Social Routes to Self-Regulation

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Interpersonal Influences on Self-Regulation

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Abstract
Since the 1960s, personality and social psychologists have taken major strides toward understanding the interpersonal processes that promote successful self-regulation. The current article reviews insights into the understanding of self-regulation gained by examining the impact of interpersonal processes on the initiation, operation, and monitoring of goals. We review research suggesting that other people can act as triggers of goals, causing people to unconsciously initiate new goal pursuits; that interpersonal interactions can tap self-control, leaving people with depleted resources for goal pursuit; that relationship partners can support goal operation, leading to more effective goal pursuit; and that the social environment can facilitate effective monitoring of one’s extant goal progress and likelihood of future goal achievement.

Keywords
self-regulation, goals, motivation, interpersonal relationships

Imagine a student, Sam, who has a goal of getting into medical school. Empirical research within social and personality psychology has uncovered many psychological processes that influence how likely it is that Sam will achieve his goal (see Baumeister, Schmeichel, & Vøils, 2007, for review). For example, he is likelier to succeed if he is good at forgoing short-term pleasures like watching television or playing Guitar Hero for as mental representations of desired end states, such as losing 20 pounds or earning a promotion.

Interpersonal Influences on Goal Initiation
Certainly people often initiate (i.e., set and activate) goals independently, driven by internal standards and resources. How
Standing Behind Your Man: Powerful Partners & Personal Goal Pursuits
Change in Personal Goals
Power and Personal Self-Regulation

• Powerful people are better goal pursuers, more agentic, more focused, more successful (e.g., Guinote, 2009; Smith et al., 2010)

• They are also more selfish; worse perspective takers

• “The powerful do not need to pay attention because...their fates do not depend on the other” (Fiske, 1993)
Power and Interpersonal Self-Regulation

• Power should lead to less motivation to attend to, please, support, etc., even close relationship partners

• Hypothesis: Low power relationship partners should be likelier to support partner’s goals and pick up partner’s goals, even at expense of own goals, because of these relational motives
Studies 1-3: How does power affect goal contagion?

- Does power affect “goal contagion”?
- Power may affect attention paid to partners and openness to their influence, via motivation to please
- If so, low power individuals more likely to pick up goals from others
Study 1: New Acquaintances

• 189 Ps took part in 4-person group discussions
• One participant was given high power role in future task; others were given low power role
• Unstructured conversation about their academic goals
• Measured perception of others’ goal commitment; measured how “inspired” they were by other’s goal
Study 1 Results

Graph showing the relationship between Goal Contagion and Target Goal, with two lines representing Low Power and High Power conditions.
Study 2

- Study 1 shows low power enhances tendency to explicitly be open to others’ goals
- Why? Relational motive
- Study 2 manipulates whether Ps expect to meet other
- Cognitive measure of goal contagion
Method

• Self-reported comfort with high power
  – I like making decisions for others
  – I like being in a high power role

• Goal contagion manipulation – other participant (whom you will vs. will not meet) prioritizes achievement or social goal
Goal manipulation

- **Stronger on one goal** (e.g., “what I’m really focused on these days is my school work,” “what I’m really trying to do these days is study as hard as I can – work on all my assignments, get ready for all my tests, and just make sure I do well, academically”)

- **Weaker on other goal** (e.g., “I mean, I guess I try not to let my social life suffer too much from this, like I still see my friends and the people I care about, to talk and laugh and have a good time”)
Method

• **DV** = lexical decision task measuring accessibility of social constructs

• **Design:** Power (high, low) x anticipated interaction (pairs, alone) x goal of target (academic, social)

• **Hypothesis:** Low power ps will be more likely to catch goal of other, but only if anticipating interaction
Accessibility of Social Goals When Other is Academically Oriented

![Bar chart showing RT (ms) to Social Goal Words for Low Power and High Power conditions. The chart compares RT for Alone (blue) and Pairs (red) conditions.]
Accessibility of Social Goals When Other is Socially Oriented

**RT (ms) to Social Goal Words**

- **Low Power**
  - Alone: 1100 ms
  - Pairs: 800 ms

- **High Power**
  - Alone: 1000 ms
  - Pairs: 900 ms

Legend:
- Alone
- Pairs
Study 3: Catching partner vs. stranger goals

- Again, if about relational motive, should be stronger for close relationship.

- Measured chronic power in romantic relationship (8 items, \( \alpha = .83 \), adapted from Anderson & Keltner, 2005)
  - “I can get my partner to listen to what I say”
  - “I think I have a great deal of power in my relationship”

- Goal contagion manipulation – target of story is stranger or partner, seeking to earn $.

- Math puzzle task to earn $.
Studies 4 and 5: Prioritizing Partner over Self

- Studies 1-3: Low power, temporary or chronic, predicts greater tendency to adopt others’ goals
- Limited resources (time, energy) for goal pursuit
- Hypothesis: Low-power individuals should prioritize partner’s goals, at expense of own goals
Method

• **T1:** Ps nominated charity important to them and one important to partner

• **T2:**
  – Manipulated thoughts of high or low power
Manipulated thoughts of low or high power:

Please recall a particular incident in your relationship in which your partner had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which your partner had control of your ability to get something you wanted, or was in a position to evaluate you. Please describe this situation in which you did not have power - what happened, how you felt etc. (Examples: not getting to decide whose parents to spend thanksgiving with, not seeing your choice of movie etc.)
• T2 DV: Anagram task in which items pay out money to participant and partner charities
  – # assigned to count toward each
  – Performance on items counting toward each
Power & Prioritizing Self v. Partner

# items assigned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Level</th>
<th>Own Charity</th>
<th>Partner's Charity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Power</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Power</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Own Charity
- Partner's Charity
Power & Performance for Self v. Partner Interests

- Low Power
  - Own Charity: # items completed correctly
  - Partner's Charity: # items completed correctly

- High Power
  - Own Charity: # items completed correctly
  - Partner's Charity: # items completed correctly

*controlling for # assigned
Study 5: Prioritizing partner over self

- Power is a dyadic process
  - How is this tendency affected by partner reports of power?
- 136 heterosexual romantic couples
- Self-reported power by both members of relationship
- DV: Willingness to give up own activities for partner
Power of Both Partners

Giving up Important Goals

- Low Partner Power
- High Partner Power

Low Actor Power  High Actor Power

- Low Actor Power: Low Partner Power
- High Actor Power: High Partner Power
Summary

- Using self-reported and experimentally manipulated power, explicitly, implicitly, and behaviorally measured, in acquaintances, groups, and romantic couples, we find:
  - Low power individuals take on others’ goals more readily and prioritize them above their own goals
  - Appears to be driven by relational motives
Implications

• For goal pursuit
  – Over time, could affect each partner’s level of success

• For relationships
  – Could increase high power partner’s dependence on low power partner
  – Could have cyclical effects, leading to greater disparity over time