Article Critique of Interpersonal Goals and Change in Anxiety and Dysphoria in First-Semester College Students

Dana Flanigan

St. Bonaventure University

3/31/11

Research Methods – CE 500-01
**Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to find the associations between interpersonal goals and anxiety and dysphoria. The researchers were influenced by many theoretical perspectives expressing that goals can influence emotional distress, including anxiety and dysphoria. Also, that the reverse could be true, that emotional distress may shape people’s goals. In the present studies, the researchers examined the influence of two interpersonal goals.

The researchers of this study proposed two hypotheses. The first hypothesis, assumed that reduced distress is predicted by compassionate goals because when people have these types of goals, the support they give and receive increases; the distress should reduce, basically, due to the support given. The second hypothesis, assumed that decreased compassionate goals and increased self-image goals are predicted by distress. Within this study, it consisted of two parts that were labeled Study 1 and Study 2.

**Study 1**

**Methods**

Participants

In the first three weeks of the Fall semester, the researchers recruited first-semester college students to partake in the study. They successfully recruited 122 (61.3%) women and 77 (38.7%) men, with a mean age of 18.08 years. From the original sample of 199 students, 194 (97.5%) completed all 12 surveys that were included in this study.

Procedure

Participants completed the pretest survey in person and received instructions for completing the remaining 11 surveys online. After completing all 11 of the remaining surveys, the participants were debriefed and paid for their participation in the study.
Measures
In Study 1, the researchers used pretest and posttest measures, as well as weekly measures. At pretest the participants completed measures of distress (anxiety & dysphoria) and measures of socially desirable responding and demographics. At posttest, the participant’s had to once again complete the measures of distress. To assess anxiety, the researchers used the Spielberger Trait Anxiety Scale. To measure dysphoria, the researchers used the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Inventory. The anxiety measurement and the dysphoria measurement make up the index of distress. To measure social desirability, the researchers used the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale. There were also weekly measures that were conducted. The Compassionate Goals scale was used to measure the compassionate goals of the participants each week of the study. The Self-Image Goals scale was used to measure the self-image related goals that the participants indicated each week of the study. All of the measuring instruments used in this study were found to have a high internal consistency.

Research Design
The research design and methodology of this study was that it was an empirical study and a quantitative study. This study was conducted in the form of two longitudinal studies.

Data Analysis
The researchers used numerous scales throughout this study, but did not indicate what form of instrument was used calculate the measurements. This may have meant that the researchers scored the scales themselves, or by some personal method.

Results & Discussion
The results in Study 1 showed that student’s chronic self-image and compassionate goals predict change in their levels of distress in the first semester of college. Compassionate goals
predicted decreased distress over the semester, and self-image goals predicted increased distress, regardless of whether the outcome was anxiety, dysphoria, or a composite of anxiety and dysphoria. Furthermore, compassionate goals predicted decreased distress, and self-image goals predicted increased distress, regardless of whether the goals were worded as approach goals, avoidance goals, or a composite of the two. Therefore, the associations between compassionate goals and self-image goals and change in distress cannot be explained by the distinction between approach and avoidance goals or promotion and prevention focus.

**Study 2**

**Methods**

Participants

The participants for Study 2, consisted of 115 same-sex first-semester freshmen roommate dyads who did not know each other prior to college, volunteered for a study of goals and roommate relationships during the fall semester.

Each roommate was offered $60 for completing the 12 surveys over the 12 weeks. The participants received $10 for each pretest and posttest completed, $4 for each weekly survey completed, as well as a $40 dollar bonus for completing all 12 surveys.

There were 109 pairs (95%) that completed the pretest, post-test, and at least 8 weekly surveys. The other 6 pairs completed fewer than the 109 pairs however the data was retained and used wherever possible. Of the 115 pairs, 86 (75%) were women. Participants ranged in age from 18-21 years ($M = 18.1$ years, $SD = 0.36$).

Procedure
The participants attended a 1.5 hour session in groups of 1 to 8. The session was designed to teach the participants about the study, to get their informed consent, complete the pre-test survey, as well as to receive instructions for completing the remaining 11 surveys online. The weekly surveys are designed to take roughly about 30 minutes to complete each week. One stipulation is that each roommate completes their survey for the week within of 48 hours of each others. To attain as many participants as possible, they had 11 weeks to complete the 10 weekly surveys. After the roommates completed the 10 weekly surveys, they completed the post-test survey and were paid for their participation.

Measures

At pre-test, post-test, and in each weekly survey, participants completed measures of anxiety and dysphoria, compassionate and self-image goals, and support given to and received from roommates. At pretest, participants completed measures of dysfunctional attitude, validation seeking, and growth seeking. In each weekly survey, participants completed measures of rumination, reflection, reassurance seeking, having clear goals, goal progress, goal setbacks, and goal-related feelings of pressure. The pre-test survey also included demographic questions, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, and parental income.

The Spielberger State Anxiety Scale was used to assess the participant’s anxiety. Dysphoria was measured using the same instrument that was used in Study 1. To measure self-image and compassionate goals, the researchers used a modified version of the two measurements that they had used in Study 1. Social support given to and received from roommates was measured with a modified version of the Multidimensional Survey of Perceived Social Support.
Pretest covariates. The *Dysfunctional Attitudes Scale*, which was included in the pretest survey, assessed cognitive vulnerability to dysphoria, specifically perfectionistic beliefs about achievement, and others approval. An abbreviated version of the Goal Orientation Inventory was used to measure validation seeking and growth seeking. Both the Dysfunctional Attitudes scale and the abbreviated version of the Goal Orientation Inventory had a high internal consistency.

Weekly covariates. The *Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire* was used to assess the rumination and reflection of the participants weekly. The *rumination scale* measured recurrent thinking about the self prompted by threats, losses, or injustices to the self. The *reflection scale* assessed the self attentive thinking motivated by intrinsic interest in abstract or philosophical thinking. Reassurance seeking was also assessed in weekly surveys using the *Reassurance-Seeking scale*. All of the scales used in the weekly covariates had high internal consistencies.

Goal characteristics. The researchers used four single-item measures to assess characteristics of goals that might account for the effects of compassionate and self-image goals on distress: having clear goals, goal progression and setbacks, and goal related pressure.

Research Design

The research design and methodology of this study was that it was an empirical study and a quantitative study. This study was conducted in the form of two longitudinal studies.

Data Analysis

The researchers used numerous scales throughout this study, but did not indicate what form of instrument was used calculate the measurements. This may have meant that the researchers scored the scales themselves, or by some personal method.
Results & Discussion

Chronic compassionate goals predicted decreased distress from pretest to posttest, replicating Study 1. Chronic compassionate goals significantly predicted decreased distress when we controlled for pretest dysfunctional attitudes, validation seeking, or growth seeking, indicating that preexisting levels of these risk factors did not account for associations between chronic goals and change in distress. Self-image goals marginally predicted increased distress even when the researchers controlled for dysfunctional attitudes, growth seeking, or validation seeking that they assessed during the pretest survey. Compassionate goals predicted increases in both support given and support received from pretest to posttest. Self-image goals predicted decreases in support given but not support received.

Conclusion

Limitations

The researchers did not use a measure of compassionate and self-image goals at pretest or post-test in Study 1. Also, the researchers did not assess anxiety and dysphoria weekly. This did not allow the researchers to test whether distress predicts change in goals. However, the reason this limitation was not listed in the conclusion of the researchers, basically, they were able to add it in Study 2.

I believe the design was appropriate for this study. They had countless surveys and scales that were designed to measure numerous significant concepts that helped support their hypotheses. I also thought it was effective the way they set up this study in two longitudinal studies to conduct their findings in a very comprehensive manner.

I enjoyed conducting this article critique, as I always enjoy learning new information and gaining knowledge. However, I would probably not pick an article so complex the next time.
When I chose this article, it looked pretty easy. It was anything but easy, containing an amazing amount of measuring instruments and scales.
References