

Introduction

It has been found that not all goal pursuit is beneficial for individuals' well-being. Past research has reported that the pursuit of extrinsic goals is associated with maladaptive behaviours and psychological distress, whereas the pursuit of intrinsic life goals is associated with greater well-being (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001).

It is not clear, however, what factors mediate the relationship between goals and well-being. We propose that *self-focused attention* might be one of the mediators that links extrinsic goals with detrimental well-being.

This proposition was tested by manipulating the salience of the two types of life goals and investigating the effect of goal manipulation on behavioural measures of self-focused attention.

We predicted that people who are primed with extrinsic goals will show greater levels of self-focused attention compared to people who are primed with intrinsic goals.

Method

Participants (69 male, 69 female) were asked to write about the “one thing you most want to achieve in your life.” Examples of goals were provided, depending on condition:

Extrinsic priming

“Some people want to be rich; others want to be well-known or even famous; others want to be beautiful.”

Intrinsic priming

“Some people want to have meaningful relationships; others want to contribute to their communities; others seek personal development and growth.”

Measure of self-focused attention

- Sentence Completion

e.g., “All of (our, my, his) answers matched the ones in the back of the book.”

(Wegner & Giuliano, 1983)

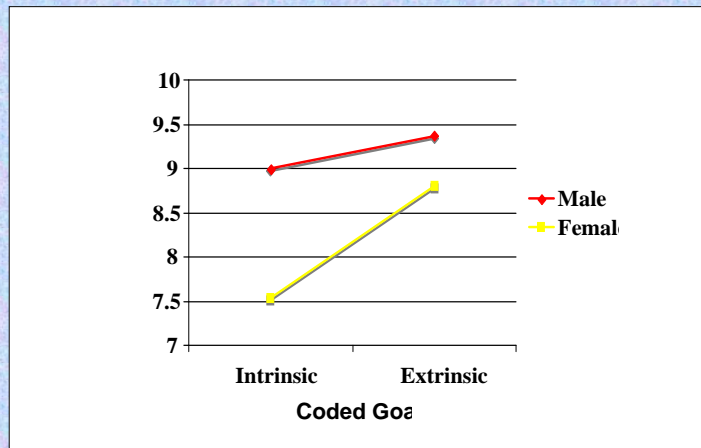
- Target Detection : Participants search for their own or a control initial in small and large letter arrays.

			N	P	
			C	+	K
Y	+	M	H		O
			B	N	

Results

- People who generated extrinsic goals tended to use more first-person singular pronouns, compared to people who generated intrinsic goals.

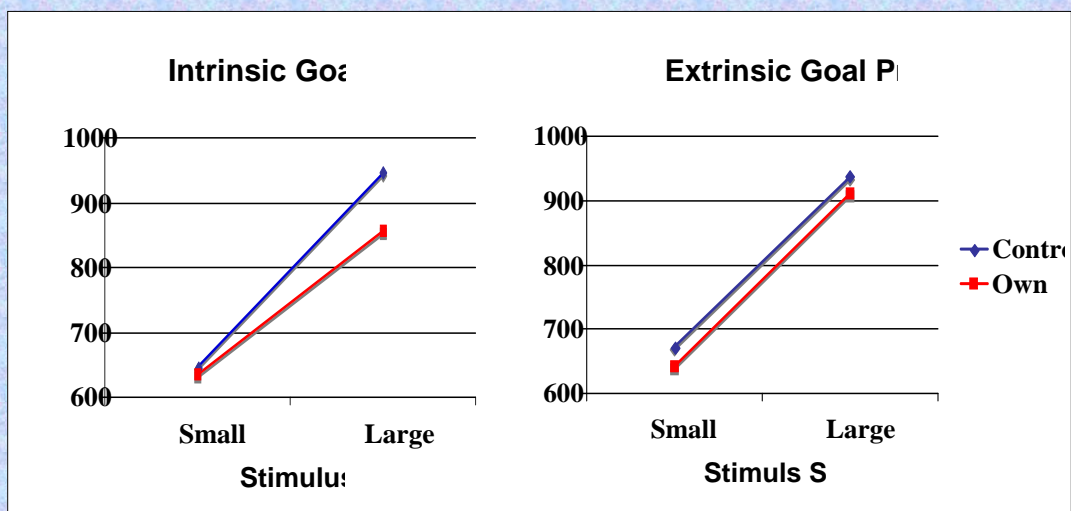
Sentence Completion Task



Generated Goals main effect: $F(1, 121) = 2.31, p < .14$; t-test on female only $t = -2.03, p < .05$.

- People who were primed with intrinsic goals detected their own initials relatively faster, compared to people primed with extrinsic goals

Target Detection Task



Size X Initial X Goal Priming: $F(1, 115) = 5.98, p < .05$

Discussion

- Participants who generated extrinsic goals were more likely to use first-person singular pronouns compared with people who generated intrinsic goals, indicating a link between extrinsic goals and heightened self-focused attention.
- Compared to participants who were primed with extrinsic goals, those who were primed with intrinsic goals showed quicker responses to their own initial, suggesting that intrinsic goal priming induced self-focused attention.
- The latter possibility is also consistent with an effect of intrinsic goals on implicit self-esteem. Distinguishing the attentional and self-esteem interpretations of the target detection task is a goal of ongoing research.

Reference: Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (1993). A dark side of the American-dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 410-422.

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