

From Perfectionism to Academic Adjustment: The Mediating Role of Achievement Goals

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Introduction

This study was interested in determining whether or not there exists a relationship between perfectionism and achievement goals in an academic context. We hypothesized that achievement goals serve as a mediator between perfectionism and measures of academic adjustment (grades and satisfaction).

Perfectionism has been defined as a multidimensional concept with two main components (Flett & Hewitt, 1991):

- Self-oriented perfectionism (SOP): Involves self-directed behaviours and being motivated to achieve perfection in all exploits.
- Socially-prescribed perfectionism (SPP): Motivated by the perception that significant others are socially exerting pressure to be perfect.

Achievement goals mentally represent objects that individuals seek to either approach or avoid (Elliot and Niesta, 2009) There are different forms associated with varying levels of adjustment (Harackiewicz, Barron, Pintrich, Elliot, & Thrash, 2002).

- Mastery-approach goals (mastering the requirements of the task) have been linked to higher interest/satisfaction, but not performance.
- Performance-approach goals (performing better than others) have been linked to higher achievement, but not interest/satisfaction
- Performance-avoidance goals (not performing poorly relative to others) have been linked to both lower levels of achievement and emotional satisfaction

Hypotheses

1. Mastery-approach goals should mediate the positive relationship between SOP and satisfaction; performance-approach goals should mediate the positive relationship between SOP and grades.

2. Performance-approach goals should mediate the negative relationship between SPP and performance. Mastery-approach goals should mediate the negative relationship between SPP and satisfaction.

Participants

A total of 261 participants (85% female, mean age = 19.23), consisting of students in freshman (49.6%), junior (30.7%), sophomore (12.4%) and senior (7.3%) years, completed three online question-

naires to assess perfectionism at T1 (early October), achievement goals at T2 (November) and academic satisfaction and grades at T3 (early February).

Results

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

	Items	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
T1_SOP	5	4.57	1.47	.88						
T1_SPP	5	3.28	1.51	.54**	.87					
T2_Map	5	5.56	1.05	.24**	-.11	.94				
T2_Pap	4	3.92	1.78	.39**	.33**	.25**	.95			
T2_Pav	3	3.62	1.84	.13	.20*	.12	.64**	.93		
T3_Acasat	8	4.92	1.01	.04	.19*	.25**	-.017	-.13	.88	
T3_Grades Reversed Score	N/A	6.09	1.77	.32**	.05	.21*	.18*	-.11	-.004	N/A

Note: alpha of Cronbach are on the diagonal.

**p < .01. *p < .05.

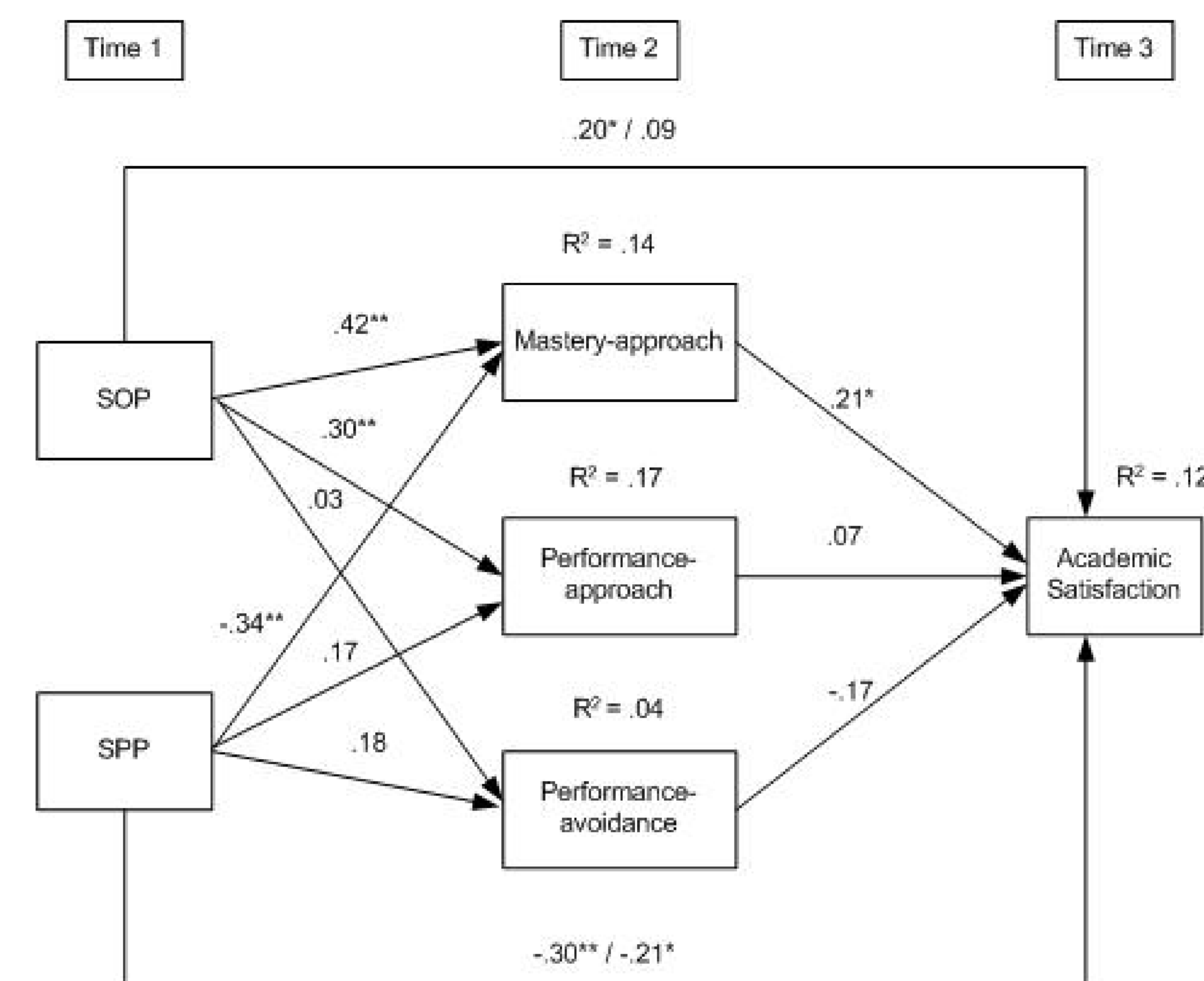


Fig. 1. The results of the multiple regressions for academic satisfaction. **p < .01. *p < .05.

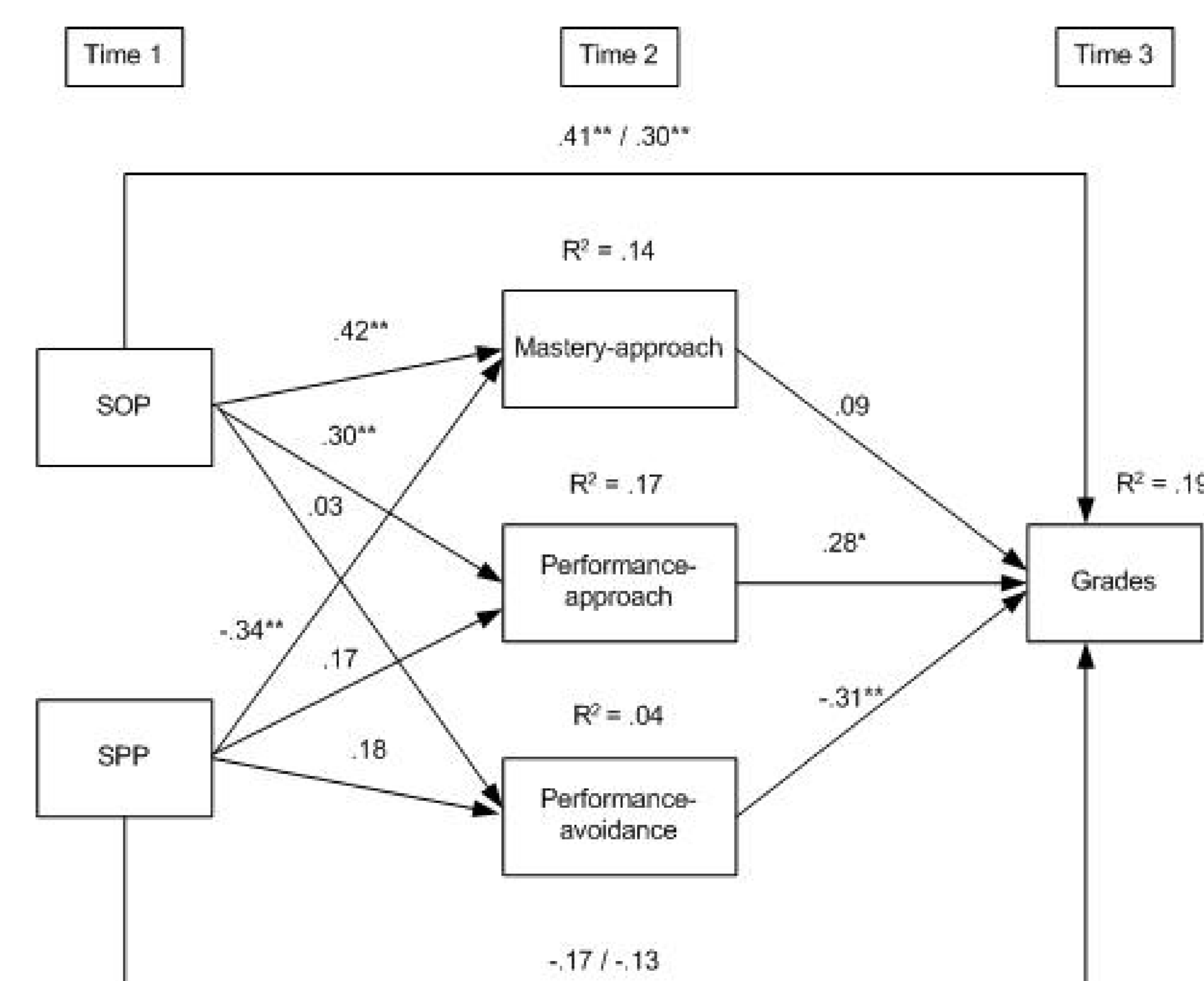


Fig. 2. The results of the multiple regressions for grades. **p < .01. *p < .05.

Conclusions

- Achievement goals mediated the relationship between perfectionism and academic measures of performance and satisfaction
- Mastery and performance-approach goals mediated the effects of SOP: high mastery goals lead to higher satisfaction, whereas high performance-approach goals lead to higher performance.
- Negative effects of SPP were mediated by performance-avoidance goals: high avoidance goals lead to poor academic satisfaction, and low mastery goals also lead to poor academic satisfaction.
- Consistent with prior research (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Senko & Miles, 2008), mastery goals failed to correlate with performance whereas performance-approach goals did not correlate with satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Research:

- This was a correlational/prospective study so no causations can be drawn from the results. Future research should incorporate experimental designs.
- This study only utilized self-report measures which are convenient, but not as reliable as objective measures. A percentage of participants dropped out of the study, meaning that future work should include larger sample sizes and incorporate strategies to reduce attrition.
- Perhaps maladaptive effects of SPP could be counteracted by training people to set both mastery-and performance-approach goals for themselves because these goals are both needed to promote higher academic satisfaction and performance, respectively.

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