

Abstract

Most research on goal conflict and well-being shows that the degree to which goals conflict with each other is detrimental to well-being and goal achievement, and that goal integration is associated with positive well-being and motivation. This association, we argue, depends on the definition of the self. For the current research, two studies examined the degree to which people define the self in terms of close relationships (termed the relational-interdependent self-construal, or RISC) as a buffer that moderates the association between goal conflict and well-being.

Relational Self-Construal, Goal Integration and Well-Being

Jonathan S. Gore

Eastern Kentucky University

Susan E. Cross

Iowa State University

Introduction

The goals people set for themselves are plans for specific actions. Sometimes achieving goals can aid the achievement of other goals. For example, the goal to get pregnant can aid the goal to start a family. Other times, goals can compete and interfere with each other. For example, the goal to "be successful at work" can conflict with the goal to "spend more time with my kids." Most research shows that the degree to which goals conflict with each other is detrimental to one's well-being and goal achievement. Conversely, the degree to which goals are integrated with each other in an overall goal structure is good; it is associated with positive well-being and motivation. This association, we argue, depends on the structure of the self. For some people, having goals that are inconsistent with each other indicates an ability to adapt one's goal structure to fit various social situations and roles. For the current research, we focus on a self-definition based on one's close relationships as an example of a self-structure that can buffer the negative association between goal conflict and psychological well-being.

Study 1 Method and Results

Method

Participants were 222 undergraduates (62 men, 155 women, 5 unspecified) who volunteered in exchange for extra course credit. First, they listed 10 goals that they were either currently working on or ones that they hoped to accomplish sometime in the future, and categorized each goal (e.g., academic, relationship). Next, they completed the measure of goal overlap, in which participants were asked to rate the extent to which the success of each individual goal related to the success of each of the other goals using a 5-point scale. The mean of all of the ratings was obtained to measure Total Goal Overlap. Finally, they completed a questionnaire that assessed relational self-construal (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000) and life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). After data collection, separate calculations were also obtained by calculating the mean overlap ratings between relationship goals and the other goals on the list (Relationship Goal Overlap), and the mean overlap ratings between academic goals with the other goals on the list (Academic Goal Overlap).

Results

We tested the hypothesis by conducting a series of hierarchical regression analyses using Life Satisfaction as the dependent variable. Results revealed significant RISC X Total Goal Overlap (see Figure 1) and RISC X Academic Goal Overlap interaction effects (see Figures 1 and 2). No other results were significant.

Study 2 Method and Results

Method

Participants were 178 undergraduates (59 men, 117 women, 2 unspecified) who participated in exchange for extra course credit. Participants followed the same procedure as in Study 1 except they completed the questionnaire assessing the relational self-construal and life satisfaction before they listed their goals, and the goal list consisted of 7 goals. They then completed a measure of goal dependency instead of a measure of goal overlap. Goal Dependency was measured by asking participants to indicate whether or not failure to achieve individual goals impacts the ability to achieve other goals (0=No, 1=Yes). The impact scores were obtained by counting the number of relationship goals in the ranking slots 1, 2, or 3, and the Academic Rank scores were obtained by counting the number of academic goals in the ranking slots 1, 2, or 3. Thus, the ranking scores measured the number of relationship and academic goals that filled the top three ranked slots, so scores ranged from 0 to 3.

Results

We tested the hypothesis that relational self-construal moderates the relation between goal dependency and well-being by again conducting a series hierarchical regression analyses using Life Satisfaction as the dependent variable. Results revealed significant RISC X Total Dependency and RISC X Academic Goal Dependency interaction effects (see Figures 3 and 4).

To test the hypothesis that relational self-construal moderates the association between goal ranking and well-being we conducted a second series of hierarchical regression analyses using Life Satisfaction as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant RISC X Relationship Rank interaction effect (see Figure 5). There were no other significant interaction effects.

Study 1 Figures

Figure 1

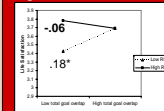
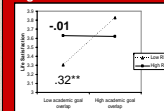


Figure 2



Study 2 Figures

Figure 3

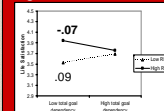


Figure 4

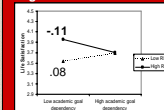
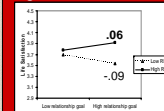


Figure 5



Conclusions

People with a highly relational self-construal displayed a weak relationship between goal integration and life satisfaction, whereas the association for low relationals was stronger. This effect was magnified when only academic goals were examined. High relationals, showed a positive association between ranking relationship goals highly and well-being, whereas low relationals showed a negative association. Thus, integration of goals for high relationals may not be as important to well-being as pursuing and prioritizing self-relevant goals.