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Gaps in Motivation Research

- *Established* theoretical frameworks
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- Established theoretical frameworks

“Theory can blind observation.”

Carol Gilligan
*In a Different Voice*
Gaps in Motivation Research

- Established theoretical frameworks
- Almost exclusively quantitative
Gaps in Motivation Research

- Established theoretical frameworks
- Almost exclusively quantitative
- Problems are *re*searcher defined
Purpose

- To involve high school students in the research process to understand motivation

What should researchers study to understand motivation at your school?
Participants

- 209 high school students
- Enrolled in General Psychology or Advanced Placement Psychology

School A ($n=57$)
- Lexington
- 2,233 students
- 64% White, 22% African American (6% H, 6% A)
- 30% free/reduced lunch

School B ($n=101$)
- Northern KY, Cincinnati area
- 1,543 students
- 91% White (2% AA, 4% H, 2% A)
- 18% free/reduced lunch

School C ($n=51$)
- Cincinnati suburb
- 1,146 students
- 95% White (2% A, 1% H, 1% AA)
- 8% free/reduced lunch
Method

Data Source

Student Survey
  ✤ Four open-ended questions
  ✤ Rating scale: 31 school related topics
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Analyses
Qualitative
- Start-list of codes
- First-level codes grouped by theme
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Analyses

Qualitative
- Start-list of codes
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Quantitative
- Descriptive statistics ($M$, $SD$)
RESULTS
Physical Climate
Social Climate
Academic Climate

Rewards
Punishments

Social Use
Educational Use
Unspecified

Relationships
Teacher Attitude
Teaching Behaviors

Dress Code
Student Choice
Unspecified

Course Availability
Relevance of School Work
Interesting / Boring Material
Nature of Work Assigned
Amount of Work Assigned
Grading Scale

Start / End Time
Freedom to Come and Go
Class Scheduling
Study Hall / Free Time

Scholarships
Smoking
College
“Nothing”
Climate/Environment
- Physical Climate
- Social Climate
- Academic Climate

Reinforcements
- Rewards
- Punishments

Technology
- Social Use
- Educational Use
- Unspecified

Teachers
- Relationships
- Teacher Attitude
- Teaching Behaviors

Freedom
- Dress Code
- Student Choice
- Unspecified

Academic
- Course Availability
- Relevance of School Work
- Interesting / Boring Material
- Nature of Work Assigned
- Amount of Work Assigned
- Grading Scale

Structure of School Day
- Start / End Time
- Freedom to Come and Go
- Class Scheduling
- Study Hall / Free Time

Miscellaneous
- Scholarships
- Smoking
- College
- "Nothing"

Other
Q1:

“If you could give any idea to the principal of this school for one thing that could be changed to improve student motivation at this school, what would it be?”
Results: Q1

To make the **school start at a later time**. It’s hard to be motivated when you can’t get enough sleep.

**Top Five Themes**
1. **Structure of Day**
2. **Academic**
3. **Reinforcement**
4. **Climate**
5. **Technology**
6. **Teachers**

**Being guided and able to take more classes that relate to the career you want to have.**
Q2:

“What would make you more motivated in school?”

Q3:

“What would make students at this school motivated?”
Results: Q2 and Q3

More opportunities to work in applying what I'm learning in classes, such as hands on work, or, for example, research projects at our school.

Receive more recognition for the challenging classes you take.

I would be more motivated if the school offered more incentives for students getting good grades and taking harder classes.

Top Five Themes
1. Academic
2. Reinforcement
3. Structure of Day
4. Teachers
5. Climate
Q4:

“What questions do you want answered about your school?
Results: Q4

Why can't you add some interesting classes?

I want to know why some students cannot enter harder classes to better their education when they are denied that right by a simple test score.

Why can't we use technology to take notes?

Why do we have to learn things we will not use in the future?

Why do we still have old computers and why do we seem to be behind on technology?

Top Five Themes
1. Academic
2. Structure of Day
3. Climate
4. Technology
5. Other
Results: Rating Scale Responses

Which topics are most important to research in your high school?
Results: Top Five Responses

Which topics are most important to research in your high school?

1. Student choice and freedom \((M = 5.06)\)*

2. Attitudes and motivation of high school teachers \((M = 4.93)\)

3. Relevance of what is taught in high school to students’ lives \((M = 4.88)\)

4. Motivation to choose a certain college or career \((M = 4.83)\)

5. Motivation to choose a college major or job \((M = 4.82)\)
Discussion and Next Steps
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Connection between results and prominent theories

- Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986)
- Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002)
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Motivation in different high school contexts (e.g., lower SES, greater ethnic diversity, rural areas)
Discussion and Next Steps

Connection between results and prominent theories

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Motivation in different high school contexts (e.g., lower SES, greater ethnic diversity, rural areas)

Student perspectives should be shared with staff
Limitations

- Do students know what is best for them?
- Might students’ interests be short-term?
- How can researchers best understand high school motivation?
Thank you!

Visit our lab at
http://p20motivationlab.org

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