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Goal Conflict and Goal Facilitation as Predictors of Daily Accelerometer-assessed Physical Activity

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Abstract

Objective: To test whether perceptions of conflicting and facilitating personal goals, and actual daily time spent in their pursuit, predict accelerometer-assessed physical activity (PA). **Methods:** A prospective multi-level design with a daily accelerometer-based assessment of PA over one week was used ($N=106$). Participants' personal goals were elicited using personal projects analysis. Participants then rated their personal goals in terms of how they were perceived to facilitate and conflict with their regular PA. Items assessing PA-specific intention and perceived behavioral control (PBC) were also embedded within the baseline measures. For the subsequent seven consecutive days, participants completed a daily diary based on the day reconstruction method, indicating the time spent in daily episodes involving each of their personal goals, and wore an RT3 tri-axial accelerometer. The main outcome was accelerometer-assessed daily time spent in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). **Results:** Random intercept multilevel models indicated that perceived goal facilitation, but not perceived goal conflict, predicted MVPA over and above intention and PBC. Daily time pursuing conflicting goals negatively predicted MVPA when subsequently added to the model and in so doing, attenuated the association between perceived goal facilitation and MVPA. **Conclusion:** Perceived goal facilitation predicts objectively measured PA over and above intention and PBC, but daily time spent in pursuit of conflicting personal goals provides a better account of how alternative goals relate to engaging in regular PA.

Keywords: goal conflict, goal facilitation, physical activity, theory of planned behavior, accelerometer

Goals are rarely pursued in isolation. Characteristically, individuals pursue numerous personal goals across the various contexts in their lives [pic](Cantor et al., 1991; Emmons, 1986; Little, 1983). Goal pursuit typically requires and is constrained by available resources (e.g., time, energy and money). The pursuit of multiple goals in daily life thus involves a degree of goal competition for these limited resources (Kruglanski et al., 2002). Such goal competition may lead to situations in which goals conflict, hindering one another's pursuit (Emmons, 1986; Wilensky, 1983). Goal conflict involves inherent incompatibility between goals (e.g., speed versus accuracy) or competition for existing resources [e.g., 'working at a part-time job' might conflict with participating in regular physical activity (PA) by consuming available time and energy; Riediger & Freund, 2004]. Personal goals can also complement one another and involve facilitating goal relations, whereby pursuit of some personal goals helps in the pursuit of others (Little, 1983; Wilensky, 1983). Goal facilitation reflects instrumentality between goals (e.g. 'working at a part-time job' can facilitate participating in PA by providing the resources to pay for physically active hobbies) or goals that share a common means of pursuit (e.g., 'going to school' and 'participating in regular PA' may facilitate each other if commuting to school involves cycling; Riediger & Freund, 2004) . Together, perceived goal conflict and facilitation indicate how an individuals' goal system affects their pursuit of a given personal goal (Kruglanski, et al., 2002; Riediger, 2007).

Consideration for the conflicting and facilitating relations in individuals' goal system may help to better understand the pursuit of health-related behaviors. Participation in regular PA is

