

## Abstract

The experiment tests the moderating effects of personality (i.e., attachment style and gender) on academic goal motivation and attainment. The participants were 56 undergraduate students at Eastern Kentucky University who received one-half credit for each session completed of this two-part study. During the first session, the participants completed personality assessments and reviewed a pamphlet that either recommended pursuing goals for oneself (the "Me" Condition) or for a close relationship (the "Us" Condition). They then set a study habit goal and created a schedule for when they planned to work towards it over the next 7 days. One week later, participants reported the level of goal attainment online. We found that men plan to work on their goal more than women. We also found that people with an avoidant attachment style report more progress on their goal when in the "Us" condition than when they were in the "Me" condition. Through a three way interaction, we found secure females in the "Me" condition reported more progress than avoidant females in the same condition. Also, avoidant females report more progress in the "Us" condition than in the "Me" condition.

# Develop Better Study Habits!

## The Role of Gender and Attachment Style in Academic Goal Pursuit



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### Introduction

#### Personal versus Relational Reasons for Goals

People work towards goals for different reasons. Obtaining goals is directed by different types of motivation. According to Gore and Cross (2006), people can be motivated by personally-autonomous reasons or relationally-autonomous reasons. Personally-autonomous reasons (PARs) are focused on the needs of the individual (pursuing the goal for "me"), whereas relationally-autonomous reasons (RARs) are focused on the needs of one's close relationships. RARs lead to more motivation in goal attainment than personally autonomous reasons.

#### Sex Differences in Motivation

The differences in the reasons for goals, whether one is focusing on the individual or focusing on the individual in a close relationship with another, may create sex differences in the type of motivation for that individual. Women are likely to define themselves in terms of their relationships involving close others. Men tend to focus more on their own qualities, attributes, and abilities than their relationships. We hypothesize that men will have more successful goal attainment when using PARs rather than RARs. In contrast, women will have better goal attainment with RARs than with PARs.

#### Attachment Style Differences in Motivation

Attachment style can also have an effect on how a person involves close others in their goals. Secure types are more confident and comfortable in their relationships with others due to having caring and responsive parents, whereas anxious types are less confident and are worried about losing the other person in the relationship, and avoidant types are prone to withdrawing from close others. People with secure attachment styles have more positive views toward their relationships than people with non-secure attachment styles (anxious/ambivalent and avoidant). This supports the belief that secure people will be more successful than non-secure people (anxious/ambivalent and avoidant combined) in attaining goals that incorporate their close relationships. This leads to the prediction of this study's results to be hypothesized that secure attachment style people will be more successful in attaining goals using RARs than non-secure attachment style people.

### Method

#### Participants

Participants were 56 undergraduate students enrolled in a psychology class at Eastern Kentucky University. Students received credit for their course participation. They were randomly assigned to an experimental condition, either the personally-autonomous ("Me") condition or relationally-autonomous ("Us") condition. To assure random assignment, a coin was flipped to decide the condition for the first experiment of the week. Following that experiment, the next ones were the opposite condition of the previous study.

#### Materials

**Gender:** Participants indicated their gender by circling M or F on the questionnaire.

**RISC Scale:** Participants completed a RISC scale, containing questions such as "My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am". The mean score determined if the participant is Hazan and Shaver independent.

**Attachment Style:** Participants completed a nominal Attachment Style scale created by Hazan and Shaver (1987). Participants read each scenario then placed a check mark next to the one that best describes the typical relationship in their life. This nominal data determined what attachment style each participant has.

**Experimental Conditions:** Pamphlets contained the experimental conditions on them, explaining to participants to use personally autonomous reasons or relationally autonomous reasons with their goal attainment. Two different pamphlets were used, including one labeled "Follow Your Own Heart" for personally autonomous reasons and one labeled "We're In This Together" for relationally autonomous reasons. The pamphlets were changed to focus around a specific goal of developing better study habits, instead of focusing on goals in general.

**Goal Attainment:** A blank schedule was distributed that showed a full week. This schedule was used to examine the amount of time that the participant planned to spend towards obtaining the goal. The schedule began with the day immediately following the experiment. A week after the study was conducted, participants will complete a questionnaire about the effort exerted towards the goal. For instance, statements such as "I was very committed to this goal" or "I found myself 'slacking off' when I worked on this goal" were rated by the participants. It also asked about the actual amount of time the participant spent towards the goal.

#### Procedure

At the first session, participants indicated their gender and completed the RISC scale. Next they completed the attachment style scale. After everyone completed both surveys, they were then randomly assigned to receive either the pamphlet that emphasizes goal attainment for the self, or for close relationships (see pamphlets below). Then they were asked to think of a study goal that they would like to improve that is suitable to work toward over one week. Once all participants had created a study goal, they were asked to record the goal on the pamphlet's inside middle column under a statement that emphasizes the manipulation. After the goal was set, participants then completed the schedule of hours planned to work towards their goal over the next week. The second session was conducted online through the SONA-Systems Program one week after the first session, in which participants completed the outcome assessment questionnaire.

### Personally-Autonomous Reasons ("Me" Condition)



### Relationally-Autonomous Reasons ("Us" Condition)



Figure 1. Gender X Reason Interaction Effect

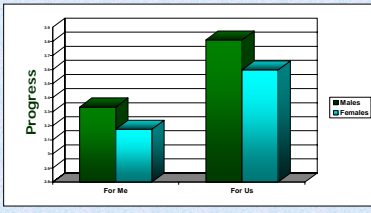
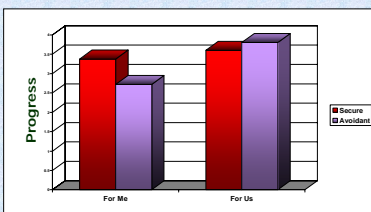


Figure 2. Attachment X Reason Interaction Effect



## Results

Through a Univariate ANOVA test, it was found that the "Us" condition felt they made more progress towards their goal than the "Me" condition felt,  $M=3.65$  for "Us",  $M=3.23$  for "Me",  $F(1,50)=4.953$ ,  $p=.03$ . On the contrary, it was found that the "Me" Condition spent more hours on the goal than the "Us" condition,  $n$  ( $M=9.65$  for "Me",  $M=6.42$  for "Us",  $F(1,49)=3.696$ ,  $p=.06$ ).

#### Sex X Reason Interaction Effect

In terms of the RISC scale, it was found that both the men and women scored high in defining themselves as relational ( $M=3.98$  for men,  $M=4.05$  for women,  $t(87)=-0.456$ ,  $n.s.$ ). It was also found that men planned to work on their goal for more hours than women, no matter the condition ( $M=16.21$  for males,  $M=12.75$  for females,  $F(1,85)=2.709$ ,  $p=.10$ ).

#### Attachment X Reason Interaction Effect

Due to a low number of anxious attachment style participants, only secure and avoidant were analyzed. Results supported the hypothesis with a moderately significant finding that secure attachment style people scored higher on progress in goal attainment when motivated by the "Us" condition ( $M=3.37$  for "Me", and  $M=3.6$  for "Us",  $F(1,49)=3.598$ ,  $p=.064$ ). However, the same test did not support the hypothesis by finding that avoidant attachment style people scored higher on progress in goal attainment when motivated by the "Us" condition ( $M=2.72$  for "Me", and  $M=3.8$  for "Us",  $F(1,49)=3.598$ ,  $p=.064$ ).

#### Sex X Attachment X Reason Interaction Effect

A post hoc Univariate ANOVA was conducted with Sex, Attachment Style, and Reason Condition as the independent variables, and Time 2 Progress as the dependent variable. Results showed a significant 3-way interaction effect  $F(1,45) = 4.168$ ,  $p = .05$ . Further tests indicated that secure females in the "Me" condition reported more progress than avoidant females in the "Me" condition, and avoidant females reported more progress in the "Us" condition than in the "Me" condition ( $p < .01$ ).

## Implications

The expected results of this experiment have the potential to be applied to any school setting. Specific motivation for the different genders and attachment styles can lead to more effective study habits and to the attainment of academic goals. Professors can consider the gender and attachment style of their students when attempting to motivate them in completing assignments. In addition, students could use these findings to consider whether they should work for themselves or for the sake of their relationships when studying.