Do Parents Really Know Best? Investigating the Relationship between Perceived Parental Goals and Academic Factors

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Previous literature has indicated that the goals that parents have for their children often become the goals the children have for themselves, and these goals influence certain character traits than can influence the development of children throughout their lifetimes (Gonida & Cortina, 2014). There exist two types of parental goals in the context of this literature—mastery goals, which orient a child towards development of skills and understanding, and performance goals, which orient a child towards achievement on specific tasks. This study looked to examine the relationship between perceived parental goals and intrinsic motivation, self-reported GPA, academic self-efficacy as well as whether these relationships differed among different demographic groups. Ninety-seven high school students were surveyed at a high school on the north shore of Long Island. The survey included four scales (parental goal orientation, intrinsic motivation, GPA, and academic self-efficacy) as well as demographic items. The results show that students who perceived their parents as having mastery goals for them had significantly higher intrinsic motivation but lower GPAs and lower academic self-efficacy when compared to students who perceived their parents to hold performance goals for them. In addition, Asian American students had significantly higher levels of perceived parental performance goals than White American students. This study suggests that parents should be mindful of the goals that they communicate to their children, as the way in which children internalize their parents' goals for them shapes not only their academic performance but also the way they view themselves.

Awards Won:
National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health &amp the Friends of NIDA: Honorable Mention