KEEPING YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE VERSUS YOUR NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE: THE EFFECTS OF LEVEL OF GOAL EVALUATION ON MOOD AND MOTIVATION

Linda Houser Marko

Dr. Kennon Sheldon, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Though higher level, primary goals provide meaning and direction for a person, evaluating progress on that primary goal versus a sub-goal is risky. Study 1 was a 2 x 2 experiment in which framing level (sub-goal or primary goal) and feedback valence (success or failure) were manipulated for participants ($n=118$) during a computer game. Positive mood and expectancy decreased and negative mood increased the most for those who received primary goal failure feedback. Study 2 was a short longitudinal study that took place over 8 weeks throughout which participants ($n=113$) evaluated their progress on a primary goal (Grade goal) or sub-goal (Study hours goal). Success or failure varied naturally for individuals. When progress was lacking, the primary goal focus was associated with decreases in mood and expectancy. These results indicate that a person might be better off evaluating goal progress at the lower, sub-goal level, especially when receiving negative feedback.