to differ in several important respects from those in Western countries (e.g., Bong, 2003) and this provides another reason to expect achievement goal differences between students in different cultures.

Nonetheless, implications drawn from these two bodies of research regarding the types of achievement goals that are valued within each culture are, at times, contradictory to each other. The purpose of the present research, therefore, was to get a glimpse of some of the potential differences in achievement goals of students in different cultures and entertain tentative conjectures as to why such differences should exist. Any valid comparison of cultures requires an in-depth analysis of socio-cultural factors, including a more or less complete set of presumed antecedents and consequents. However, this study pursued a rather modest aim and tried to document differences in student responses on only a limited number of variables, mostly motivational beliefs

that are related to achievement goals. Also, although the present sample consisted of Korean, European American, and African American students, the primary focus was on the unique characteristics of Korean students in comparison with the representative findings in the literature. I now turn to the brief overview of the two lines of inquiry that suggest achievement goal differences across cultures.

## II. Cultural Variations in Construal of the Self

Contrasting styles of how one comes to understand and project oneself within different cultures have been the subject of interest for some time. Markus and Kitayama (1991) cogently described the cultural variations in how individuals construe themselves and others in their social network. In the Western psychology, the self is typically portrayed as an active and independent agent, whose ultimate goal is to achieve uniqueness by asserting one's internal attributes. This conception of the self is clearly reflected in the traditional achievement motivation literature as well as most contemporary theories of academic motivation. Students who believe they are more able than their peers and who feel confident about their capabilities to succeed in given tasks and domains are presumed to enjoy many benefits of positive motivation such as pride, persistence, effective task engagement, and improved performance.

The self in most East Asian cultures, in comparison, is viewed as more interdependent and closely connected with others in their reference group (Heine et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). "Fitting-in" is valued while "standing-out" is not, because the latter ruins the harmony that exists between the self and relevant others. Whereas one's internal

attributes are assumed to be the driving force behind the behavior of an independent self, it is others' presumed thoughts, feelings, and actions that largely determine the behavior of an interdependent self. Ego-focused emotions such as pride and anger are avoided for the concern of belonging, reliance, empathy, and reciprocity. Naturally, those with interdependent views of the self tend to demonstrate pervasive attentiveness to others in the social contexts.

Such keen interest in and awareness of others' thoughts and feelings easily translate into heightened concerns about how one is received by others in the relevant social network. Therefore, individuals with interdependent self-systems, compared to those with independent self-systems, care more about how others might view and evaluate them and, at the same time, feel stronger obligations to please and not disappoint significant others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oishi & Diener, 2001). In terms of achievement goals, such strong desires to meet the expectations of others are more likely to be expressed as stronger commitment to performance- than mastery-goals. Standards of success and failure for students with the interdependent self-systems are likely negotiated by approval and disapproval of parents and teachers or, to a certain extent, peers as well. Whereas orientations toward performance-approach goals may be tempered by fear of standing out and hence appearing arrogant, those toward performance-avoidance goals are likely strengthened for an equally important concern of not standing out in a negative way within one's social network. Korean students' performance-avoidance goals, which became stronger as they perceived greater emphasis on task mastery in their classrooms (Bong, 2005), thus seem to

reflect their strong desire to fit in and not fall behind in order to avoid disapproval of their teachers and peers, rather than pure fear of failure. Not to be embarrassed in public would be a stronger motivating factor for these students, for whom the social/public aspects of the self assume greater significance in the self-esteem maintenance.

The hypothesized stronger performance-avoidance goals of Korean students are not completely compatible with other inferences drawn from the literature. Heine et al. (2001) suggested that individuals with independent views of themselves also believe that their unique internal attributes are relatively stable across time and contexts. Those who espouse interdependent views of the self are presumed to be not as concerned about such cross-situational consistency of their behaviors because a more important goal for them is to satisfy the role obligations and relationships by adjusting themselves to varying situational demands. Referring to Dweck's work on the implicit theory of self (e.g., Dweck & Legget, 1988), these researchers claimed that the Western conceptions of the stable, unwavering self share its roots with an entity theory of self. The East Asian self-views are deemed consistent with an incremental theory of self. Across four studies, Heine and his colleagues demonstrated that Japanese college students persisted longer on the tasks that they failed than on those that they succeeded (Studies 1 and 2), rated the tasks as more accurate when they failed than when they succeeded (Study 2), and indicated that abilities were more incremental in nature compared to American or Canadian college students (Study 4).

According to Dweck (1989), subscribers of the entity or

fixed theory of intelligence are oriented toward performance goals because they want to either document their superior ability or conceal their inferior ability in front of others. Individuals who believe that intelligence is malleable and improvable by investing effort, on the other hand, tend to pursue learning or mastery goals. Combined with Heine et al.'s (2001) findings, it can be conjectured that students in the East Asian cultures may show stronger gravitation toward mastery goals due to their firm belief in the incremental nature of abilities. East Asian students appear to value failure experiences more than success experiences because they provide additional information on how to improve themselves (e.g., Heine et al., 2001), a belief consistent with their endorsement of incremental theory of intelligence and hence mastery achievement goals. European American students' lay theories are more consistent with the entity theory of intelligence, predicting relative importance of performance-oriented goals among these students.

Similar arguments can be advanced also on the basis of observed differences in the common attributions of academic successes and failures made by Western and East Asian students. Chen and Stevenson (1995) reported that the majority of Chinese and Japanese students selected "studying hard" as the determining factor of academic performance, whereas the most popular choice among the European American students was "having a good teacher." A strong belief in the utility of effort is one of the hallmarks of the mastery-oriented individuals. The attributional difference between Asian and European American students is therefore consistent with the presumed weight assigned to mastery-oriented pursuits in East Asian cultures.

As can be seen, conflicting implications could be drawn from existing studies on cultural differences in the



self-construal processes. On the one hand, the interdependent views of the self may lead students in East Asian cultures to be more strongly oriented toward performance-avoidance goals compared to those in Western cultures, who display an independent self-construal. The heightened interest in social comparative cues in an attempt not to stand out among the group members in a negative way, coupled with strong obligations not to disappoint significant others in their social context, predicts a stronger tendency of engaging in achievement-related behaviors for the purpose of avoiding any possibility of making their relative incompetence known to others. On the other hand, findings from studies on subjective well-being and academic attributions of East Asian students demonstrate their stronger endorsement of an incremental theory of ability and utility of effort by these students compared to their Western counterparts, both of which logically imply stronger orientations toward task mastery. It should be noted that several recent studies challenged the strong effort attributions of East Asian students, suggesting that these students may view effort not necessarily as a means of achieving improved ability, as has been widely believed, but instead as an effective means of "overpowering" ability deficits (e.g., Bempechat & Drago-Severson, 1999; Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

### III. Contextual Variations in Classrooms

Whereas the implications from the self-relevant cognitions are somewhat mixed, those from the presumed contextual differences are relatively straightforward. A typical Korean classroom can be characterized by its heavy teacher-centered orientation, whole-class instruction that follows a highly

organized lesson sequence, one-way communication dominated by the teacher, assignment of convergent tasks, and normative evaluation that is extremely competitive, the results of which are often made public (see, e.g., Grow-Maienza, Hahn, & Joo, 2001; Kim, 2002). Bong (2003) also discussed lack of choice, competitive and unidimensional evaluation, and limited opportunity for success as some of the most representative characteristics of Korean classrooms. Research on the effects of classroom learning environment on students' achievement goals clearly suggests that all these features make students' relative ability salient and communicate the importance of performance and evaluation rather than task mastery to students in their classrooms (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988; Eccles et al., 1993; Marshall & Weinstein, 1984; Midgley, Anderman, & Hicks, 1995). Perceiving ability stresses in the classroom fosters personal adoption of performance-oriented achievement goals among students (Anderman & Midgley, 1997; Church, Elliot, & Gable, 2001; Roeser, Midgley, & Urda, 1996).

It is also generally agreed that Asian and Asian American students and their families put a greater emphasis on academic achievement than do other ethnic groups (e.g., Fuligni, 1997; Mau, 1997). The strong value toward their children's education held by parents often evinces itself as obsession with their children's performance at school and exerts undue pressure on their children. Ablard and Parker (1997), after surveying parents of academically gifted children, reported that an overwhelming majority (69%) of Asian parents listed performance-oriented academic goals for their children, compared with only 25% of European American parents who reported such goals. The investigators also found that children of parents who listed performance-goals for

their children were significantly more likely to display dysfunctional perfectionism. Because classroom teaching practices and parental beliefs and attitudes constitute the two major sources of contextual influence on students' motivation, it seems highly likely that Korean students display stronger performance achievement goals than would students in other cultures.

To summarize, research on self-cognition processes generate conflicting hypotheses regarding the relative salience of each of the three achievement goals for students in East Asian and Western cultures (see Table 1). A heavy concern about others' perceptions of the self, stemming out of the interdependent nature of self-construal, predicts stronger performance-avoidance goals among East Asian students, whereas their belief toward malleability of ability and utility of effort predicts stronger mastery goals. Research on classroom environment predicts stronger performance goals among Korean students due to the heavy and ubiquitous emphasis on relative ability in Korean classrooms. It is not clear whether this emphasis makes Korean students to be more heavily geared toward an approach or avoidance form of performance goals compared to students in other learning environments.

The following section presents preliminary results on the comparison of achievement goals among students in different cultures.

## IV. Method

### A. Participants

One hundred and eighteen Korean 6th graders and 119 U.S. 6th graders comprised the present sample. There were 64 African American (40 girls) and 55 European American students (34 girls) in the U.S. sample. There were 53 girls in Korean sample. Participants responded to the motivation questionnaire in their own language during regular classroom hours.

### B. Measures

Students' mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance achievement goals as well as their academic self-efficacy and help-seeking avoidance were assessed. Items were adopted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ Pintrich & De Groot, 1990) and the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS; Midgley et al., 2000; Roeser et al., 1996). Table 2 presents sample items and reliability statistics for each scale. All items referred to math as the subject domain under consideration.

## V. Results

### A. Factorial Analyses of Variance

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for each group. The 2 (country: Korea vs. U.S.)  $\times$  2 (gender: girls vs. boys) factorial analyses of variance detected significant main effects of country on students' mastery goals,  $F(1, 238) = 22.90, p < .001$  ( $M_s = 3.43$  for Korean and 3.85 for U.S. students, respectively) and self-efficacy,  $F(1, 238)$

= 14.87,  $p < .001$  ( $M_s$  = 3.50 for Korean and 4.10 for U.S. students, respectively), both favoring U.S. students. None of these differences was consistent with theoretical predictions.

When the sample was divided into African American, European American, and Korean students, a more complex and interesting pattern emerged. Results from the 3 (ethnicity: African American, European American, Korean)  $\times$  2 (gender: girls vs. boys) factorial analyses of variance showed that there were significant differences in students' mastery,  $F(2, 237) = 9.35$ ,  $p < .001$ , performance-approach,  $F(2, 237) = 3.63$ ,  $p < .05$ , and performance-avoidance goals,  $F(2, 237) = 3.09$ ,  $p < .05$ , according to their ethnicity. The main effect of gender and interaction effect of ethnicity  $\times$  gender were not significant on any of the achievement goal scores. The post-hoc tests by the Scheffé procedures indicated that African American students' mastery goals ( $M = 4.01$ ) were stronger compared to those of Korean students ( $M = 3.43$ ). The Korean and European American 6th graders' mastery goal scores were not statistically different.

When it comes to performance-goals, Korean students demonstrated statistically stronger performance-approach goals ( $M = 3.80$ ) compared to those of European American students ( $M = 3.44$ ), again as determined by the Scheffé procedures. The performance-approach goal scores of African American students ( $M = 3.80$ ) were comparable to those of Korean students.

A statistically significant main effect of ethnicity was also obtained on students' self-efficacy ratings,  $F(2, 237) = 16.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . The Scheffé tests showed that the strengths of math efficacy perceptions of African American ( $M = 4.21$ ) and European American 6th graders

( $M = 3.96$ ) were not statistically different from each other but they were both stronger than those of Korean 6th graders ( $M = 3.50$ ). A significant interaction effect of gender  $\times$  ethnicity was obtained on students' help-seeking avoidance scores,  $F(2, 237) = 4.23, p < .05$ . European American girls again stood out with their stronger tendency of avoiding help-seeking in math classes even when it was needed ( $M = 2.50$ ) compared with European American boys ( $M = 1.97$ ),  $t(53) = 2.27, p < .05$ . Gender difference was not statistically significant in the remaining two groups.

### B. Correlational Analyses

An examination of correlation coefficients among the variables within each group also produced an interesting insight. As was the case with the mean-level comparisons, not much difference seemed to exist between students in the two countries, except for the particularly strong correlation between performance-approach goals and self-efficacy among Korean students ( $r_s = .44$  for Korean and  $.17$  for U.S. students, respectively) (see Table 4). The picture changed dramatically when the sample was separated into three ethnic groups.

As can be seen in Tables 4 and 5, the intercorrelational pattern among achievement goals differed across the groups. For European American students, mastery goals correlated positively with performance-approach goals ( $r = .28$ ) and negatively with performance-avoidance goals ( $r = .32$ ). The approach and avoidance performance goals did not correlate significantly. For African American and Korean students, performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals

were positively correlated with each other ( $r_s = .44$  and  $.32$ , respectively). Whereas neither covaried meaningfully with mastery goals among African American students, the performance-approach goals of Korean students were positively correlated with mastery goals ( $r = .28$ ).

Achievement goal correlation with self-efficacy and help-seeking avoidance also differed depending on students' ethnic background. The adaptive nature of mastery goals and maladaptive nature of performance-avoidance goals played out most clearly among European American students. For this group of students, mastery goal ratings displayed strong positive correlation with self-efficacy ( $r = .63$ ) and strong negative correlation with help-seeking avoidance ( $r = .52$ ). An exactly opposite pattern was obtained with performance-avoidance goals such that they demonstrated negative correlation with self-efficacy ( $r = .24$ , *ns*) and positive correlation with help-seeking avoidance tendencies ( $r = .43$ ). The roles of performance-approach goals were mixed, tending to correlate positively with self-efficacy ( $r = .22$ ) and nonsignificantly with help-seeking avoidance.

In contrast, the presumed positive effects of mastery goals and negative effects of performance-avoidance goals did not emerge as clearly in the other two groups. Although mastery achievement goals exhibited positive correlation with self-efficacy ( $r_s = .73$  and  $.59$  for African American and Korean students, respectively) and negative correlation with help-seeking avoidance ( $r_s = .32$  and  $.29$  for African American and Korean students, respectively), the magnitude of these relations, especially with help-seeking avoidance, was noticeably weaker than those found for European American 6th graders. Further,

performance-avoidance goals did not always demonstrate negative relationships with positive indicators of motivation such as self-efficacy and mastery achievement goals. Instead, these relations were mostly nonsignificant in both African American and Korean samples.

However, the pattern diverged between the two groups when the correlation involved performance-approach goals. African American students' performance-approach goals did not correlate significantly with self-efficacy and mastery goals but did correlate positively with help-seeking avoidance ( $r = .30$ ). Korean students' performance-approach goals correlated positively with self-efficacy ( $r = .44$ ) and mastery goals ( $r = .28$ ) but nonsignificantly with help-seeking avoidance. Therefore, Korean students' performance-approach goals were associated with a correlational pattern that was similar to that displayed by European American students, whereas the correlational pattern of their performance-avoidance goals was most analogous to that of African American students.

## VI. Discussion

### A. Motivational Pattern of Korean Students

Evidence from the few investigations conducted with Korean students generally corresponds with the literature (e.g., Bong, 2001, 2004, 2005). Mastery goals of Korean students correlated positively with self-efficacy and task value, as did their performance-approach goals with self-efficacy, task value, and performance-avoidance goals. Mastery and performance-approach goals also correlated positively with each other. Nevertheless, there were also several inconsistencies or otherwise idiosyncratic



relationships that deserve attention. Most of these unique relationships involved performance-avoidance goals. Whereas the correlation coefficients between performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals are typically positive or nonsignificant among Western samples, the magnitude of these associations was particularly strong among Korean students. Further, whereas perceived classroom stresses on task mastery almost always encourage personal adoption of mastery-oriented achievement goals among students in the Western samples, perceptions of classroom mastery goals often increased performance-avoidance goals among Korean students (e.g., Bong, 2005). Likewise, the role of performance-avoidance goals was not always maladaptive as has been consistently observed with the Western samples. Korean students' performance-avoidance goals sometimes displayed significant positive correlation with adaptive motivational variables such as mastery goals, self-efficacy, and task value (e.g., Bong, 2001).

Only few of the results reported in this paper were consistent with the hypotheses regarding Korean students' achievement goals, generated on the basis of both self-construal and learning contexts research. One of such findings was the moderate correlation between performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals of Korean students. As discussed in the introduction, if Korean students indeed construe themselves mainly in the contexts of their social relationships and hence feel strong obligations to fulfill the expectations of others in their social network, they will not only adopt the goals emphasized by their teachers and parents but also try to avoid revealing their incompetence as an attempt not to disappoint these significant adults in their learning

environment. Therefore, it makes sense that students who pursue performance-approach goals would simultaneously pursue performance-avoidance goals. Other than that, the preliminary results did not provide clear support for the predictions advanced on the basis of individualism versus collectivism (Triandis & Suh, 2002) or independent versus interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Overall, Korean students' motivational pattern was more negative in comparison with that of American students. For example, Korean 6th graders did not endorse mastery achievement goals as strongly as did their African American counterparts. They also demonstrated performance-approach goals that were stronger than those of European American students and self-efficacy beliefs that were weaker than those of both European and African American students. In other words, Korean students did not view acquiring new knowledge via task mastery as important as did their U.S. age peers. Instead, they considered doing better than others as a more important goal of their achievement strivings than did their U.S. counterparts. Korean students also exhibited math self-efficacy beliefs that were weaker compared to those of U.S. students.

Though not completely unexpected, it is always surprising to learn that students with good scholastic performance do not exhibit correspondingly optimistic attitudes toward learning, especially in the subject matter area known as their relative strength. Nevertheless, these findings were fully predictable on the basis of research on classroom and parental influences. When students perceive that their teachers and parents put a heavy emphasis on their comparative superiority, they themselves tend to pursue achievement goals that are

highly performance oriented. Perceptions of classroom performance goal structures also lower students' confidence about successful performance because success is defined by not solely on the basis of how one performs but also on the basis of how others perform, which is beyond their personal control (Ames & Archer, 1988; Roeser et al., 1996; Wolters & Pintrich, 1998).

More generally, the results vividly demonstrated the possibility that each goal functions differently within each culture. Of particular interest was the finding that the much-touted adaptive roles of mastery achievement goals and maladaptive roles of performance-avoidance goals were clearly replicated only among European American students. When judging from its correlation with self-efficacy and help-seeking avoidance, the mastery goals of African American and Korean students were not as adaptive as those of European American students, while their performance-avoidance goals were not as maladaptive. These findings may indicate that most theoretical and empirical developments in the Western psychology, including those in the achievement goal literature, are rooted in typical European American, middle class culture. This conjecture is merely speculative because the current results are highly preliminary and based only on a limited number of variables and students.

### **B. Limitations and Suggestions**

Several major limitations must be noted, all of which speak to the difficulty of conducting well-designed cross-cultural comparative research. Some of these limitations are more specific to the present investigation, whereas others represent more general problems in

culture comparison studies. I first discuss what I see as relatively specific problems, followed by increasingly more general problems.

First, students' socioeconomic statuses and prior achievement levels were not controlled in this study. However, without proper control of these variables, one can never be certain whether the differences obtained are actually due to cultural factors (Graham, 1994). Second, the present research simply described the end-states and fell short of providing additional insights as to "why" these differences came to exist. The presumed self- and contextual processes leading to the observed differences in students' achievement goals were not directly assessed in this study. Further, because of this failure to capture motivational processes, the relative weight students assigned to each source of information when pursuing a particular type of achievement goals could not be determined. Students' goals are likely shaped by their personal attributes, achievement history, styles of self-cognition, as well as contextual perceptions, and the achievement goals in different cultures likely characterize varying combinations of these sources. Also related to this issue, although the purpose of the present study was to compare potential differences in students' achievement goals across "cultures," the analyses instead used "country" or "ethnicity" of students as a classificatory variable. Obviously, individuals who live in the same country and/or who have the same ethnic background may or may not share the same culture and they do so to a different extent. A similar problem is often noted in gender studies (e.g., Bem, 1974, 1977). Considering that both ethnicity and gender are mere proxies of the psychological constructs of interest, ethnic

and gender identity/orientation may prove more useful in future comparison studies of this sort.

Other problems are more general in nature. First such problem involves relevance of item content in each culture. In the present study, items were adopted from established scales and translated into Korean. Reliability statistics were acceptable, suggesting that the translated items were at least internally consistent and differentiated among individuals to a reasonable degree. However, this procedure does not guarantee that the included items adequately sample the way each motivational orientation might be understood within each culture. Representative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that better typify each achievement goal of Korean students might have been omitted. Moreover, the same word might carry subtle but different connotation in two different cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In a similar vein, use of subjective Likert-type scales in cross-cultural studies could create a measurement problem. According to Heine et al. (2001), respondents tend to use similar others within their own reference group as an anchor point when using subjective rating scales, which often masks any difference that might have surfaced had objective measures been available. Heine and colleagues demonstrated that use of concrete behavioral examples could alleviate this problem.

Finally, there is the problem of classifying culture into different subgroups. East Asian cultures, for example, include many subcultures that are simultaneously similar and unique. The Chinese culture is different from the Japanese culture and these two cultures are in turn distinguishable from the Korean culture in several important ways. To avoid the risk of generating results that are too broad to the point of

lacking theoretical insights or too specific to the point of lacking practical significance, cross-cultural comparisons must be preceded by careful analysis and identification of common and idiosyncratic value systems and cultural practices among the group members of interest.

## References

- Ablard, K. E., & Parker, W. D. (1997). Parents' achievement goals and perfectionism in their academically talented children. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 26*, 651-667.
- Ames, C. (1984). Competitive, cooperative, and individualistic goal structures: A cognitive-motivational analysis. In R. Ames & C. Ames (Eds.), *Research on motivation in education: Vol. 1. Student motivation* (pp. 177-207). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, structure, and student motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*, 261-271.
- Ames, C., & Archer, J. (1988). Achievement goals in the classroom: Students' learning strategies and motivation processes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*, 260-267.
- Anderman, E. M., & Midgley, C. (1997). Changes in achievement goals, perceived academic competence, and grades across the transition to middle-level schools. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 22*, 269-298.
- Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42*, 155-162.
- Bem, S. L. (1977). On the utility of alternative procedures for assessing psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 45*, 196-205.
- Bempechat, J., & Drago-Severson, E. (1999). Cross-national differences in academic achievement: Beyond etic conceptions of children's understanding. *Review of Educational Research, 69*, 287-314.

- Bong, M. (2001). Between- and within-domain relations of academic motivation among middle and high school students: self-efficacy, task-value, and achievement goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*, 23-34.
- Bong, M. (2003). Choices, evaluations, and opportunities for success: Academic motivation of Korean adolescents. In F. Pajares & T. C. Urdan (Eds.), *Adolescence and education: Vol. 3. International perspectives* (pp. 323-345). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Bong, M. (2004). Academic motivation in self-efficacy, task value, achievement goals, and attributional beliefs. *Journal of Educational Research, 97*, 287-297.
- Bong, M. (2005). Within-grade changes in Korean girls' motivation and perceptions of the learning environment across domains and achievement levels. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 97*, 656-672.
- Chen, C., & Stevenson, H. W. (1995). Motivation and mathematics achievement: A comparative study of Asian-American, Caucasian-American, and East Asian high school students. *Child Development, 66*, 1215-1234.
- Church, M. A., Elliot, A. J., & Gable, S. L. (2001). Perceptions of classroom environment, achievement goals, and achievement outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*, 43-54.
- Dweck, C. S. (1989). Motivation. In A. Lesgold, & R. Glaser (Eds.), *Foundations for a psychology of education* (pp. 87-136). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social-cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review, 95*, 256-273.
- Eccles, J. S., Wigfield, A., Midgley, C., Reuman, D., Mac



- Iver, D., & Feldlaufer, H. (1993). Negative effects of traditional middle schools on students' motivation. *Elementary School Journal, 93*, 553-574.
- Fuligni, A. J. (1997). The academic achievement of adolescents from immigrant families: The roles of family background, attitudes, and behavior. *Child Development, 68*, 351-363.
- Graham, S. (1994). Motivation in African Americans. *Review of Educational Research, 64*, 55-117.
- Grow-Maienza, J., Hahn, D. -D., & Joo, C. -A. (2001). Mathematics instruction in Korean primary schools: Structures, processes, and a linguistic analysis of questioning. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*, 363-376.
- Harackiewicz, J. M., Barron, K. E., & Elliot, A. J. (1998). Rethinking achievement goals: When are they adaptive for college students and why? *Educational Psychologist, 33*, 1-22.
- Harackiewicz, J. M., Barron, K. E., Tauer, J. M., Carter, S. M., & Elliot, A. J. (2000). Short-term and long-term consequences of achievement goals: Predicting interest and performance over time. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*, 316-330.
- Heine, S. J. (2001). Self as cultural product: An examination of East Asian and North American selves. *Journal of Personality, 69*, 881
- Kim, J. -W. (2002). Is school being collapsed? The reality of 'school collapse' observed in a daily school life. *Korean Journal of Educational Research, 40(3)*, 271-298.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98*, 224-253.

- Marshall, H. H., & Weinstein, R. S. (1984). Classroom factors affecting students' self-evaluations: An interactionist model. *Review of Educational Research, 54*, 301-325.
- Mau, W. C. (1997). Parental influences on the high school students' academic achievement: A comparison of Asian immigrants, Asian Americans, and White Americans. *Psychology in the Schools, 34*, 267-277.
- Meece, J. L., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Hoyle, R. H. (1988). Students' goals and cognitive engagement in classroom activities. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*, 514-523.
- Midgley, C., Anderman, E., & Hicks, L. (1995). Differences between elementary and middle school teachers and students: A goal theory approach. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 15*, 90-113.
- Midgley, C., Maehr, M. L., Hruda, L. Z., Anderman, E., Anderman, L., Freeman, K. E., Gheen, M., Kaplan, A., Kuman, R., Middleton, M. J., Nelson, J., Roeser, R., & Urdan, T. (2000). *Manual for the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Oishi, S., & Diener, E. (2001). Goals, culture, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 1674
- Pintrich, P. R., & De Groot, E. V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82*, 33-40.
- Roeser, R. W., Midgley, C., Urdan, T. C. (1996). Perceptions of the school psychological environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral

- functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 88*, 408-422.
- Triandis, H. C., & Suh, E. M. (2002). Cultural influences on personality. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 133
- Tweed, R. G., & Lehman, D. R. (2002). Learning considered within a cultural context: Confucian and Socratic approaches. *American Psychologist, 57*, 89-99.
- Wolters, C. A., & Pintrich, P. R. (1998). Contextual differences in student motivation and self-regulated learning in mathematics, English, and social studies classrooms. *Instructional Science, 26*, 27-47.

Table 1 Predictions of Korean Students' Achievement Goals

Presumed East Asian (Korean) Characteristics	Achievement Goal Predictions
<p data-bbox="387 469 564 499"><i>Individual level</i></p> <p data-bbox="387 528 542 558">Self-construal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="421 587 721 617">● Interdependent self-system</li> <li data-bbox="421 646 1115 676">● Care more strongly about how others might view/evaluate them</li> <li data-bbox="421 705 1088 735">● Stronger obligation to please/not disappoint significant others</li> <li data-bbox="421 764 1323 794">● Standards of success/failure are affected by approval/disapproval by parents/teachers</li> <li data-bbox="421 823 1391 882">● Standing-out in a positive way is avoided in the fear of appearing arrogant; however, not standing-out in a negative way within one's social network is highly important</li> <li data-bbox="421 911 1357 941">● Social/public aspects of the self assume greater significance in self-esteem maintenance</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="387 970 640 1000">Implicit theory of self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="421 1029 804 1059">● Incremental theory of intelligence</li> <li data-bbox="421 1088 1480 1147">● Cross-situational consistency of behaviors is less important, adjusting oneself to varying situational demands and fulfill role obligations/relationships is more important</li> <li data-bbox="421 1176 1480 1206">● Value failure experiences more than success experiences because they provide information on how</li> </ul>	<p data-bbox="1514 764 1823 823">Stronger performance-avoidance goals</p> <p data-bbox="1514 1088 1756 1118">Stronger mastery goals</p>

<p>to improve oneself</p> <p>Common attribution of academic success/failure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong belief in the utility of effort</li> <li>● "Studying hard" is viewed as a determining factor of academic performance</li> </ul>	Stronger mastery goals
<p><i>Contextual level</i></p> <p>Goal stresses in learning environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong ability/performance focus</li> <li>● Limited choice of tasks/subjects</li> <li>● Assignment of convergent tasks to whole class</li> <li>● Extremely competitive, normative evaluation</li> </ul>	Stronger performance goals - approach? avoidance?
<p>Parental expectations/beliefs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong value toward education, which often results in obsession with children's performance</li> <li>● Stronger endorsement of performance goals for their children</li> </ul>	Stronger performance goals - approach? avoidance?

Table 2 Sample Items and Reliability Statistics

Scales	Sample Items	No. Items	$\alpha$ s	
Mastery goal	An important reason why I do my math work is because I want to get better at it.	6	European American	.85
			African American	.76
			Korean	.78
			Total	.79
Performance-approach goal	I would feel successful in math if I did better than most of the other students in the class.	5	European American	.76
			African American	.71
			Korean	.70
			Total	.72
Performance-avoidance goal	The reason I do my math work is so the teacher doesn't think I know less than others.	6	European American	.75
			African American	.74
			Korean	.76
			Total	.75
Self-efficacy	I am sure that I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for math class.	5	European American	.87
			African American	.73
			Korean	.87
			Total	.85
Help-seeking avoidance	When I don't understand my math work, I often guess instead of asking someone for help.	5	European American	.78
			African American	.79
			Korean	.83
			Total	.80

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics

Scales	US 6 <sup>th</sup> Graders (n = 119)						Korean 6 <sup>th</sup> Graders (n = 118)		
	African American			European American			Girls (n = 53)	Boys (n = 65)	Total
	Girls (n = 40)	Boys (n = 24)	Total	Girls (n = 34)	Boys (n = 21)	Total			
Mastery goal	4.06 (.80)	3.93 (.89)	4.01 (.83)	3.56 (.79)	3.81 (.85)	3.65 (.82)	3.44 (.79)	3.43 (.86)	3.43 (.83)
Performance-approach goal	3.72 (1.07)	3.93 (.70)	3.80 (.94)	3.41 (.89)	3.49 (1.12)	3.44 (.98)	3.87 (.64)	3.75 (.79)	3.80 (.73)
Performance-avoidance goal	2.96 (1.03)	2.97 (1.04)	2.97 (1.03)	2.65 (.89)	2.52 (.88)	2.60 (.88)	2.72 (.82)	2.60 (.83)	2.65 (.82)
Self-efficacy	4.28 (.81)	4.10 (.79)	4.21 (.80)	3.76 (.83)	4.28 (.84)	3.96 (.86)	3.39 (.83)	3.58 (.91)	3.50 (.87)
Help-seeking avoidance	2.34 (.95)	2.84 (1.26)	2.53 (1.09)	2.50 (.85)	1.97 (.83)	2.30 (.88)	2.43 (.93)	2.31 (.90)	2.36 (.91)

Table 4 Correlation Coefficients Among Variables for Korean ( $n = 118$ ) and U.S. 6th Graders ( $n = 119$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mastery goal	--	.281**	.014	.594**	-.286**
2. Performance-approach goal	.237**	--	.315**	.441*	.056
3. Performance-avoidance goal	-.057	.307**	--	.379**	-.073
4. Academic self-efficacy	.692**	.170	.011	--	-.255**
5. Help-seeking avoidance	-.361**	.152	.319**	-.390**	--

*Note.* Correlation coefficients above the diagonal are for Korean students; those below the diagonal are for U.S. students.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .



Table 5 Correlation Coefficients Among Variables for African American ( $n = 64$ ) and European American 6th Graders ( $n = 55$ )

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Mastery goal	--	.144	.058	.733**	-.323**
2. Performance-approach goal	.277*	--	.436**	.075	.298**
3. Performance-avoidance goal	-.324**	.083	--	.153	.230
4. Academic self-efficacy	.631**	.222	-.235	--	-.286**
5. Help-seeking avoidance	-.515	-.094	.431	-.602**	--

*Note.* Correlation coefficients above the diagonal are for African American students; those below the diagonal are for European American students.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .