Academic Goals and Self-Protection Motivational Strategies

Antonio Valle¹, José C. Núñez², Ramón G. Cabanach¹, Susana Rodríguez¹, Julio A. González-Pienda², Pedro Rosario³

¹Dept. of Developmental & Educational Psychology, Univ. of La Coruña, Spain
²Dept. of Psychology, University of Oviedo, Spain
³Dept. of Educational Psychology, University of Minho, Portugal

Spain / Portugal
Abstract

Individuals can use a variety of strategies to deal with threats to their self-worth. Three such strategies self-handicapping, defensive pessimism and self-affirmation have receive little attention to date and their explanations are the focus of this study. According to the self-worth theory of motivation, the need to protect one’s self-worth arises primarily from a fear of failure and the implications this failure may have for one’s private and public sense of ability and subsequent self-worth. Surveys were administered to 607 Spanish university students.

Results indicate that learning orientation would reduce the likelihood of choosing self-handicapping and self-affirmation strategies, but defensive pessimism is not related to this orientation. On the other hand, we found that performance-avoidance orientation does not have significant relations with self-handicapping and self-affirmation. We suggest that we should be cautious when systematizing the association between performance motives and self-worth protection strategies.

Keywords: academic goals, self-affirmation, self-handicapping, defensive pessimism, university students.

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