

2. Title of the Project

Sanctifying Achievement Motivation: An Exploration of Parental Goals, Parental Expectations, and Emerging Adult Motivational Processes

3. Statement of the End Products

I intend to publish a journal article about the connection between early academic expectations and emerging adult academic anxiety in the Journal of Psychology and Christianity, the journal of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies. I also intend to present these findings at a CAPS annual conference and at the American Association of Christian Counseling biennial conference. Ultimately, I hope to use this data to begin the conceptualization of a book on the shortcomings of achievement motivation theories for Christians toward a theologically sound view of achievement motivation that parents and clergy can begin to emphasize.

This research will serve my teaching in PSY-316 Behavioral and Cognitive Theories of Learning because it will give more evidence to my developing theory that even Christian parents are emphasizing achievement over following Christ, and that the misalignment of priorities is leading to harmful learning outcomes of academic anxiety, procrastination, perfectionism, and performance goal orientations.

4. Description of the Project and its Major Goals

I. Statement of the specific research question/project

This study is a mixed-methods examination of emerging adults' perception of their parents' goals for them, expectations of them, and their achievement motivation, academic anxiety, perfectionism, procrastination, and experiential avoidance, and burnout. I question whether 1) emerging adults' perception of their parents' goals for them and the behavioral expectations emerging adults had/have to do to please their parents are misaligned. I hypothesize that 2) Emerging adults whose parents overemphasized achievement expectations will be higher in performance goal orientation, academic anxiety, perfectionism, procrastination, experiential avoidance, and burnout.

II. Description of the Activity and its Goals

Christian parents are prone to idolizing their children's success, popularity, and happiness over admonition in the Lord. One way this idolatry presents is excessive expectations and time spent on achievement. Overemphasis on achievement can communicate conditions of worth that foster anxiety for the young person and drive perfectionism or experiential avoidance of new or difficult academic tasks (Madjar et al., 2015; Rezaei-Gazki et al., 2024).

I plan to conduct a mixed methods study of emerging adults. These emerging adults will respond to the Faith Activities in the Home Scale, the Perception of Parental Expectations Inventory, the Academic Anxiety Scale, the Academic Procrastination Scale, the Goal Orientation Scale, and the Academic Burnout Scale. I will also include two open ended questions, "What would you say was your parents' primary goal for your life as they raised you?" and "When you were growing up, what did you have to do to please your parents?" I will use the scales for correlations and

regressions. I will code the open-ended response items and use them for analyses of variance and determine the extent to which Christian parents misalign their goals for their youth and their expectations of their youth.

III. Theoretical Framework

The *self-worth theory of motivation* states that people have a need to move toward success to affirm their worth and avoid failure, which could lead to a sense of worthlessness (Covington & Berry, 1976). Worldly standards of success and failure are often set and reinforced by the society where the individual lives. A school system may set standards for academic success and failure, while coaches and fine arts teachers set standards for playing positions, travel teams, and roles in plays. While there often are external reinforcers for success in these contexts, parents are known to be one of the main sources of validation that affirm or deny a person's sense of worth. The values that are communicated, the behavioral expectations that are communicated, and the feedback on how a youth is doing on those values and expectations are important sources of information about a youth's worth.

Although high expectations are known to produce good outcomes broadly (Khattab, 2015), another line of literature indicates it is possible for parental expectations to be too high. When parental expectations are too lofty, youth often experience academic anxiety. Academic anxiety is a perceived mismatch between their ability and the task difficulties encountered in educational settings. High academic anxiety is associated with poor coping strategies on a continuum from perfectionism and burnout to procrastination and avoidance (Ghattas et al., 2024; Tezaei-Gazki et al., 2024; Alvin et al., 2023; Gassady et al., 2019; Dobos et al., 2021).

To reinforce achievement, parents often use principles from the expectancy-value theory of motivation (Atkinson, 1957; Eccles et al., 1983). They tie grades, advanced placement course participation, and overscheduled lives of sports and arts to future opportunities and scholarships. Youth are then more likely to believe that their performance is tied to their achievement and their achievement is tied to their worth. Some youth who experience anxiety related to affirming their worth through achievement will develop a sense of perfectionism. These high performers are less likely to be identified as dealing with anxiety because they perform well, even perfectly in some cases. The positive results they get affirm their worth and the cycle continues until they reach a point where they experience burnout or can no longer maintain the façade of perfection. On the other hand, youth who experience anxiety due to a need to affirm their worth with achievement, but believe they lack ability, may procrastinate or avoid difficult tasks because then they can blame it on something external (i.e. I didn't have enough time to complete the work). This form of self-sabotage may prevent them from taking on tasks that they could do with help or from internalizing their worth apart from achievement.

Until our society separates worth from achievement and affirms worth apart from achievement, academic anxiety will prevail. Well-meaning parents, even Christian parents, should examine the alignment between their values and their expectations if a faith-integrated model of achievement motivation that I'm trying to develop should ever thrive.

In psychology, there is no integrated theory of achievement motivation yet. The most Christian psychologists have tried to do is take the current theories of motivation and connect principles of Christian faith to them, which is an example of the linkages model of non-manipulative conceptual integration paradigm. These efforts are admirable, but they do not reflect a fully integrated perspective that starts with the person doing Psychology in faith, promoted by the transformational approach to Psychology and Christian integration (Coe & Hall, 2010). I envision developing a Christian theory of achievement motivation where people who grow and guide kids emphasize achievement effort as a means to worship God and do the good works that He has planned ahead of time rather than emphasizing achievement for personal gain. When the effort is tied to sanctified motives, the outcome will be more readily tied to glorifying God than to personal gain.

IV. Brief examination of scholarly literature or context of the activity within your discipline.

Anxiety is the most reported presenting problem at university counseling centers across the United States (Perez-Rojas et al., 2017). Undoubtedly, anxiety presents itself in academics as college students are expected to learn and interact with ideas and complete assignments that are new to them (Finch et al., 2024). Anxious students who do not have the appropriate motives and coping skills may default to harmful patterns at opposite ends of a spectrum: perfectionism and burnout on one end or procrastination and experiential avoidance on the other end (Finch et al., 2024; Dobos et al., 2021; Ghattas et al., 2024; Madjar et al., 2015).

Anxiety doesn't arise spontaneously. It can be rooted in spiritual matters and is often rooted in poor experiences that develop maladaptive core beliefs that you can identify through thought patterns that people express verbally. From my experience as a professor, the academic anxiety my students experience is rooted in the thoughts they have when they do not meet their own expectations. Often, when I talk to them about their expectations of achievement, they reveal that their parents had high expectations of their achievement during their formative years. Research suggests high expectations lead to high performance (Khattab, 2015), but the oversharing of this research finding without context may be detrimental for two key reasons. First, expecting achievement without the context of unconditional love and warm support may contribute to a sense that achievement equals worth and failure equals worthlessness. Second, from a Christian perspective, pursuing achievement at the cost of congregational worship, service, family life, stillness, rest, and play may condition learners to believe achievement is more important than a flourishing life in submission to Christ.

This study extends current research regarding parental expectations and perfectionism, burnout, procrastination, avoidance, and goal orientations by examining perceived parental goals and perceived specific expectations. The alignment of perceived parental goals and expectations is the gap in the literature.

References

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education students. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Literature*, 2(2), 146-154.

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Cassady, J.C., Pierson, E. E., & Starling, J. M. (2019). Predicting student depression with measures of general and academic anxieties. *Frontiers in Education: Educational Psychology*, 4(11). doi: 10.3389/feduc.2019.00011

Covington, M. V., & Beery, R. (1976). *Self-worth and school learning*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Dobos, B., Piko, B. F., & Mellor, D. (2021). What makes university students perfectionists? The role of childhood trauma, emotional dysregulation, academic anxiety, and social support. *Scandinavian journal of psychology*, 62(3), 443-447.

Eccles, J., Adler, T. F., Futterman, R., Goff, S. B., Kaczala, C. M., Meece, J., and Midgley, C. (1983). Expectancies, values and academic behaviors. In Spence, J. T. (ed.), *Achievement and Achievement Motives*, W. H. Freeman, San Francisco.

Finch, W. H., Cassady, J. C., & Helsper, C. A. (2024). Identification and validation of severity standards for the academic anxiety scale. *International Journal of Testing*, 24(2), 145-168.

Gao, X. (2023). Academic stress and academic burnout in adolescents: a moderated mediating model. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1133706.

Ghattas, A. H. S., & El-Ashry, A. M. (2024). Perceived academic anxiety and procrastination among emergency nursing students: the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation. *BMC nursing*, 23(1), 670.

Madjar, N., Voltsis, M., & Weinstock, M. P. (2015). The roles of perceived parental expectation and criticism in adolescents' multidimensional perfectionism and achievement goals. *Educational Psychology*, 35(6), 765-778.

Melman, S., Little, S. G., & Akin-Little, K. A. (2007). Adolescent overscheduling: The relationship between levels of participation in scheduled activities and self-reported clinical symptomology. *The High School Journal*, 90(3), 18-30.

Pérez-Rojas, A. E., Lockard, A. J., Bartholomew, T. T., Janis, R. A., Carney, D. M., Xiao, H., Youn, S. J., Scofield, B. E., Locke, B. D., Castonguay, L. G., & Hayes, J. A. (2017). Presenting concerns in counseling centers: The view from clinicians on the ground. *Psychological Services*, 14(4), 416–427. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000122>

Rezaei-Gazki, P., Ilaghi, M., & Masoumian, N. (2024). The triangle of anxiety, perfectionism, and academic procrastination: exploring the correlates in medical and dental students. *BMC Medical Education*, 24(1), 181.

Xu, L., Wang, Z., Tao, Z., & Yu, C. (2022). English-learning stress and performance in Chinese college students: A serial mediation model of academic anxiety and academic burnout and the protective effect of grit. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1032675.

5. An essay (500 - 1000 words) describing how the Christian faith relates to your understanding of your discipline and how it relates to this scholarly endeavor.

As a Christ-follower, I believe that we are commanded to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Loving the Lord with our whole being and our efforts does involve caring about excellence in our work, as Colossians 3:23-24 states, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." However, I also believe that Christians are forgetting that the Lord's "burden is easy, and His yoke is light." Working for people communicates the bondage of extreme expectations resulting in personal and relational neglect, but working for Christ involves freedom from perfectionistic tendencies while rightly prioritizing rest and relationships.

I increasingly encounter Union students who are paralyzed by perfectionism or experiential avoidance in their academic endeavors. The students who can maintain a façade of perfection throughout college are often burnt out by the time they graduate. When I have conversations with capable students about their graduate school prospects, very bright students often tell me they need a break and they just can't even think about more education. What many of them don't realize is that the burnout they feel often begins prior to Union with excessive achievement expectations placed on them by parents, teachers, coaches, or society. If these students can't verbalize another plan than the graduate school path I'm suggesting, I often discuss ways that graduate school is different because of opportunities to prioritize exactly what they want to study and less social inundation. Then, I encourage students to remember that they have been set free from perfectionism and extreme, worldly expectations as my one final effort to encourage them to work heartily for the Lord and revive goals they verbalized early in their collegiate experience. I end these conversations by challenging them to pray about what taking up their cross and following Jesus looks like in the next chapter of their lives rather than quitting school because the expectations of others and themselves led to burnout.

My attempts to Biblically transform students' achievement motivations throughout their experiences in the Psychology department has borne fruit, but I believe Christians need a radical shift in achievement motivation that would hopefully infuse Christian parenting practices so that Christian college students, unencumbered by anxiety and the perfectionism or experiential avoidance that accompanies it, can freely study and produce creative, formative work that truly forms them rather than serving as a means to an end. For freedom, Christ has set many of our students free, but many of them are submitting to yokes of slavery that involve misplaced hopes and worldly expectations of success. If I can identify that these hypotheses I've presented are indeed evidence-based, as some previous research suggests, I can use my clinical knowledge and professional platforms to reach Christian parents and counselors to foster Biblical achievement motivations rather than worldly achievement motivations.

6. A time frame for the completion and a plan for the dissemination of the project.

Date/Date Range	Event
November 2025	Obtain IRB approval for the study
November 2025-March 2026	Gather data
April-May 2026	Analyze data
June 2026	Write the theoretical and research articles and submit them to the Journal of Psychology and Christianity.
September 2026	Submit the abstract to present research at CAPS 2027 conference and the next AACC conference
March 2027	Present research at CAPS
April 2027	Present research at PEW research luncheon

7. A Brief Budget

Item	Cost
Participant compensation for qualitative research (approximately 4 \$50.00 gift cards)	Up to \$200.00
Registration for Christian Association of Psychological Studies Conference (CAPS) 2025 (approximately \$480.00)	Approximately \$480.00
Conference Hotel CAPS (approximately \$800.00)	Approximately \$800.00
Flight to CAPS (I believe it will be in Washington D.C. in 2026)	Approximately \$1,000.00
CAPS meals (\$60.00 per day for 4 days = \$240.00)	Approximately \$240.00
Open Source Publication Fees (remaining \$1780.00)	Approximately \$1780.00
Total (approximate)	\$4500.00

8. Curriculum Vitae

Professional License

State of Tennessee Department of Health

March 2017-present

Licensed Professional Counselor with Mental Health Service Provider designation

License Number LPC0000003847

Education

Ph.D The University of Memphis, Memphis, TN

May 2020

Educational Psychology and Research

School of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Research

M.A. Oral Roberts University; Tulsa, OK May 2013
Christian Mental Health Counseling
Graduate School of Theology and Missions

B.S. Union University; Jackson, TN May 2011
Psychology
Minor: Biology
College of Arts and Sciences

Current Position

Associate Professor July 2022-present
Department of Psychology
College of Arts and Sciences
Union University
Courses I teach: Introduction to Psychology; Behavioral and Cognitive Theories of Learning; Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences; Applied Research; Issues in Psychology and Religion; Psychological Testing and Assessment; Adolescent Development; Adult Development, Child Growth and Development; Social Psychology; Field Research Presentation; Positive Psychology; Advanced General Psychology

Assistant Professor August 2021-July 2022
Department of Psychology
School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Asbury University
Courses taught: Psychology in Everyday Life; Advanced Psychology and Professional Life; Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences; Counseling I; Expressive Therapies

Program Director and Assistant Professor August 2020-May 2021
Psychology Program
School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Lincoln Memorial University
Courses taught: PSYC-100 Introduction to Psychology; PSYC-221 Child, Adolescent Development; PSYC-255 Social Psychology; PSYC-450 Health Psychology; PSYC-460 Counseling Theories and Techniques; PSYC-498 Internship in Psychological Services

Adjunct Instructor of Psychology August 2014-May 2022
Department of Psychology, Union University
Courses taught: PSY-213 Introduction to Psychology; PSY-316 Behavioral/Cognitive Theories of Learning; PSY-324 Child Growth and Development; PSY-338 Issues in Psychology and Religion

Research Experience

Publications

- Carter, M. D. K., & Popplewell, D. C. (2025). A Psychological Reactance Perspective of Social Media Prohibition and Outcomes. *The Family Journal*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10665807251346971>.
- Popplewell, D. C., Carter, M. D. K., and Rainey, K. M. (2025). "I don't think they knew what to tell me." Social media mediation and emerging adult social media outcomes. *The Family Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807251329602>.
- Carter, M. D. K., Blalack, J. L., and King, K. L. (2024). The translation and efficacy of a Christian self-compassion intervention. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*.
- Carter, M. D. K. (2023). The social psychology of masking among undergraduates in a predominantly conservative region. *PS: Political Science and Politics* special issue on COVID-19 and Higher Education, 56(3), 373-376.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096523000185>.
- Carter, M. D. K. (2022). Paths from spiritual support to college self-efficacy in southeastern Christian and southeastern public university students. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research* special issue 4(1): 1-17.
<http://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2022.2>
- Yang, C-c., Carter, M. D. K., Holden, S. M., & Webb, J. J. (2019). Developmentally salient psychosocial characteristics, rumination, and compulsive social media use during the transition to college. *Addiction Research and Theory*, doi:10.1080/16066359.2019.1682137.
- Yang, C-c., Holden, S. M., & Carter, M. D. K. (2018). Social media social comparison and identity distress at the college transition: A dual-path model. *Journal of Adolescence*, 69, doi: j.adolescence.2018.09.007.
- Yang, C-c., Holden, S. M., & Carter, M. D. K. (2018). Social media social comparison of ability (but not opinion) predicts lower identity clarity: Identity processing style as a mediator. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, doi: 10.1007/s10964-017-0801-6.
- Yang, C-c., Holden, S. M., & Carter, M. D. K. (2017). Emerging adults' social media self-presentation and identity development at college transition: Mindfulness as a moderator. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 52, doi: 10.1016.j.appdev.2017.08.006.

Presentations

- Carter, M. D. K. (2024). Christian Self-Compassion. Seminar presented at Christian Association of Psychological Studies Conference. Atlanta, GA.: March, 2024.
- Carter, M. D. K., Blalack, J. L. (2023). The introduction of a Christian self-compassion curriculum. 75-minute workshop presented at American Association of Christian Counseling World Conference. Nashville, TN.: September, 2023.
- Carter, M. D. K., Dean, J., & Miller-Eschlemann, M. (2022). A path from spiritual abuse to attachment to God: Adult attachment as a mediator. Poster presented at Christian Association of Psychological Science Convention. Louisville, KY.: April, 2022.
- Carter, M. D. K., & Blalack, J. L. (2021). Spiritual modeling and perspective-taking in the discipleship of emerging adults. 75-minute workshop presented at American Association of Christian Counseling World Conference. Orlando, FL.: September, 2021.
- Walden, L., Carter, M. D. K., & Carmack, R. (2021). Harm Reducing A-CRA Implementation Decreases Truancy and Disciplinary Action. Paper presented at National Association of School Psychologists Conference. Virtual.: February, 2021.
- Carter, M. D. K., & Yang, C-c. (2019). A path to compulsive social media use: Social media social comparison as a moderator. Poster presented at American Association of Christian Counseling World Conference. Nashville, TN.: October, 2019.
- Carter, M. D. K., & Yang, C-c. (2018). A path to compulsive social media use: Entrapment as a mediator, gender as a moderator. Poster presented at Society for Research on Adolescence. Minneapolis, MN.: April, 2018.
- Carter, M. D. K., Yang, C-c., & Holden, S. M. (2017). Loneliness, entrapment, and compulsive social media use: A path model. Presented at Society for Studies of Emerging Adulthood. Washington, D. C.: November, 2017.

Counseling Experience

Private Practice

August 2017-present

Provide individual and family counseling.

School Based Liaison for At Risk Youth

October 2014-January 2016

Parkview Learning Center, alternative school

Jackson Madison County School System in partnership with Pathways Behavioral Health services, an affiliate of West Tennessee Healthcare
Conduct intakes, individual counseling, and group counseling.

Supervisor of Program Implementation

January 2015-January 2016

Treatment and Recovery for Youth Initiative, State of Tennessee in partnership with Pathways Behavioral Health Services, an affiliate of West Tennessee Healthcare
As part of a clinical research trial, support staff by continually monitoring implementation of the Adolescent Community Reinforcement approach to ensure fidelity to the model. Instruct clinicians on how to use the Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach effectively with a variety of presenting problems. Assist research evaluator by relaying intake, assessment, and discharge information. Participate in state and federal compliance visits. Maintain contact with stakeholders.

Program Counselor

June 2013-January 2016

Treatment and Recovery for Youth Initiative, State of Tennessee in partnership with Pathways Behavioral Health Services, an affiliate of West Tennessee Healthcare
As part of a clinical trial, implement individual, caregiver, and family therapy consistent with the Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach.

Professional Memberships

Christian Association for Psychological Studies
American Association of Christian Counselors