

# Abstract

This 2-part study examined the pursuit of self-improvement goals with the following sequence in a proposed model: personality factors predict the reasons why people pursue their goals, which in turn predict goal outcomes, and these goal outcomes predict psychological well-being. At the first session, 166 participants completed assessments of their personality and well-being, specified a major self-improvement goal they wanted to pursue and the reasons for pursuing it. They also generated 5 subgoals they could pursue over the next month that would get them closer to achieving the major self-improvement goal. Four weeks later, participants returned to complete follow-up questions about their subgoals and their well-being. Results showed that pursuing goals for oneself is predicted by different personality variables and predict different goal outcomes than pursuing goals for one's close relationships. Results also indicated significant Sex X Reason interaction effects.

# Be All You Can Be

## Personality and Motivation Factors that Predict Self-Improvement



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### Introduction

Several of the current theorists in social psychology suggest that the best reasons for pursuing goals are those that enhance a person's autonomy (i.e., those that reflect a person's core beliefs and interests). However, people can also pursue goals for reasons that are integrated with close others' interests, and therefore are in the interest of one's close relationships. *Relationally-autonomous reasons* (or *RARs*) are defined as reasons for pursuing goals that reflect the interest of oneself and a close other. In a series of models, previous research has shown that people who define themselves based on social connections tend to pursue their goals for relationally-autonomous reasons, and that RARs predict the amount of effort exerted and progress made toward the goal. These associations were significant controlling for *personally-autonomous reasons* (or *PARs*, which reflect the degree to which the goal promotes the person's beliefs and interests). The objectives for the current study are to apply RARs to a clinical setting. Specifically, the current study examines the effectiveness of RARs for subgoal attainment for self-improvement goals. Often times, clients who come in for therapy are encouraged to identify a major goal that they want to accomplish, and subsequent therapy sessions involve realizing smaller, obtainable subgoals. The current study tests the hypothesis that personality factors predict the reasons why people pursue their goals, which in turn predicts goal outcomes, and these goal outcomes predict psychological well-being (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Proposed Model



### Method

#### Participants and Procedure

166 undergraduate students (33 males, 128 females, 5 unspecified) signed up for two sessions (4 weeks apart). During the first session of the study participants completed a questionnaire that asked them about their personality and well-being. Next, they described a major life goal that they wanted to achieve within the next five years. They were then instructed to list of five subgoals that they could realistically achieve within the next four weeks that would get them closer to their major life goal. Next, they were asked to rate statements pertaining to the reasons why they were pursuing the major goal (their PARs and RARs). At the second session, they completed a follow-up assessment of their well-being, and the outcomes of their subgoals.

#### Materials

- Personality Traits**
  - Big 5 Personality Traits, Relational Self-Construal, Independent Self-Construal
- Psychological Well-Being**
  - Self-Esteem, Life Satisfaction, Purpose in Life, Relational Esteem, Positive Relations with Others, Stress, Depression
- Goal Reasons**
  - Personally-Autonomous Reasons, Relationally-Autonomous Reasons
- Goal Outcomes**
  - Effort, Progress, Support, Authenticity, Future Effort
  - Note: Items were dependent on whether or not the subgoal was attained

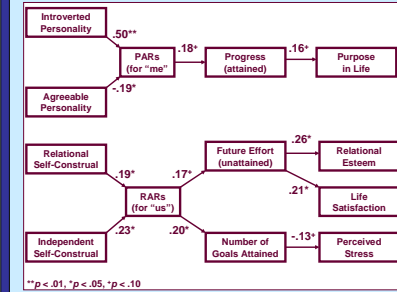
### Results

A series of linear regression analyses were conducted to test the proposed model (see Figure 2). Results showed that socially-oriented individuals pursue goals using RARs, which in turn predicted goal attainment and perseverance, enhancing their life satisfaction and relational esteem, and lowering their stress levels.

People who are less socially-oriented (introverted and low in agreeableness) were more likely to endorse personal reasons for self-improvement, which in turn predicted satisfaction with how they progressed toward their attained goals, which enhanced their sense of purpose.

Results from these analyses also showed four significant Sex X Reason interaction effects predicting goal outcomes for unattained subgoals (see Figure 3).

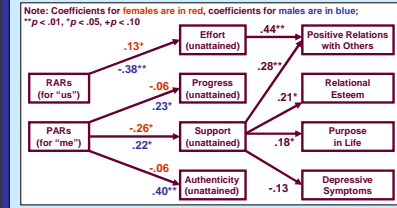
### Figure 2. Model Results



### Personally-Autonomous Reasons (Self-Improvement for "Me")



### Figure 3. Sex X Reason Effects



### Relationally-Autonomous Reasons (Self-Improvement for "Us")



### Implications

This is the initial study in a research program that will investigate self-improvement using RARs, which has not yet been examined extensively in either the social psychology or clinical psychology literature. These results have implications for any self-improvement context, including psychotherapy, rehabilitation, or health programs. Future studies will investigate the influence of RARs in each of these contexts.