

## CHAPTER 1

# The Journey Begins

Thanks for picking up our book! The fact that you are starting it must mean that you are interested in people's motivation and either want to learn more about it or think about ways you can study it. Motivation is something we all recognize: We know what it feels like when we are motivated—and when we are not. As psychologists who study people's motivation, we strive to answer fundamental questions such as: Why do people do what they do? What moves individuals to action? We investigate the personal (biological and psychological), social, and cultural influences on people's choices of what to do. Psychologists also distinguish among different kinds of motivation. We have studied many of these issues, but much of our work has focused on achievement motivation, the motive to do tasks in different areas when standards of evaluation are in play.

So why this book and why now? Jacque and Allan have worked together for 45 years to test and refine our expectancy-value model of achievement choice, so we relish the opportunity to describe what we believe we have accomplished theoretically and empirically “all in one place.” As the two senior authors begin to wind down what we have to say regarding the model, we are pleased to have Sandi and Fani coauthor the book with us, bringing the perspectives of subsequent generations of scholars who base their work on the model to the fore. Their work has focused on the socialization aspects of the model—Sandi focused on parents and Fani on teachers—and each brings incredible methodological skills to their work.

Another reason for the book is to address concerns that the motivation field is “stuck” theoretically. In 2024 our colleague Reinhard Pekrun stated that the motivation field is experiencing theoretical

stagnation, given that several theories have dominated the field since the 1970s and 1980s. More recently, our colleagues Kou Murayama and Luise von Keyserlingk (2026) stated that contemporary theories of motivation are, in fact, rather old and thus not very contemporary at all. They argued that these theories often fail to address the antecedents of key constructs or to specify the processes linking constructs to one another and to important outcomes. By contrast we think there have been important theoretical advances in the motivation field during that period—situative approaches, complex dynamic systems models, and more attention paid to unconscious compared with conscious motivational processes, to name some that we will consider in this book. And in terms of our own work, one goal of this book is to convince you that Jacque’s expectancy–value theory, renamed situated expectancy–value theory (SEVT) by Jacque and Allan in 2020 (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), is nimble and fresh enough to incorporate these newer perspectives. Indeed, advocates of Eccles et al.’s expectancy–value theory continue to develop responses to new challenges in motivational science, including a stronger emphasis on situated perspectives, the integration of culturally responsive lenses, and the incorporation of methodological innovations. We and other related scholars also specify the antecedents of SEVT’s core constructs more clearly, and attend more and more to processes involved in the development of children’s expectancies and task values and then their relations to other key constructs and outcomes. We believe that the theory’s longevity is due in part to this capacity for adaptation and elaboration, as well as the truth of the basic underlying theoretical frames. Thus we think the theory remains vibrant in the second quarter of the 21st century and beyond. We present new figures here to illustrate how the theory continues to evolve. We will return to this discussion in other chapters in the book.

### **Developing the Expectancy–Value Model and How We Collaborate**

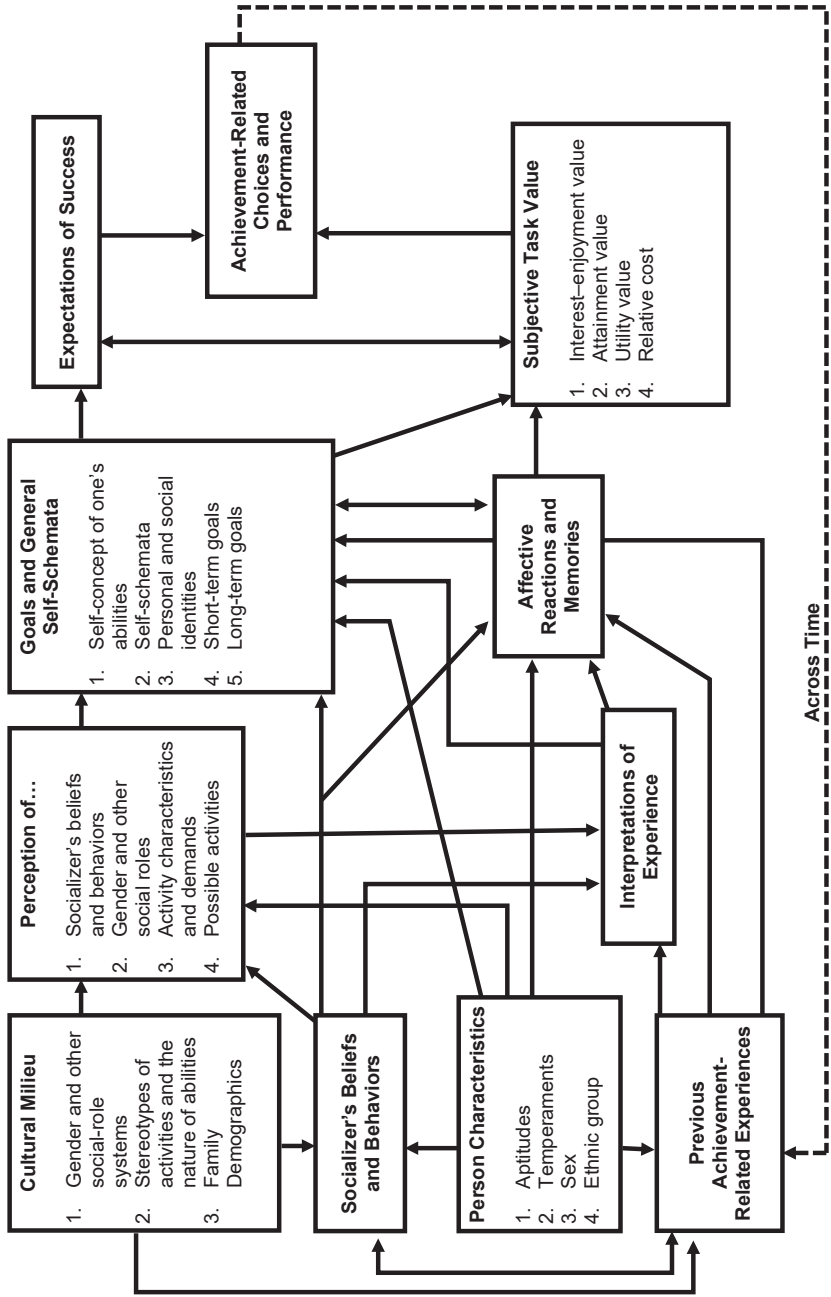
Motivation has long been a central topic in psychology. Researchers have developed different theories to try to explain the nature of motivation and how it operates. In the early 1980s, and building on the prior work of Jack Atkinson, David McClelland, Albert Bandura, Bernard Weiner, and Norman Feather, Jacque Eccles (then named Jacque Eccles-Parsons) and her colleagues developed an expectancy–value, developmental, and social-cognitive model of achievement-related task choice and performance; this model became known as Eccles’s expectancy–value theory (EEVT). Jacque and her colleagues proposed that people’s choices of

what achievement-related tasks to do are guided by how well they think they can do various activity options both now and in the future (relative expectancies for success) and the incentives or reasons they have for either engaging in or avoiding specific achievement-related tasks or activities (subjective task values [STVs]). These two foundational belief systems were assumed to interact in complex ways to determine people's preferred task hierarchies, choices, and, ultimately, their actions. Jacque and colleagues (Eccles [Parsons] et al., 1983) described a variety of cultural, socialization, psychological, and biological factors that influence individuals' expectancies and STVs throughout their lifespan. Figure 1.1 presents the graphical version of the model we have used in our work. We are gratified to say that EEVT has been quite influential and has guided much research on people's achievement-related activity and task choices.

Over the years, we have adapted the theory to account for various research findings in our work, findings of others, and new positions or foci that have emerged in the field. One of the most significant changes occurred in 2020 when Jacque and Allan decided to rename the theory the *situated* expectancy–value theory (SEVT) to emphasize (in line with other work, e.g., Nolen, 2020) that people's decisions are shaped and constrained by the situations in which they find themselves rather than being driven solely by personal characteristics and attitudes. SEVT further highlights the complexity of how people's expectancies and STVs develop over time as well as how hierarchies of expectancies and STVs emerge across the different activity domains they encounter.

### **A Personal Approach**

Because we have worked together for so many years (Jacque and Allan, 45 years; Jacque and Sandi, 25 years; Jacque and Fani, 17 years; Allan and Sandi, 10 years; Allan and Fani, 5 years, and counting), we decided to take an autobiographical approach throughout the book. In Chapter 2, we tell our personal stories about how we became interested in studying motivation, the various influences on our thinking, and how we came together as collaborators. We also describe our career paths together and apart to date. In the final chapter, we tell you what is next for each of us. We think this approach brings our collaborations to life in ways that simply describing our theory development and research efforts would not. We hope that our stories provide guidance for younger colleagues. It is relatively unusual for researchers in our field to work together for so long—how did we do it? How have our collaborations changed as we all advanced through our careers? Stay tuned to find out!



**FIGURE 1.1.** Eccles (Parsons) et al.'s 1983 model of achievement-related choices and performances.

### **Major Research Issues We Have Addressed**

Turning to the work itself, the theory has guided much research on diverse topics such as these:

1. The extent to which individuals' expectancies and STVs guide and predict their activity choices, subsequent engagement, and performance in different achievement-related domains, in both the short and long term.
2. The ways in which individuals' expectancies and STVs take shape and change over time.
3. The extent to which life changes, such as school and other life transitions, influence changes in individuals' expectancies and STVs.
4. The ways in which parents' beliefs about their children's abilities, their own values for their children's education and skill development, the opportunities they provide, and the ways they interact with their children during activities influence children's developing expectancies and STVs? We are excited to draw attention to the detailed parent socialization model that Jacque and colleagues developed, which has guided studies by Sandi, Fani, Jenny Fredericks, Leslie Guttman, Rena Harold, and many others. This is currently the most elaborate and specific model in the literature explaining how parents socialize their children's motivation and how children's characteristics, in turn, influence their parents.
5. The ways in which characteristics of schools, classrooms, and other learning environments and educational practices influence individuals' developing expectancies and STVs.
6. The ways in which SEVT explains achievement-related choices people make at different phases of their lives.
7. The kinds of effects motivation interventions based on SEVT have on different outcomes in the short and long term.

We have addressed each of these questions in our research, which is the primary focus of what we discuss in this book. We present in detail the rationale for the design of and the results from four major longitudinal studies we conducted as well as the many other studies in which each of us has been involved. Our studies remain the only ones in the world to take such a long-term, longitudinal perspective on the development of motivation. Of course, we discuss other people's basic and applied research grounded in EEVT/SEVT. However, we do not attempt a systematic review of this research because the book's primary purpose is to capture

the constructs in the model, their relations, and their influence on decision making across different cultural contexts. This is a conceptual book, not a systematic review. It is also methodologically forward-looking, as we provide many examples of the complex methodologies now available to researchers for nuanced analyses of the questions we pose.

### **Our Key Themes**

We emphasize several key points and themes throughout the book.

1. **Culture permeates the entire model.** The model was originally developed to explain and understand a cultural phenomenon: Why aren't females as likely to take advanced high school math and seek out careers in STEM as males? By extension, the model can be very helpful for understanding other such cultural phenomena, and we give examples throughout the book. In fact, the model is grounded in both individual and group differences (with an initial focus on gender), embedded in cultural context and phenomena, and—because we are psychologists—focused on individual agency. A fundamental broad issue the model addresses is how culture or cultures “get inside different people's heads” and then motivate their behavior and subsequent choices.

2. **Choices are not made in a vacuum and are hierarchical.** By “hierarchies” we mean the ways in which people organize their beliefs and values regarding an array of different activity/task options available to them; for example, I am good at math and like it but not so good at English and don't like it. We were not so much interested in examining the source of individual differences in a single choice based on expectations of success and STVs in a single domain. We are most interested in understanding the origins and consequences of within-person decisions to choose one option rather than another. Yet, researchers have tended to look at interindividual differences in the likelihood of one specific choice, like STEM. We hope this book changes that approach.

3. **The model is inherently complex and recursive** rather than linear and static. We emphasize the model's complexity and how it still makes clear predictions about how individuals' activity choices influence their subsequent performance. Our new graphic representations of the model will help establish these points.

4. **The model is fluid, changeable, and expandable.** Jacque and Allan (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, 2024) pointed out that the constructs included in each box are exemplars, not a final set. They can be expanded to address different issues of interest to the researcher and the field more generally.

For example, the gender-related constructs in the cultural milieu were intended to illustrate cultural issues, not to delimit the range of issues that could be considered. We will elaborate on the model's applicability across cultures and groups and have already written about this (e.g., Matthews & Wigfield, 2024; Starr, Tulagan, et al., 2022; Tonks et al., 2018). We will also expand our discussion of achievement emotions, which are included in the affective memories box without much elucidation.

**5. The roles of culture, family, and education extend to the very heart of our idea of choice.** We believe individuals learn which activities and tasks are included in the set of options available to them from these major sources of external influence. One is very unlikely to decide to become a rugby player or belly dancer if such activities are not played in one's culture or one's social groups.

**6. Personal expectations, outcome expectations, and task-related beliefs all influence individuals' activity choices.** In keeping with a key distinction made by Bandura (1977), we view both personal and outcome expectations as central to the social-cognitive processes discussed in this book. Personal expectations are beliefs about one's capability to successfully perform the actions required for a particular task. Outcome expectations are beliefs about the consequences that are likely to follow from performing a given action. We also consider beliefs about task characteristics, including perceived task difficulty and task procedural beliefs—"if-then" knowledge that individuals acquire about how achievement tasks work in practice. We discuss how these beliefs influence activity choices.

**7. Social and personal identities and their formation are key to achievement-related activity/task choices.** We did not stress this aspect of motivated behavioral choices when we began this academic journey. But it has become increasingly clear to us that these kinds of identities are critical for understanding choice. We differentiate between personal and social identities as those to which a person attaches great importance and meaning. For example, a person may indicate "Black" on demographic forms without experiencing this group membership as a particularly salient aspect of self or may experience being Black as one of the most central and defining aspects of who they are. We view social identities as central to one's sense of belonging, whereas personal identities are central to one's sense of uniqueness.

### **The Organization of This Book**

Before describing the book's contents, let us give you some writing conventions we use:

1. We use the abbreviation SCA for *self-concept of ability* and STVs for *subjective task values* throughout the book.
2. We think the model has lifespan applications, so we will use the terms “individuals” and “actors” to characterize people, not just children and adolescents.
3. Because of our autobiographical approach, when we refer to and cite our own work in the text, we will often use our first names and the first names of our main contributing authors to the articles and chapters.

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 tells our intellectual stories, relevant aspects of our personal stories, and how we came to work together. This chapter also describes the intellectual roots of our work and the different areas of expertise we brought to it. Chapter 3 describes the original development of the model by Jacque and colleagues in the late 1970s and early 1980s. We describe what led to the model and its initial conceptual and graphical depictions, including both the overall model and a model that elaborates on the family socialization aspects included in it. Chapter 4 presents our rationale for renaming the theory to SEVT, setting the stage for the next chapters that elucidate the model's constructs and present research findings on them. Chapter 5 provides an overview of how we consider culture in the model. We include it in the first part of this book to make our case that culture infuses every aspect of the model; as Jacque and Allan put it in 2020, “SEVT is situationally specific and culturally bound” (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020, p. 2).

The next five chapters focus on what we call the psychological or agentic section of the model. This part of the model is grounded in social-cognitive frameworks such as those of Bandura (1986), the attribution theory of Fritz Heider (1958) and Bernard Weiner (1985), the meaning-making perspectives of Oyserman and colleagues (Oyserman et al., 2017), and historical needs-based motivational theories. It is also grounded in broad theories of human agency as well as in concepts and identity formation from thinkers like Piaget, Vygotsky, and Erikson. We begin this section with chapters on parts of the model that have not been fully explored. In Chapter 6, we discuss how various characteristics of children—aptitudes, temperament, personality, physical attributes, and gender—influence actors' developing expectancies and STVs. Chapter 7 covers three of the boxes in the original model: (1) how individuals interpret the information/outcomes they receive; (2) how they interpret feedback and reactions from the important socializers in their lives; and (3) their task, their affective reactions to both of those things.

We then turn to a detailed discussion of the “foundational” constructs in the model. In Chapter 8, we discuss SCAs and other

self-schemata (notably identity, expectancies for success, perceptions of task difficulty, and goals for achievement). Chapter 9 covers arguably the most innovative part of the model initially: the elaboration and differentiation of the task value construct. In Chapter 10, we discuss the interweaving of individuals' expectancies and STVs in predicting their choices (at multiple levels), engagement, self-regulation, and performance. We are excited about the new methodologies and statistical packages that allow for a much richer exploration of these relations than was possible when we started this work.

The next chapters describe the model's socialization components. Like Bronfenbrenner (1979), we conceptualize the socialization of motivation as occurring in nested spheres of influence. Chapter 11 focuses on the family socialization model that Jacque and colleagues developed; that model describes direct, indirect, and reciprocal influences on the development of their children's motivation. Chapter 12 focuses on schools as general socializing institutions and skill-training settings; due to space limitations, we focus primarily on our own work on schooling. We examine teachers as specific socializers of students' motivation and describe how motivation changes across various school transitions. We revisit the notion of *stage-environment fit* that Jacque and Carol Midgley introduced and emphasize its importance for optimizing students' motivation in school. We also introduce work on teachers' own motivations, a relatively new area of research for the model on which Fani and her colleagues are working. Last but certainly not least, we discuss activity settings outside of school and the associated adults/coaches/mentors where skills are taught and learned and where individuals' motivation is affected. Finally, Chapter 13 focuses on the large and still-growing body of intervention work based on the model that has occurred over the last 15 years. These studies provide an interesting set of tests of the model's theoretical assumptions.

The concluding chapter summarizes key points we think and hope we have established regarding the work emanating from the model as well as the continued viability of the theory. We note key issues that researchers interested in the model should focus on in the coming years and make recommendations for how to address them using the increasingly sophisticated methodological tools we now have. We tell you what comes next for each of us in our life stories.

We are excited to provide you with this comprehensive overview of the model and issues to address moving forward. We hope you find it interesting, important, and useful for your own work.