

# Institutional Autonomy Support Predicts College Student's Achievement Goals Through Psychological Need Satisfaction

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## What motivates college students?

- Goal orientations help explain motives for engagement (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).
- **Mastery-approach goals** focus on **developing competence** & seeking growth according to **intrapersonal standards**. These types of motives are adaptive in achievement contexts (Kaplan & Maehr, 2006).
- **Performance-avoidance goals** focus on **demonstrating competence** & avoiding feeling inferior according to **normative standards**. These kinds of goals are linked to poor academic outcomes (e.g., lower task involvement; McGregor & Elliot, 2002).
- **Basic psychological need satisfaction** encompasses competency, relatedness, & autonomy needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
- Needs are nurtured by **autonomy supportive environments** (Adie et al., 2008), which **encourage students to explore their own interests** (Reeve et al., 2004).

## What role do instructors play?

We hypothesized that **through psychological need satisfaction**, greater institutional autonomy support would indirectly predict:

- greater mastery-approach goals, and
- lower performance-avoidance goals.

## Methods

- $N = 184$  college students, 72.3% female, 22.8% male, 4.3% non-conforming, .05% not specified; 51.1% white, 48.9% students of color.
- **Likert Scales** completed in an online survey.
- *Learning Climate Questionnaire* (Williams & Deci, 1996), *Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scale* (Chen et al., 2015), *Achievement Goal Questionnaire* (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

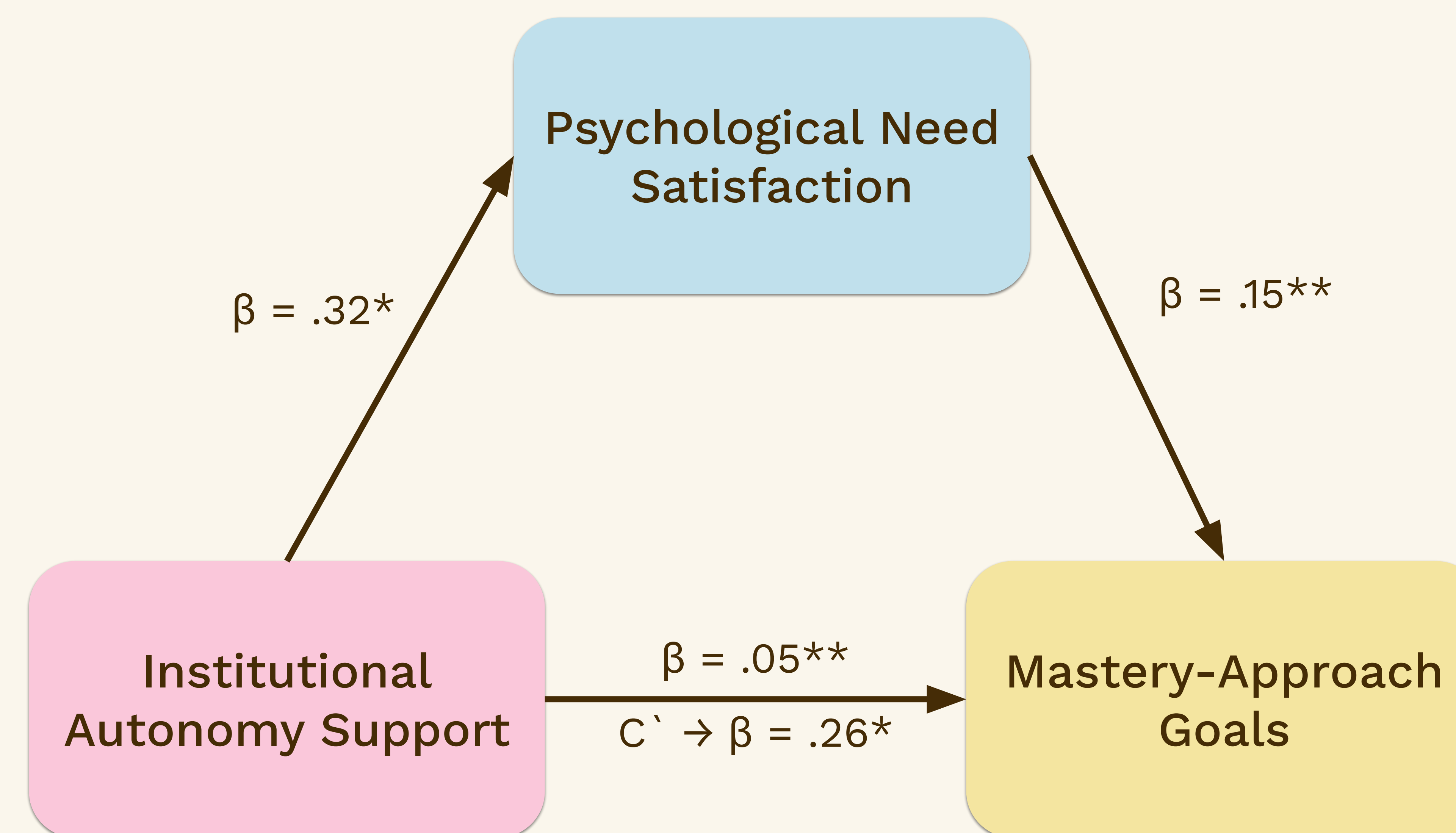
## Results

- In model 1, students who perceived greater institutional autonomy support tended to report greater mastery-approach goal orientations.
- Psychological need satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between institutional autonomy support and mastery-approach goals (Figure 1).

**Greater autonomy support is related to greater satisfaction of psychological needs, which in turn, predicts mastery-approach goal orientations.**

Figure 1

*Mediation Model Predicting Mastery-Approach Goals*



Note: \*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .05$

- In model 2, greater basic psychological need satisfaction was related to lower adoption of performance-avoidance goals ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, institutional autonomy support was not directly ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .08$ ) or indirectly ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .06$ ) associated with performance-avoidance goal orientations.

## Discussion

- There was partial support for the hypotheses.
- As expected, institutional **autonomy support indirectly predicted mastery-approach goals** through psychological need satisfaction.
- Contrary to our hypothesis, autonomy support was not related to performance-avoidance goals. During the COVID-19 pandemic, such goals may have been less relevant due to the challenges of emergency remote teaching.
- Online surveys are limited due to self-report biases and lack of generalizability.
- Future studies should examine whether certain needs, like competency needs, may play a larger role in understanding goal orientations relative to other needs.

## Implications for Instructors

Instructors can implement autonomy supportive motivational strategies in their classrooms.

- Autonomy supportive environments may facilitate greater student adoption of mastery-approach goal orientations.
- Institutional changes enable instructors to provide autonomous learning environments, which may increase students' motivation and academic success (Okada, 2021).

## Conclusion

- Basic psychological need satisfaction plays a role in helping us understand the relationship between institutional autonomy support and achievement goal orientations, specifically mastery-approach goals.



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