

Basic Personality Dispositions, Self-Esteem, and Personal Goals: An Approach-Avoidance Analysis

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ABSTRACT This research examined the hypothesis that self-esteem negatively predicts avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals, as well as the hypothesis that self-esteem mediates the link between indicators of approach and avoidance temperament and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals. Study 1 established that self-esteem is indeed negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, even with social desirability concerns controlled. In Study 2, self-esteem was found to mediate the relation between Neuroticism (conceptualized as an indicator of avoidance temperament) and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals. In Study 3, self-esteem was documented as a mediator of the relation between BAS and BIS sensitivity (conceptualized as indicators of approach and avoidance temperament, respectively) and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals in the achievement domain. The implications of these findings for our understanding of basic personality dispositions, self-esteem, and personal goals are discussed.

Classic and contemporary conceptualizations of the self have posited that the self serves both an evaluative function and an executive function (Baumeister, 2000; Diggory, 1966; James, 1890; Sedikides &

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Skowronski, 1997). An important aspect of the evaluative function of the self is to judge oneself as a whole; this global self-evaluation is commonly referred to as self-esteem (Leary & MacDonald, 2003; Tesser, 2001). An important aspect of the executive function of the self is to regulate goal-directed behavior: to set goals in line with self-relevant standards, to implement strategies designed to accomplish these goals, and to monitor progress toward goal attainment (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Carver & Scheier, 1998). Over the years, substantial literatures have emerged on these two concepts—self-esteem and goal pursuit. However, surprisingly little research has linked the evaluative and executive functions of the self. The present research is designed to address this oversight; we examine the connection between self-esteem and specific forms of goal pursuit.

Specifically, our research examines self-esteem as a predictor of the extent to which individuals adopt approach or avoidance goals in their daily self-regulatory efforts. We also focus on self-esteem as an intermediary variable that accounts for the link between basic personality dispositions—indicators of approach and avoidance temperament—and the adoption of approach or avoidance personal goals. The approach-avoidance distinction is integral to an understanding of basic personality dispositions (Elliot & Thrash, 2002), self-esteem (Baumiester, Tice, & Hutton, 1989), and goal-based regulation (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998). As such, the approach-avoidance distinction seems an optimal conceptual platform from which to examine the links between these different constructs.

Approach and Avoidance Personal Goals

Personal goals represent self-investments that individuals use to guide their behavior in everyday life (for reviews see Emmons, 1999; Little, 1999). Personal goals have been studied with regard to a number of characteristics, including concreteness (Emmons, 1992), self-concordance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), self-consistency (McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001), motive congruence (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Graessman, 1998), meaningfulness (Lecci, MacLean, & Croteau, 2002), importance (Affleck et al., 2001), and match to stage-specific demands (Salmela-Aro, Nurmi, Saisto, Halmesmaeki, 2001). Overall, this body of research has advanced our understanding of goal-directed behavior by demonstrating

connections between goal characteristics and a variety of behavioral and emotional outcomes.

One characteristic of goals, including personal goals, that seems particularly important in predicting a variety of outcomes is that of goal valence. Goals can be conceived of in terms of approaching a positive outcome or end state (i.e., approach goals) or in terms of avoiding a negative outcome or end state (i.e., avoidance goals). For example, within the achievement domain, a goal regarding one's performance may focus on approaching a positive outcome (e.g., "I want to try to do well in my classes") or on avoiding a negative outcome (e.g., "I want to avoid doing poorly in my classes"; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). When asked to list their personal goals, individuals spontaneously report both approach and avoidance goals, and this is true for personal goals in general (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998), domain-specific personal goals (e.g., the achievement domain; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997), and context-specific personal goals (e.g., the psychotherapy context; Elliot & Church, 2002).

A conceptual analysis of goals suggests that, relative to approach goals, avoidance goals are inherently less optimal regulatory structures. Approach goals use positive possibilities as the hub of self-regulation, whereas avoidance goals entail regulating according to negative possibilities, and this negative focus has several deleterious implications. First, avoidance goals provide something to move away from but do not provide something to move toward that can keep the individual focused on a concrete behavioral path (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Second, in avoidance regulation, the individual is incessantly reminded of negative possibilities that tend to evoke threat appraisals, anxiety, controlled volition, and other negative processes (Elliot & McGregor, 1999). Third, with avoidance goals, success simply represents the absence of a negative outcome or end state, as opposed to the presence of a positive outcome or end state that might be needed for the individual to thrive (rather than merely survive; Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997).

In light of this conceptual analysis, it should not be surprising that avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals have been shown to predict a number of negative outcomes. With regard to general personal goals, avoidance (relative to approach) goals have been linked to perceptions of low goal progress (prospectively: Elliot & Sheldon, 1998; Elliot et al., 1997), perceptions of low autonomy and perceptions of high controlledness during goal pursuit

(prospectively: Elliot & Sheldon, 1998), low subjective well-being (concurrently: Coats, Janoff-Bulman, & Alpert, 1996; prospectively: Elliot et al., 1997; and longitudinally: Elliot et al., 1997), and high physical symptomatology (prospectively and longitudinally: Elliot & Sheldon, 1998). In the achievement domain, avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals have been linked to low enjoyment and fulfillment during goal pursuit (prospectively: Elliot & Sheldon, 1997), perceptions of low goal progress (prospectively: Elliot & Sheldon, 1997), low job satisfaction (concurrently: Roberson, 1990), and low subjective well-being (prospectively and longitudinally: Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). In the psychotherapy context, avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals have been shown to be prospective predictors of low therapist satisfaction and longitudinal predictors of low subjective well-being (Elliot & Church, 2002).

Self-Esteem as an Antecedent

Given that avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals predict many negative outcomes, it is clearly important to determine the antecedents of these deleterious regulatory structures. Research on general personal goals has demonstrated the following to be predictors of avoidance (relative to approach) goals: high Neuroticism (Elliot et al., 1997) high activity inhibition (Emmons & McAdams, 1991), fewer life skills (Elliot et al., 1997), the absence of positive self-defining memories (Moffitt & Singer, 1994), high interdependent self-construals and low independent self-construals (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001), Asian (versus Caucasian) heritage (Elliot et al., 2001), and living in South Korea or Russia (versus the United States; Elliot et al., 2001). Avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals in the achievement domain have been linked to high behavioral inhibition system (BIS) sensitivity and low behavioral activation system (BAS) sensitivity (Elliot & Thrash, 2002), high fear of failure (both implicit and self-attributed; Elliot & Sheldon, 1997), and insecure attachment (both avoidant and anxious/ambivalent; Elliot & Reis, 2003). In the psychotherapy context, avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals have been linked to parental loss before the age of 18 due to death or divorce (Elliot & Church, 2003).

In the present research, we examined the possibility that self-esteem predicts avoidance (relative to approach) personal goal

adoption. Research on self-esteem has not typically focused on specific goal constructs. Rather, it has focused on differences between low self-esteem individuals (LSEs) and high self-esteem individuals (HSEs) in motivation and adjustment more generally. For example, after a failure, the motivation and performance of LSEs on a subsequent task declines, whereas the motivation and performance of HSEs is enhanced (Baumeister & Tice, 1985; Brockner, 1979; McFarlin, Baumeister, & Blascovich, 1984). LSEs are also not as well calibrated in their regulation of goal-directed behavior as are HSEs, in that they make less prudent decisions about whether to persist or give up when facing failure (Di Paula & Campbell, 2002). Self-esteem differences in mood regulation motivation have also been identified, such that LSEs show weaker motivation than HSEs to repair their negative moods (Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002; Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003) and to savor their positive moods (Wood et al., 2003).

The extant research most directly relevant to the present work is that conducted by Baumeister, Tice, and colleagues on the self-based motivational tendencies of LSE and HSE people (Baumeister & Tice, 1985; Baumeister et al., 1989). Baumeister et al. (1989) proposed that individuals with LSE are primarily concerned with concealing their faults or preventing further decrements or losses to their self-esteem (self-protection motivation), whereas HSEs are primarily concerned with presenting themselves in a positive light and further enhancing their self-esteem (self-enhancement motivation). Empirical evidence supports this view of LSEs as self-protective and HSEs as self-enhancing (e.g., Arkin, 1981; Baumeister & Tice, 1985; Tice, 1991; Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela, & Gaus, 1994). These ideas from the self-esteem literature seem to parallel the approach/avoidance distinction: Self-protection, with its focus on concealing faults and preventing losses to self-esteem, appears to be an avoidance-based motivation that likely prompts specific self-regulatory efforts focused on avoiding negative outcomes and experiences, whereas self-enhancement, with its focus on presenting oneself in a positive light and enhancing self-esteem, appears to be an approach-based motivation that likely prompts specific self-regulatory efforts focused on approaching positive outcomes and experiences. As such, our central hypothesis is that, overall, self-esteem will negatively predict avoidance (relative to approach) personal goal pursuit.

Self-Esteem as a Mediator

In addition to examining self-esteem as an antecedent of approach (relative to avoidance) personal goals, we also investigate self-esteem as a mediator variable with regard to basic personality dispositions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, BIS sensitivity, and BAS sensitivity. Neuroticism and Extraversion represent traits, and BIS sensitivity and BAS sensitivity represent motivational dispositions. Some theorists emphasize the conceptual and content-based differences between these trait and motivational disposition constructs (Aron & Aron, 1997; Gray, 1981; Newman, 1987) and the fact that they have somewhat distinct empirical profiles (Corr, 2001; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Pickering & Gray, 1999). However, traits and motivational dispositions also clearly possess important similarities. Both types of construct are characterized as temperaments by their proponents (Eysenck, 1970; Gray, 1982; McCrae et al., 2000), valence is central to both types of constructs, and clear empirical links have been drawn between Neuroticism and BIS sensitivity (Carver & White, 1994; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2003; Gomez, Cooper, & Gomez, 2000) and Extraversion and BAS sensitivity (Ball & Zuckerman, 1990; Corulla, 1987; Diaz & Pickering, 1993).

In the present research, we focus on the similarities between these basic personality dispositions. Recent research by Elliot and Thrash (2002) has demonstrated that Neuroticism and BIS sensitivity are related because they share an underlying avoidance temperament and that Extraversion and BAS sensitivity are related because they share an underlying approach temperament. An individual with a strong avoidance temperament (reflected in high Neuroticism and BIS sensitivity) is presumed to be particularly sensitive to negative and potentially punishing stimuli, to show more negative affective responses toward such stimuli, and to be predisposed toward behavior leading away from such stimuli. In contrast, a person with a strong approach temperament (reflected in high Extraversion and BAS sensitivity) is presumed to be particularly sensitive to positive and rewarding stimuli, to respond more readily with positive affect to such stimuli, and to be oriented toward behavior that leads toward such stimuli. Following Elliot and Thrash (2002), Neuroticism and BIS sensitivity are used in the present work as indicators of avoidance temperament, and Extraversion and BAS sensitivity are used as indicators of approach

temperament. In so doing, we do not mean to convey that these well-validated dispositional variables are isomorphic with their corresponding temperament; each variable clearly has unique aspects that make it conceptually and empirically distinct to some degree. We simply mean to convey that these variables share an underlying conceptual core, so they may be used as manifestations of or proxies for this core (see Elliot & Thrash, 2002, for additional details).

As noted in the previous section, research has found that indicators of avoidance temperament—Neuroticism and BIS sensitivity—positively predict avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals, whereas an indicator of approach temperament—BAS sensitivity—negatively predicts avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals. In addition, research has shown that an indicator of avoidance temperament—Neuroticism—negatively predicts self-esteem (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994; Watson, Suls, & Haig, 2002), whereas an indicator of approach temperament—Extraversion—positively predicts self-esteem (Halamandaris & Power, 1997; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). What remains to be examined is whether self-esteem negatively predicts avoidance (relative to approach) goals and whether self-esteem mediates the relation between indicators of approach and avoidance temperament and avoidance (relative to approach) goals.

We propose that self-esteem mediates the relation between indicators of approach and avoidance temperament and avoidance (relative to approach) goals because individuals' temperaments influence their self-esteem, and their self-esteem, in turn, influences the nature of the goals they adopt. That is, we conceive of self-esteem as an aspect of personality partially determined by biologically based, temperamental propensities (Watson et al., 2002). Approach and avoidance temperaments are presumed to orient individuals toward positive or negative attributes (respectively) as they evaluate their self-concept and to underlie and energize self-enhancement or self-protection concerns (respectively). Once in place, self-esteem represents a resource that individuals draw upon in their ongoing self-regulation (Spencer, Josephs, & Steele, 1993). As noted earlier, negative self-evaluation and its accompanying self-protective concerns are likely to lead to goal-based regulation focused on negative possibilities, whereas positive self-evaluation and its accompanying self-enhancement concerns are likely to lead to goal-based regulation

focused on positive possibilities. Thus, self-esteem is viewed as the proximal predictor, and indicators of approach and avoidance temperament are viewed as distal predictors of the use of avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals in self-regulation.

Overview of the Present Research

We examined the hypothesized associations between indicators of approach and avoidance temperament, self-esteem, and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals in three studies. To maximize confidence in the robustness and validity of our findings, we varied our indicators of temperament, self-esteem, and personal goals across studies. In Study 1, we sought to demonstrate that self-esteem negatively predicts avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals, while controlling for social desirability biases that could produce a spurious association between these variables (i.e., participants high in social desirability may be less likely to report both low self-esteem and more avoidance goals). In Study 2, we used Extraversion and Neuroticism as indicators of approach and avoidance temperament (respectively), and examined whether self-esteem mediates the association between these approach and avoidance temperament variables and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals. In Study 3, we used BAS and BIS sensitivity as indicators of approach and avoidance temperament (respectively) and evaluated whether self-esteem mediates the association between these approach and avoidance temperament variables and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred and ten (98 male and 112 female) undergraduates in an introductory level psychology course participated in the study in return for extra course credit. Participants completed the measures in three different sessions. Self-esteem was assessed in a large group session at the beginning of the semester. Participants completed the social desirability measure in a take-home packet several days later. The day that participants returned the completed social desirability measure, they also

attended a large group session in which they reported their personal goals for the upcoming semester.¹

Measures

Self-esteem. Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski's (2001) single-item measure was used to assess self-esteem: "I have high self-esteem." Participants responded on a 1 (*not very true of me*) to 5 (*very true of me*) scale. The validity and predictive utility of this measure has been documented by Robins et al. (2001). The mean for self-esteem in this study was 3.53 ($SD = 1.06$) with a range of 1–5 (possible range = 1–5).

Personal goals. Personal goals were assessed using Elliot et al.'s (1997) Personal Goals Questionnaire (which is based on Emmons's [1986] work on personal strivings). Personal goals were defined for participants as "things that you typically or characteristically are trying to do in your everyday behavior . . . the objectives that you are typically trying to accomplish or attain." Participants were instructed to list the eight personal goals that best described what they would be trying to do in their daily life during the semester; they were free to write down any type or valence of goals in this goal-listing procedure. Two trained coders categorized each goal as approach or avoidance using the coding scheme described in Elliot and Friedman (2005); coding was done independently, and the rare disagreements (interjudge agreement exceeded 99%) were resolved by a third coder. Examples of approach goals listed by participants were: "to help others in times of need" and "have fun throughout the semester"; examples of avoidance goals listed by participants are "avoid being lonely" and "avoid wasting time hanging out." An avoidance (relative to approach) goals index was created by summing the number of avoidance goals on each participant's list (all participants provided eight goals, and each goal was coded approach or avoidance, so this measure is conceptually equivalent to the number of avoidance goals relative to the number of approach goals). The validity and predictive utility of this avoidance (relative to approach) goals measure has been documented in several studies (see Elliot & Friedman, 2005; Elliot et al., 1997). The mean for avoidance (relative to approach) goals in this study was .71 ($SD = .81$) with a range of 0–4 (possible range = 0–8).

1. The data for this study as well as Studies 2 and 3 were collected in the context of a larger project (Study 1, see Elliot & Mapes, 2002; Study 2, see Elliot & Friedman, 2005; Study 3, see Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). None of the analyses or findings reported in the present research has been reported in any prior work.

Social desirability. Paulhus's (1991) Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding was used to assess self-deceptive enhancement (20 items, e.g., "I always know why I like things"), impression management (20 items, e.g., "I always obey laws, even if I'm unlikely to get caught"), and overall social desirability (the sum of the individual measures). Participants responded on a 1 (*not true*) to 7 (*very true*) scale. After appropriate reverse scoring, one point was given for each extreme (6 or 7) response, and these points were summed to form the impression management ($\alpha = .76$), self-deceptive enhancement ($\alpha = .70$), and overall social desirability ($\alpha = .77$) indexes. These scales have been shown to have high reliability and validity (Paulhus, 1991). The means for impression management, self-deceptive enhancement, and overall social desirability in this study were 5.50 ($SD = 3.62$), 5.35 ($SD = 3.27$), and 10.85 ($SD = 5.27$), respectively, with ranges of 0–16 (possible range = 0–20), 0–14 (possible range = 0–20), and 0–28 (possible range = 0–40), respectively.

Results and Discussion

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the hypothesized relations. Sex was included as a variable in preliminary analyses and was included as a covariate in the final analyses when significant.

Self-esteem was shown to be positively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, $F(1, 206) = 5.95, p < .05$ ($\beta = -.17$). Self-deceptive enhancement was positively related to self-esteem, $F(1, 208) = 47.14, p < .01$ ($\beta = .43$), as was overall social desirability, $F(1, 208) = 14.91, p < .01$ ($\beta = .26$); impression management was not related to self-esteem. None of the social desirability measures were related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals. When the avoidance (relative to approach) goals index was regressed on self-esteem with self-deceptive enhancement and impression management included in the equation, the relation between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) goals was essentially unchanged, $F(1, 206) = 6.57, p < .05$ ($\beta = -.20$). Likewise, the relation between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) goals was virtually unchanged when overall social desirability was controlled, $F(1, 207) = 6.83, p < .01$ ($\beta = -.19$).

These findings are consistent with our hypothesis that self-esteem negatively predicts avoidance (relative to approach) goals. This hypothesis was supported even when social desirability biases were controlled. In Study 2, we sought to replicate the association

between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) goals and to demonstrate that self-esteem mediates the relation between indicators of approach and avoidance temperament (Extraversion and Neuroticism, respectively) and avoidance (relative to approach) goals.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and sixty-one (55 male and 106 female) undergraduates in an introductory level psychology course participated in the study in return for extra course credit. Participants completed the measures in three different sessions. Extraversion and Neuroticism were assessed in a large group session at the beginning of the semester. Participants reported their personal goals for the semester 1 week later in one of several small group sessions. Self-esteem was assessed several weeks later in a large group session.

Measures

Neuroticism and Extraversion. Eysenck, Eysenck, and Barrett's (1985) EPQ-R was used to assess Neuroticism and Extraversion. The EPQ-R consists of 12 Neuroticism items (e.g., "Would you call yourself tense or high strung?") and 12 Extraversion items (e.g., "Do others think of you as being very lively?"). Many studies attest to the reliability and validity of these measures (see Eysenck et al., 1985). Participants responded to each item by indicating no (1) or yes (2), and their responses were summed to form the Neuroticism (Kuder Richardson 20 = .76) and Extraversion (Kuder Richardson 20 = .76) indexes. The means for Neuroticism and Extraversion in this study were 17.77 ($SD = 3.25$) and 19.55 ($SD = 2.17$), respectively, with ranges of 12–24 (possible range = 12–24) and 12–23 (possible range = 12–24), respectively.

Self-esteem. Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item measure was used to assess self-esteem (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself"). Participants responded to each item using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) scale, and their scores were summed across the 10 items to create the self-esteem index ($\alpha = .92$). Reliability and validity data for the measure are reported in Rosenberg (1965). The mean for self-esteem in

this study was 32.47 ($SD = 6.04$) with a range of 11–40 (possible range = 10–40).

Personal goals. The same personal goals measure and approach/avoidance coding procedure used in Study 1 was also used in this study (interjudge agreement exceeded 98%). The mean for avoidance (relative to approach) goals in this study was 1.44 ($SD = 1.17$) with a range of 0–5 (possible range = 0–8).

Results and Discussion

As in Study 1, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the hypothesized relations. Sex was included as a variable in preliminary analyses and was included as a covariate in the final analyses when significant.

Direct Associations

Self-esteem was found to be negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, $F(1, 158) = 6.97, p < .01$ ($\beta = -.20$), and females were more likely than males to report avoidance (relative to approach) goals, $F(1, 158) = 3.90, p < .05$ ($\beta = .15$). When the avoidance goals variable was regressed on Neuroticism and Extraversion, Neuroticism was shown to be positively related, $F(1, 163) = 4.04, p < .05$ ($\beta = .18$), but a null relation was observed for Extraversion. Likewise, when self-esteem was regressed on Neuroticism and Extraversion, Neuroticism was shown to be negatively related, $F(1, 158) = 35.96, p < .01$ ($\beta = -.44$), but a null relation was observed for Extraversion.

Test of Mediation

Baron and Kenny (1986) delineated three requirements for documenting mediation. First, the dependent variable should be regressed on the independent variable to show that the independent variable is significantly related to the dependent variable. Second, the mediator should be regressed on the independent variable to show that the independent variable is significantly related to the mediator variable. Third, the dependent variable should be regressed on both the independent variable and the mediator variable to show that the mediator variable is significantly related to the dependent

variable and accounts for at least a portion of the direct relation between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

In the preceding analyses, Extraversion was not significantly related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, so mediation is not applicable in this instance. However, Neuroticism was shown to be (1) negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, and (2) negatively related to self-esteem. These associations satisfy the first two requirements needed to establish self-esteem as a mediator of the relation between Neuroticism and avoidance (relative to approach) goals. To test the final requirement for mediation, we regressed avoidance (relative to approach) goals on self-esteem with Neuroticism and Extraversion included in the equation. In this analysis, self-esteem was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, $F(1, 157) = 4.15$, $p < .05$ ($\beta = -.18$), and the coefficient for the direct relation between Neuroticism and avoidance (relative to approach) goals dropped from .18 to .11 (and was no longer significant), a decrease of 39%. These results establish self-esteem as a mediator of the direct relation between Neuroticism and avoidance (relative to approach) goals.² As a further test of mediation, MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets's (2002) z' statistic was computed to examine the significance of the indirect relation between the predictor variable

2. In addition to testing the proposed mediational model, we tested two alternative models, one in which Neuroticism and/or Extraversion were examined as mediators of the relation between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) goals, and another in which avoidance (relative to approach) goals were examined as mediators of the relation between Neuroticism and/or Extraversion and self-esteem. The first model was not supported. Although self-esteem was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$) and self-esteem was negatively related to Neuroticism ($\beta = -.45$, $p < .01$) and positively related to Extraversion ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), neither Neuroticism nor Extraversion was related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals when self-esteem was controlled. The second model received some support, although nowhere near as strong as that for the proposed model. Neuroticism was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals ($\beta = -.44$, $p < .01$), whereas Extraversion was unrelated; Neuroticism was positively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), and avoidance (relative to approach) goals were negatively related to self-esteem ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .05$). However, in contrast to the proposed model, inclusion of the mediator variable in this model did not eliminate the direct relation (which remained ($\beta = -.42$, $p < .01$), and the mediator only accounted for 5% of the direct relation (as opposed to 39% of the direct relation in the proposed model).

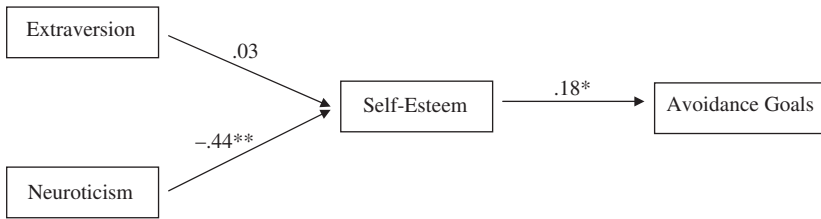


Figure 1

The mediational results documented in Study 2. Path values are standardized regression coefficients. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

and the dependent variable via the hypothesized mediator. This test provided additional support for the proposed Neuroticism mediation, $z' = 1.93$, $p < .01$. See Figure 1 for a pictorial representation of the documented relations.

These findings largely supported our predictions, in that self-esteem was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) goals, and self-esteem mediated the relation between temperament (Neuroticism) and avoidance (relative to approach) goals. Extraversion was unrelated to avoidance (relative to approach) goals and, therefore, could not be examined with regard to mediation. This was a surprising finding given that Extraversion is an indicator of approach temperament (although see comparable results in Elliot et al., 1997). These Extraversion results will be considered in further detail in the General Discussion. In Study 3, we sought to conceptually replicate Study 2, but this time using BIS and BAS sensitivity as indicators of temperament. We also examined achievement personal goals as the dependent variable, rather than general personal goals.

STUDY 3

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and fifty (55 male and 95 female) undergraduates in an introductory level psychology course participated in the study in return for extra course credit. Participants completed the measures in three different sessions. BAS and BIS sensitivity were assessed in a large group session at the beginning of the semester. Self-esteem was assessed in a large group session 1 week later. Participants reported their personal achievement goals the following week in one of several small group sessions.

Measures

BIS and BAS sensitivity. BIS and BAS sensitivity were assessed using Carver and White's (1994) BIS and BAS scales, respectively. The BIS scale has seven items (e.g., "If I think something unpleasant is going to happen I usually get pretty worked up"); the 13-item BAS scale (e.g., "When I see an opportunity for something I like, I get excited right away") consists of three subscales (fun seeking, reward responsiveness, and drive) that, when aggregated, constitute a single BAS variable (see Jorm et al., 1999). For both measures, participants responded on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) scale, and the items for each measure were summed to form the BIS ($\alpha = .80$) and BAS ($\alpha = .83$) indexes. The BIS and BAS measures have been shown to have high reliability and validity (see Carver & White, 1994). The means for BIS and BAS in this study were 21.25 ($SD = 4.15$) and 41.93 ($SD = 5.10$), respectively, with ranges of 11–28 (possible range = 7–28) and 13–52 (possible range = 24–52), respectively.

Self-esteem. As in Study 2, Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item measure was used to assess self-esteem ($\alpha = .91$). The mean for self-esteem in this study was 32.11 ($SD = 5.88$) with a range of 13–40 (possible range = 10–40).

Personal achievement goals. Elliot and Sheldon's (1997) idiographic achievement goals questionnaire was used to assess personal achievement goals. Participants were introduced to the concept of achievement goals and then generated their own list of eight personal achievement goals that they pursue in daily life. Two trained coders independently categorized each goal as approach or avoidance (interjudge agreement exceeded 99%). Examples of approach goals listed by participants are "perform well in my work" and "try new and challenging activities"; examples of avoidance goals listed by participants are "avoid doing poorly in school" and "avoid looking inferior to others." An avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals index was created by summing the number of avoidance goals on each participant's list. The validity and predictive utility of this avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals measure has been documented in several studies (see Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot & Thrash, 2002). The mean for avoidance (relative to approach) goals in this study was 1.85 ($SD = 1.51$) with a range of 0–6 (possible range = 0–8).

Results and Discussion

As in Studies 1 and 2, multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the hypothesized relations. Sex was included as a variable in

preliminary analyses and was included as a covariate in the final analyses when significant.

Direct Associations

Self-esteem was found to be negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals, $F(1, 148) = 12.85, p < .01$ ($\beta = -.28$). When avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals were regressed on BIS and BAS sensitivity, BIS sensitivity was shown to be positively related, $F(1, 147) = 3.68, p = .057$ ($\beta = .15$), and BAS sensitivity was shown to be negatively related, $F(1, 147) = 5.57, p < .05$ ($\beta = -.19$). When self-esteem was regressed on BIS and BAS sensitivity, BIS sensitivity was shown to be negatively related, $F(1, 147) = 26.26, p < .01$ ($\beta = -.38$), and BAS sensitivity was shown to be positively related, $F(1, 147) = 12.16, p < .01$ ($\beta = .26$).

Test of Mediation

In the preceding analyses, BIS sensitivity was shown to be (1) positively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals and (2) negatively related to self-esteem, and BAS sensitivity was shown to be (1) negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals and (2) positively related to self-esteem. These associations satisfy the first two requirements needed to establish self-esteem as a mediator of the relation between BIS sensitivity and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals and the relation between BAS sensitivity and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals. To test the final requirement for mediation, we regressed avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals on self-esteem with BIS and BAS sensitivity included in the equation. In this analysis, self-esteem was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals, $F(1, 146) = 6.79, p < .05$ ($\beta = -.23$); the coefficient for the direct association between BIS sensitivity and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals dropped from .15 to .07, a decrease of 53%, and the coefficient for the direct relation between BAS sensitivity and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals dropped from $-.19$ to $-.13$, a decrease of 28% (neither direct association was significant). These results establish self-esteem as a mediator of the direct relation between BIS sensitivity and avoidance (relative

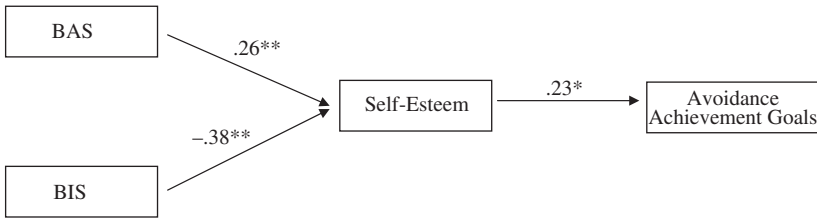


Figure 2

The mediational results documented in Study 3. Path values are standardized regression coefficients. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

to approach) goals and BAS sensitivity and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals.³ The mediational test recommended by MacKinnon et al. (2002) provided further support for the proposed BIS sensitivity ($z' = 2.32, p < .01$) and BAS sensitivity ($z' = 2.09, p < .01$) mediation. See Figure 2 for a pictorial representation of the documented associations.

3. As in Study 2, in addition to testing the proposed mediational model, we tested two alternative models, one in which BIS and/or BAS sensitivity were examined as mediators of the relation between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals and another in which avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals were examined as mediators of the relation between BIS and/or BAS sensitivity and self-esteem. The first model was not supported. Although self-esteem was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals ($\beta = -.28, p < .01$) and self-esteem was negatively related to BIS sensitivity ($\beta = -.36, p < .01$) and positively related to BAS sensitivity ($\beta = .23, p < .05$), neither BIS sensitivity nor BAS sensitivity was related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals when self-esteem was controlled. The second model received some support, although nowhere near as strong as that for the proposed model. BIS sensitivity was negatively related to self-esteem ($\beta = -.38, p < .01$), and BAS sensitivity was positively related ($\beta = .26, p < .01$); BIS sensitivity was positively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals ($\beta = .15, p = .057$), and BAS sensitivity was negatively related ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$); and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals were negatively related to self-esteem ($\beta = -.20, p < .05$). However, in contrast to the proposed model, inclusion of the mediator variable in this model did not eliminate the BIS sensitivity direct relation (which remained $\beta = -.35, p < .01$) nor the BAS sensitivity direct relation (which remained $.22, p < .05$), and the mediator only accounted for 8% of the BIS sensitivity direct relation and 15% of the BAS sensitivity direct relation (as opposed to 28% and 53%, respectively, in the proposed model).

In summary, as in Studies 1 and 2, the results supported our predictions. Using different indicators of temperament and focusing on personal goals within a particular domain (i.e., achievement), we found that not only was self-esteem negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals but it also mediated the relations between BIS and BAS sensitivity and avoidance goal adoption.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research comprises three studies designed to examine the links between basic personality dispositions, self-esteem, and personal goals. In Study 1, self-esteem was negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals, even when social desirability concerns were controlled. Study 2 replicated this finding and extended it by establishing self-esteem as a mediator of the relation between avoidance temperament (as indicated by Neuroticism) and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals. Study 3 replicated the Study 2 findings in that self-esteem again mediated the relation between avoidance temperament (as indicated by BIS sensitivity) and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals in the achievement domain; self-esteem also mediated the relation between approach temperament (as indicated by BAS sensitivity) and avoidance (relative to approach) achievement goals.

Prior research indicates that low self-esteem is associated with poor task persistence and performance, coping, affect regulation, emotional well-being, and other unfavorable outcomes (for reviews see Leary & MacDonald, 2003; Tice, 1993). The present findings add to this body of research in demonstrating that the lower an individual's self-esteem, the greater his or her adoption of avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals. Avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals have been shown to have an inimical influence on a host of outcomes including several of the aforementioned (e.g., performance, persistence, emotional well-being; see Elliot & Friedman, 2005). As such, it seems likely that the pursuit of avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals represents an important mechanism through which self-esteem influences motivation and adjustment. Future research would do well to explore this mediational possibility.

Our findings converge nicely with the work of Baumeister and colleagues (Baumeister & Tice, 1985; Baumeister et al., 1989; Tice, 1993), who posited that different motivational tendencies underlie the behavior of LSE and HSE individuals. Baumeister and colleagues hypothesized that LSEs have a self-protective orientation that motivates them to avoid threats or decrements to their self-esteem, whereas HSEs have a self-enhancement orientation that motivates them to bolster their strengths and positive qualities. In the present work, we portrayed these self-protective and self-enhancement orientations in terms of avoidance and approach motivation, respectively, and established links between approach and avoidance motivation at the self-esteem and goal levels of analysis. Our findings are consistent with the possibility that the self-protection motivation of LSEs prompts them to adopt avoidance goals, whereas the self-enhancement motivation of HSEs prompts them to adopt approach goals.

Our research additionally made use of the approach-avoidance distinction at the level of basic personality dispositions, demonstrating that approach temperament (as indicated by Extraversion and BAS sensitivity) is positively related to self-esteem, and avoidance temperament (as indicated by Neuroticism and BIS sensitivity) is negatively related to self-esteem. The inclusion of temperament variables in our work was important for two reasons. First, it enabled us to examine the possibility that any link between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals is not simply due to shared variance in one of our indicators of avoidance temperament—Neuroticism. That is, some researchers portray self-esteem as essentially a facet of Neuroticism (Whitley & Gridley, 1993), and Neuroticism has been shown to be positively related to avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals (Elliot et al., 1997). Accordingly, one could argue that any association between self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals is merely a function of their overlapping Neuroticism variance. The results from Study 2 clearly show that this is not the case, in that self-esteem was found to be negatively related to avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals in analyses controlling for Neuroticism variance. Similarly, Wood et al. (2003) found that self-esteem predicted affect regulation even when Neuroticism and Extraversion were controlled.

The second, and most important, reason that we included indicators of temperament in our work was that it enabled us to test our hypothesized mediational model. This model is grounded in the assumption that there is an important contribution of temperament to self-esteem (Watson et al., 2002). Being endowed with an approach temperament may facilitate the development of a positive self-view in a number of ways, such as orienting persons toward positive objects and opportunities in the environment, facilitating the onset and intensity of positive emotional experience, and influencing the recall and weighting of positive self-relevant information. Indeed, HSEs have been shown to exhibit these characteristics—to be oriented toward positive social relationships (Leary & MacDonald, 2003) and positive emotional experiences (Wood et al., 2003) and to remember self-relevant information in positive ways (Conner Christensen, Wood, & Feldman Barrett, 2003). Perhaps a general approach temperament drives these processes. Parallel processes, reciprocally valenced, are presumed to emerge from avoidance temperament. Obviously, global self-evaluation is a product of much more than biologically based predispositions. Experiences with the environment—especially parental socialization and relational experiences—are likely to have an important impact on the development of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1999; Leary & Downs, 1995). Our work simply aims to highlight the point that biologically based factors such as temperament can also influence self-esteem, most likely both independently of and in interaction with other experientially based factors (see also Klein, 1993, 1995).

The results from our research were consistent with our hypotheses and consistent across studies with a single exception. Although the proposed links between avoidance temperament, self-esteem, and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals were observed regardless of which indicator of temperament was used, approach temperament was linked to self-esteem and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals when it was assessed using a measure of BAS sensitivity but not when it was assessed using a measure of Extraversion. A likely explanation for these null results lies in the specific Extraversion scale that we used—that from the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. A careful examination of the items from this scale reveals that they are primarily focused on social characteristics and behaviors, in contrast to other scales (e.g., the NEO-PI)

that use a broader range of items more directly applicable to approach temperament. Thus, in hindsight, the Eysenck measure was not a good choice for representing approach temperament in Study 2, and researchers interested in examining approach temperament would do well to use alternative indicators of this construct in their work.

Our hypotheses regarding the associations between indicators of approach and avoidance temperament, self-esteem, and avoidance (relative to approach) personal goals presume a particular causal ordering among the constructs. Although we took care in our research to temporally separate the various assessments, to control for potential response biases, and to examine alternative models, our data remain correlational, and unequivocal causal statements are not justified. Now that the focal relations have been empirically established, subsequent longitudinal and experimental research is needed to document causality more definitively.

Furthermore, we should note that the magnitude of the relations observed in our work were quite modest. It is possible that our results accurately reflect the strength of the relations we examined, but it is also possible that measurement issues played a role. One possibility is that approach and avoidance personal goals have different antecedents and that our relative measure of approach and avoidance goals obscures this fact and weakens the observed relations. However, a full idiographic assessment of personal goals does not allow the independent assessment of approach and avoidance goals; only by adding a nomothetic element to the goal assessment (e.g., instructing individuals to make separate lists of approach and avoidance goals) can separate measures of approach and avoidance goals be obtained. Another possibility is that self-esteem has independent approach and avoidance components (see Elliot & Mapes, 2005) and that separate indicators of these two components would yield relations with personality dispositions or personal goals of a greater magnitude.

The present work established links between three different types of constructs: basic personality dispositions, self-esteem, and personal goals. Substantial literatures have developed around each of these focal constructs, but researchers have not often considered these constructs together. From our perspective, an important task confronting personality theorists in the 21st century is to build integrative connections among the many different constructs that

have been proffered over the past decades. Such integrative work promises to advance the field by establishing a more coherent and complete portrait of the person, but it will also undoubtedly generate new, fresh research within individual literatures as well. Basic personality dispositions, self-esteem, and personal goals are each clearly important components of personality in and of themselves, but bringing them together and connecting them to other personality constructs is likely to achieve the greatest clarity.

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