



SOCIAL APPROVAL AND ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AMONG STUDENTS IN PROSOCIAL ACTIVITIES AS FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CAREER CHOICES

Marta Kaczorowska

ORCID: 0009-0009-4248-4940

Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz

e-mail: martawoz@ukw.edu.pl

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Abstract. The presented article presents theories of social approval (Delroy L. Paulhus' two-factor theory of social approval), achievement motivation (Heinz Schuler's onion model of achievement motivation) and prosocial activity as factors contributing to students' career choices. The main question posed during the study is whether there is a relationship between social acceptance and the motivation of Polish students to be prosocial. The students were tested using the Social Approval Test (TAS-22), the Achievement Motivation Inventory (LMI-K) and the author's report card. Statistical analysis showed that there is a significant relationship between social acceptance and achievement motivation. Therefore, it can be concluded that social approval is an important motivation for achievement among prosocial students. Moreover, attention was paid to the importance of social approval and motivation as factors contributing to the choice of a career path among students, in particular students of humanities and social sciences. No significant differences were observed between the studied variables (social approval and achievement motivation) and sociodemographic and biographical characteristics.

**APROBATA SPOŁECZNA A MOTYWACJA OSIĄGNIĘĆ WŚRÓD
STUDENTÓW W DZIAŁALNOŚCI PROSPOŁECZNEJ JAKO CZYNNIKI
PRZYCZYNIAJĄCE SIĘ DO WYBORÓW ZAWODOWYCH**

Słowa kluczowe: aprobata społeczna, motywacja osiągnięć, wybór drogi zawodowej

Streszczenie. W prezentowanym artykule przedstawiono teorie aprobaty społecznej (dwuczynnikowa teoria aprobaty społecznej Delroya L. Paulhusa), motywacji osiągnięć (Cebulowy model Motywacji Osiągnięć Heinza Schulera) oraz aktywności prospołecznej jako czynniki przyczyniające się do wyborów zawodowych studentów. Głównym pytaniem postawionym w trakcie badania jest to, czy istnieje związek między akceptacją społeczną a motywacją polskich studentów do aktywności prospołecznej. Studenci zostali przetestowani za pomocą Testu Aprobaty Społecznej (TAS-22), Inwentarza Motywacji Osiągnięć (LMI-K) oraz autorską metryczką. Analiza statystyczna wykazała, że istnieje istotny związek między akceptacją społeczną a motywacją osiągnięć. Można zatem stwierdzić, że aprobatą społeczną jest ważną motywacją osiągnięć wśród studentów udzielających się prospołecznie. Ponadto zwrócono uwagę na znaczenie aprobaty społecznej i motywacji jako czynników przyczyniających się w wyborze drogi zawodowej wśród studentów, w szczególności studentów kierunków humanistycznych i społecznych. Nie zauważono istotnych różnic między badanymi zmiennymi (aprobatą społeczną i motywacją osiągnięć) a cechami socjodemograficznymi i biograficznymi.

Introduction

A significant challenge for young individuals entering the labour market is finding a job that places realistic demands on their knowledge, skills, competencies, and experience. Unfortunately, sometimes these professional requirements are so high that they become a “legend”. Among job offers, young people, including students, often find requirements for experience in a similar position, which due to further education at a higher education institution is nearly impossible to achieve. Setting a high bar for students at the beginning of their career journey leads them to seek support in shaping their professional experience through community engagement. Why? Focusing on Generation Z (Kroenke, 2015), which sometimes holds different values from Generations X and Y regarding professional work, the author of this article concentrates on the relationship between social approval and achievement motivations among students as factors contributing to the shaping of professional experience among young adults.

A few remarks on social approval

Social approval was originally regarded as individuals’ tendency to lie in order to present socially desirable traits. This phenomenon was observed when subjects filled out personality questionnaires, especially questions on the control scale, otherwise known as the lie scale (Strzałkowska, 1993). Noticing people’s

tendency to self-enhance, researchers soon began to use social approval as an indicator of personality traits (Furnham, 1986). Among prominent researchers dealing with social approval, two theories emerged: the one-factor theory of social approval, advocated by Allen L. Edwards (1957), Douglas P. Crowne, and David Marlowe (1960), and the two-factor theory of social approval, which had among its proponents, for instance, Jerry S. Wiggins (1964) and Paulhus (2002).

The unifactorial theory of social approval according to Edwards (1957) assumes that not only internal biases determine how respondents react, but also other external factors that cannot be checked with tests. In the course of empirical research, he hypothesized that questionnaire items relating to an individual's personality and behavioural traits can be analysed in terms of social disapproval and approval.

According to Edwards (1957), social approval is a variable characterizing the mentioned questionnaire items and does not translate into behaviours in everyday life. Therefore, based solely on the responses given by an individual, a researcher can determine whether the behaviour is motivated by the need for social approval. Edwards also places questions on a psychological continuum, where he defines two poles of influence. The first concerns undesirable behaviours and traits of society, while the second concerns behaviours and traits of the individual that are positively perceived by the environment. An important discovery was that the conditions of completing the questionnaire, whether public or confidential, yielded equal levels of completion for socially acceptable answers on the questionnaire. This author also observed that there is a correlation between saturation and social acceptance, as well as the likelihood that a respondent will give that particular answer. The scientist demonstrated a positive, linear relationship here. It should also be noted that the responses given by subjects can only indicate a tendency towards such behaviours, as they may perform these actions either consciously or unconsciously.

Subsequent research by scientists on the concept of social approval led to the development of the two-factor model. This model distinguishes two elements, from which its name is derived, namely: – Self-deception, which is an unconscious process and also not intended; it is associated with adopting too many positive traits that the individual genuinely believes they possess; – Impression management, which manifests through directing the image of oneself in the eyes of others; it hides unfavourable traits and highlights those that make the individual appear positive (Izdebski, Żbikowska, Kotyśko, 2013).

Continuing the topic of two-factor models of social approval, it is essential to examine the theory proposed by Paulhus (2002). With a broader range of tools than Wiggins (1964), Paulhus re-engaged in factor analysis. He distinguished two factors:

- self-deception, defined as a distortion of self-image, refers to an individual's tendency to present themselves in an excessively positive light, which is false. Moreover, it is characterized by hiding one's negative traits and emphasizing positive ones. To understand how a researcher fills out a questionnaire, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with the content of items related to social agreement. However, this does not mean that a person denies all socially unacceptable behaviours. It should be treated as a kind of defensive mechanism in which the individual tries to deny their thoughts and feelings about behaviours fundamentally dangerous to the human psyche.
- impression management – is a deliberate and conscious action in which the individual's image is distorted by themselves. A person wishes to present themselves to their environment as positively as possible, as someone who acts according to generally accepted norms, is visionary, punctual, and trustworthy. Such individuals are also willing to undertake actions that highlight their high values, kindness, etc., compared to others.

Paulhus, however, did not stop at the above theory. He continued his in-depth research. Based on further factor analysis, he demonstrated that social approval comprises three factors. Changes occur in self-deception, where researchers emphasized two factors:

- Emphasizing one's own positive traits – this factor is characteristic of people who unconsciously distort their responses in various surveys to appear as favourable as possible.
- Denying one's own negative traits – this is the unconscious behaviour of individuals who create an overly positive image of themselves in the eyes of others and deny traits that are undesirable to most of the society; subsequently, individuals subconsciously minimize negative actions in their emotions.

Subsequent research and factor analyses provided a new perspective on the phenomenon of social acceptance. Researchers Paulhus and R.F. Nartesi (1993, as cited in: Paulhus, 2002) focused on a detailed explanation of the Alpha and Gamma factors. As a result of these studies, the final assumptions of Paulhus' two-factor concept of social approval were developed, in which the Alpha and Gamma factors depend on two values:

- Action, which signifies self-development and human success; the individual values independence, individualism, control, and the deepening of their values and opinions.
- Community, which is important for people who value good relationships, sociability, the presence of others, peace, and the ability to help other people or larger social groups (Paulhus, John, 1998, as cited in: Izdebski, Żbikowska, Kotyśko, 2013).

Paweł Izdebski, Karolina Żbikowska, and Martyna Kotyśko (2013), building on the theory of Paulhus and his collaborators, distinguished two categories of actions: egotistical attitude and moral attitude. According to them, these categories are not merely temporary means to satisfy the needs of an individual filling out a questionnaire, but also form the basis of how a person perceives the surrounding world and themselves. The values that guide a person determine their attitude, and thus their motivation for action in everyday life. Based on basic and most important needs and values, such as action or community, two motives can be distinguished: the need for strength and power, and the need for approval. These motives lead to selfish behaviours, which focus on self-improvement, independence, and moral behaviours, particularly community values. In defining these motives, they should be precisely described, namely:

- Egotistical attitude – individuals with this mindset can be equated to “superheroes” (Paulhus, John, 1998, as cited in: Izdebski, Żbikowska, Kotyśko, 2013); this belief stems from the fact that the person exaggerates their positive traits; they want to be perceived primarily as independent, dominant, talented, with a need for power and authority, and associated with action.
- Moral attitude – successful people in this area base their behaviour on the approval of the people and community around them; community is most important to them; these individuals possess character traits that depict them as good citizens, kind in relationships, conscientious, guided by moral and legal principles, calm, and restrained; these people can be characterized as “saints” (Paulhus, John, 1998, as cited in: Izdebski, Żbikowska, Kotyśko, 2013), because, when filling out surveys, they want to present themselves as trustworthy individuals for whom the common good and civic values are paramount.

Building on Paulhus’ (2002) two-factor theory of social approval, it can be mentioned that both moral attitude and egotistical attitude can be incorporated into the process of self-deception, as well as in managing the impression made on other people.

The continuous socio-economic and intellectual development – triggered in its own way by globalization – necessitates that instruments measuring both theory and social acceptance require continuous refinement.

Achievement motivation and its Onion-ring model

To understand the dynamics of an individual's actions, it is essential to pay attention to their relationship with the environment. The main entities in this relationship are needs, which serve to organize perception and its interpretation, thinking, and acting, thereby transforming unsatisfactory situations. These needs can arise from internal or external stimuli (Murray, 1938, pp. 123-124). Needs relate to the stresses that follow a person. To eliminate them, it is necessary to satisfy them by reducing previously experienced tensions (Oleś, 2003).

Henry A. Murray identified many needs that a person must confront throughout their life. In subsequent years, researchers attempted to apply the needs listed by Murray to the analysis of fully appropriate behaviours. The need for achievement, through which a person strives to succeed in socially preferred activities, was most commonly mentioned. In Murray's (1938) understanding, the motivation for achievement is directed, among other things, to controlling and manipulating physical objects, people, and the ideas they represent. According to the researcher, it is also characterized by strong competition between the individual and the society in which they should rule. This motivation also includes achieving high results independently and effectively. A person should develop a sense of self-worth based on the talent with which they have achieved success or satisfactorily completed a set challenge. Continuing Murray's considerations on the motivation of achievement, it should be added that he defined it as accomplishing something difficult and complicated by a person.

Schuler (2000), who developed the Onion Model of Achievement Motivation, distinguished four groups in it:

- Core facets, including goal orientation, drive, hope for success, fear of embarrassment, persistence.
- Peripheral facets, which include behavioural aspects such as self-confidence or status orientation.
- Theoretically compounds. These are not the main sources of achievement motivation but interact with it.

Personality traits are the foundation of achievement motivation; they constitute a kind of “influencing background” of achievement motivation because they describe other behavioural phenomena associated with this type of motivation.

Below, Schuler’s achievement motivation model is presented in a graphical form (Figure 1).

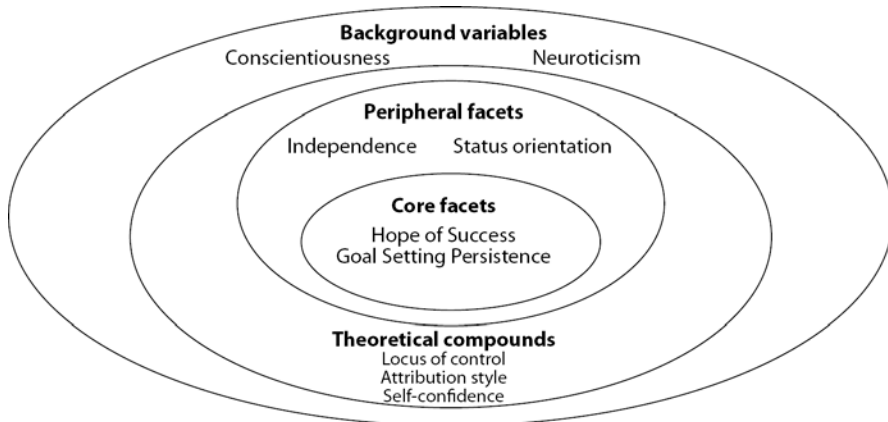


Figure 1. The Onion-ring model of achievement motivation

Source: Based on: Schuler, Thornton, Frintrup, Prochaska, 2018, p. 10.

The presented model provides the opportunity for a detailed and complete diagnosis of an individual and has a multidimensional character, based on the analysis of all examined dimensions.

Methodological approaches adopted in own research

The research presented in this study was conducted in April 2021. The instruments used were questionnaires, specifically: short version of the Achievement Motivation Inventory (LMI-K) and the Social Approval Scale (TAS-22). The theoretical assumptions of the conducted study are based on Schuler’s Onion Model of Achievement (Schuler, Prochaska, 2000) and the theory of social approval proposed by Paulhus (2002), which were described in the earlier part of the article.

The aim of this study was to examine the co-occurrence of social approval and achievement motivation in pro-social activities among students of Polish higher education institutions and to verify the co-occurrence of the above variables with the sociodemographic characteristics of the subjects.

The problems posed before the studies were as follows:

- Are there differences between the female and male students surveyed in terms of the need for social approval?
- Are there differences in achievement motivation between the female and male students surveyed?
- Are there differences between the fields of study chosen by students and the level of social approval and achievement motivation?

Due to the scope of the work, the research results will be presented in a condensed and somewhat simplified form. Thus, the characteristics of the study group along with the reduced and selected research findings will be presented below. In the summary, efforts were made to present findings and observed the co-occurrence of variables that show the impact of social approval and achievement motivation among students in pro-social activities as factors contributing to career choices.

In the study, 94 individuals participated, including 57 women (60.64%) and 37 men (39.36%). The participants were aged between 19 and 41 years. The majority of respondents were aged 21-24 years. The average age of respondents was 23.18 years (with a standard deviation of 3.05).

Respondents were most often residents of cities with over 100,000 inhabitants (65.96%). The least common group of respondents were individuals living in towns of up to 5,000 inhabitants (2.13%).

The students who participated in the study represented various research areas, grouped according to fields: humanities, social sciences, medical, technical, artistic, exact, and natural sciences. The group of individuals who provided the most responses represented the field of social sciences (58.51%). This was followed by the humanities (11.70%), natural and exact sciences (10.64%). The remaining respondents each accounted for less than 10%: medical (8.51%), technical (8.51%), and artistic (2.13%). The students involved in the study represented all years of study: first year (26.60%), second year (37.23%), third year (19.15%), fourth year (4.26%), fifth year (10.64%) and sixth year – including the medical program (2.13%). The average year of study for the respondents was 2.41 (with a standard deviation of 1.33). Respondents represented students of first-degree studies (39.36%), second-degree studies (29.79%), and uniform master's degree programs (30.85%).

The vast majority of students participating in the study were active in student government (58.51%). The most frequently mentioned activities included: Szlachetna Paczka (19.15%), other activities (17.02%), Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy (15.96%), academic volunteering (11.70%), and associations/

organizations/foundations (10.64%). Less interest was shown in: religious associations (9.57%), non-university volunteering (8.51%), Volunteer Fire Brigades (3.19%), and Independent Student Associations (3.19%). On average, respondents had spent 3.91 years in pro-social activities (standard deviation: 3.26). Respondents had been socially active for periods ranging from 3 months to 20 years.

Research results

One of the main statistical analysis methods used during the analysis of the obtained research results is the correlation of variables. The results of these correlations have been presented in tabular form. These variables were matched concerning the set objective and research problems.

Table 1. Correlation of social approval (TAS-22) with achievement motivation (LMI-K)

	TAS-22	LMI-K
TAS-22		0.38
LMI-K	0.38	

TAS-22 – Social Approval Test, LMI-K – short version of the Achievement Motivation Inventory

Source: Own research.

The correlation between the scores obtained by respondents in the Social Approval Test (TAS-22) and short version of the Achievement Motivation Inventory (LMI-K) was 0.38. This correlation is weak, positive, and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Analysis of the significance of differences between surveyed women (1) and men (2) and the level of social approval (TAS-22) measured by the t-test for independent samples with respect to the group.

	Mean average 1	Mean average 2	Standard deviation 1	Standard deviation 2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
TAS-22	48.67	52.65	12.04	13.99	-1.47	92	0.15

TAS-22 – Social Approval Test

Source: Own research.

The results of the analysis of the significance of differences showed that there is no significant difference in the level of social approval (TAS-22) achieved between women and men ($p = 0.15$).

Table 3. Analysis of the significance of differences between social approval (TAS-22) and the field of study measured by one-way ANOVA using a post-hoc test for $F(5,88) = 0.54$; $p = 0.75$ ($N = 94$)

Field of Study	<i>n</i>	TAS-22 Mean average	TAS-22 Standard error
Social Sciences	55	51.04	1.76
Humanities	11	49.18	3.94
Medical	8	53.88	4.62
Artistic	2	40	9.25
Technical	8	48.38	4.62
Exact and Natural Sciences	10	47.60	4.14

TAS-22 – Social Approval Test

Source: Own research.

The fields of study: social sciences, humanities, medical, artistic, technical, exact, and natural sciences do not significantly differentiate the level of social approval (TAS-22) for $F(5,88) = 0.54$ and $p = 0.75$.

Table 4. Analysis of the significance of differences between surveyed women (1) and men (2) and the level of achievement motivation (LMI-K) measured by the t-test for independent samples with respect to the group.

	Mean average 1	Mean average 2	Standard deviation 1	Standard deviation 2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
LMI-K	147.72	150.62	22.82	16.80	-0.66	92	0.51

LMI-K – short version of the Achievement Motivation Inventory

Source: Own research.

The results of the analysis of the significance of differences showed that there is no significant difference in the level of achievement motivation (LMI-K) achieved between women and men ($p = 0.51$).

Table 5. Analysis of the significance of differences between achievement motivation (LMI-K) and the field of study measured by one-way ANOVA ($N = 94$).

	Deviation from the Mean (SS)	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Field of study	951.90	5	190.40	0.43	0.82

LMI-K – short version of the Achievement Motivation Inventory

Source: Own research.

Through the conducted analysis of the significance of differences between achievement motivation (LMI-K) and the field of study, no significant difference is found ($p = 0.82$).

Table 6. Analysis of the significance of differences between achievement motivation (LMI-K) and the field of study measured by one-way ANOVA using a post-hoc test for $F(5,88) = 0.43$; $p = 0.82$ ($N = 94$)

Field of Study	<i>n</i>	LMI-K Mean average	LMI-K Standard error
Social Sciences	55	149.24	2.82
Humanities	11	144.45	6.31
Medical	8	151.50	7.40
Artistic	2	138.50	14.80
Technical	8	145.00	7.40
Exact and Natural Sciences	10	154.70	6.62

LMI-K – short version of the Achievement Motivation Inventory

Source: Own research.

The fields of study: humanities, social sciences, medical, technical, artistic, exact, and natural sciences do not significantly differentiate the level of achievement motivation (LMI-K) for $F(5,88) = 0.43$ and $p = 0.82$.

Following the preliminary analysis of the research, it is necessary to proceed to the summary and discussion of the results. The discussion will refer to published monographs and scientific articles.

Conclusions

The main hypothesis presented concerned the co-occurrence of social approval and the motivation of Polish students to engage in pro-social activities. Statistical analysis showed that social approval and achievement motivation co-occur, and their relationship is statistically significant. This relationship is positive. Therefore, the level of achievement motivation increases through social approval and vice versa. Thus, it can be assumed that students who decide to engage in pro-social activities are motivated by social approval, expressed through, among others, participation in important events for society, presence in variously understood media, social recognition, etc. The current young society depends on its social position on social media, building a new image of themselves there (Siibak, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that among students, social approval coexists with the motivation for pro-social activities.

During the conducted research, no significant difference was found between the gender of respondents and the perceived level of social approval, so the hypothesis posed during the study was not confirmed ($p = 0.15$). This may be surprising, as it was assumed that women require greater social acceptance. However, considering the development of the young generation and the values it represents, it can be assumed that today this need is equally important for women and men, as everyone wants to be appreciated.

Analysing the significance of differences between the gender of respondents and the level of achievement motivation, the hypothesis was again rejected. Gender does not significantly differentiate the level of achievement motivation of the subjects ($p = 0.51$). These results show that regardless of gender, people experience achievement motivation, which operates from time to time, considering past activity, the number of actions performed in function of the time of activity.

Similarly, the hypothesis stating that there are differences between the fields of study chosen by students and the level of social approval and achievement motivation was rejected, as the fields of study: social sciences, humanities, medical, artistic, technical, exact, and natural sciences do not significantly differ concerning the above variables.

However, referring to the research conducted by Magdalena Barańska (2016), it should be emphasized that pro-social activity is an apt form of career planning, as it allows for the relatively quick acquisition of specific competencies and skills that students often do not gain to a similar extent during the execution

of professional internships planned in their study programs. Additionally, pro-social activity allows for the verification of career plans. During the implementation of volunteer activities, a student has the opportunity to learn about the specifics and procedures of various government, non-governmental, and private institutions. Furthermore, the mentioned research also confirms the observed tendency that students studying social sciences and humanities are most likely to engage in pro-social activities. These fields require specific personality predispositions, such as the ability and willingness to work with people, communicativeness, self-awareness, empathy, and tolerance. It is important to highlight that volunteer activity is recommended as a way of gaining experience, enabling students to shape their professional future.

Summarizing the above considerations, pro-social activity coexists with social approval and achievement motivation on the path to shaping a professional future. This coexistence stems from the desire to be appreciated by society and to achieve goals that, in the context of the above issues, aim to acquire competencies, skills, and experience necessary for the young generation – especially students – in defining their career path and proper professional initiation.

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