Strategies of self-esteem protection during adolescence in the school context
Francisco Peixoto
Instituto Superior de Psicologia Aplicada – Lisbon/Portugal

Previous research on the self-esteem/academic achievement relationship have shown that school achievement don't differentiate students on global self-representations despite the differences on academic self-evaluation. In this study we analyze the strategies that underachievers used to maintain self-esteem at acceptable levels and the influence of developmental factors on the self-esteem/academic achievement relationship. Participants were 955 adolescents in the 7th, 9th and 11th grades, from four secondary schools in Lisbon. Of these students 552 had failed at least once in previous school years and 603 never failed. To collect the data we used a self-concept scale and a scale to evaluate attitude toward school. The self-concept scale was based on the Portuguese version of Harter's Self Perception Profile for Adolescents, but with a different format (one single statement instead the two in Harter's scale) and two other dimensions (Portuguese Self-Concept and Mathematical Self-Concept). Data was analyzed using correlations, MANOVAs and cluster analysis. Results are discussed in terms of methodological implications from the use of cluster analytical techniques in self-representations research and the influence of developmental factors on the self-esteem/academic achievement relationship.

Personal conceptions of intelligence in late adolescence: theory and practice revisited
Luísa Feria
Faculty of Psychology and Education – Porto State University, Porto/Portugal

Research on personal conceptions of intelligence indicates that children and adolescents hold two functional or operating theories about the nature of intelligence, that affect the pursuit of achievement goals in academic contexts and the choice of different patterns of behavior in the same contexts.

One of the theories, the static or entity one, holds that intelligence is a fixed or an uncontrollable trait, a global and stable amount of skills that the individual cannot change. The other theory, the dynamic or incremental one, holds that intelligence is a malleable, increasable, controllable quality, a group of dynamic skills which can be developed through personal investment and effort.

This study revisited the psychometric qualities (reliability, discriminative power and construct and empirical validity) of a Portuguese scale of Personal Conceptions of Intelligence, with 26 items organized in two subscales (dynamic and static), near a sample of 730 students - 380 senior high-school (10th and 12th grades) and 350 university students (1st and 2nd grades), from both sexes and different socio-economic statuses, and compared them with previous results in the Portuguese educational context, which proved to be globally satisfactory, supporting and promoting the use of this scale to measure personal conceptions of intelligence.

Achievement goals, competence and performance assessment strategies among high school students
Excribe, C., Dupuyrat, C., Regner, I.
University of Toulouse, France

The assumption that people are motivated to reduce certainty about their capacities is central in achievement goal theory. Achievement goals are cognitive representations of students' purposes in different achievement situations. Traditionally two major classes of goals have been distinguished: learning goals, in which the aim is to develop competence, and performance goals, in which the aim is to demonstrate competence relative to others by gaining favorable judgments (performance approach goals) or by avoiding unfavorable judgments of one's competence (performance avoidance goals) (Dweck, 1991; Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). While both classes of goals concern the pursuit of competence, they can be seen as "different ways of building and maintaining self-esteem" (Dweck, 1991, p. 208) and they lead to different strategies for assessing one's own competence level. When learning goals are adopted, individuals tend to use self-referent standards, but when performance goals are adopted, normative and/or social comparison standards are used (Jagacinski & Duda, 2001). However, some research has revealed that individuals adopting learning goals may also at times use social comparison standards, although for different purposes than individuals adopting performance goals (e.g., Butler, 1992). While social comparison mainly serves a function of self-enhancement or self-protection under performance goals, under learning goals it mainly serves a function of self-evaluation and self-improvement.

The aim of the present research is to explore the relationships between high-school students' achievement goals, perceived competence, and choice of performance assessment strategies (self-referent vs. social).