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The social costs of extrinsic relative to intrinsic goal pursuits revisited: The moderating role of general causality orientation

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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggested that Self-Determination Theory's distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic goal pursuits provides a partial explanation for individual differences in ethnic and racial prejudice in general and for individual differences in negative attitudes towards multiculturalism in particular. Negative attitudes towards multiculturalism would partly take root in valuing extrinsic over intrinsic goals. Results of the present study among university students ($N = 440$) suggest that the relationship between goal pursuit and multicultural ideology is less straightforward than previously assumed. Specifically, results suggest that it is moderated by differences in the causality orientation underlying people's goal pursuit, with multicultural ideology only being less positive among people predominantly pursuing extrinsic goals for controlled rather than autonomous reasons.

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1. Introduction

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) discerns intrinsic from extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals such as self-development, affiliation, and community contribution are said to be inherently satisfying to pursue because they are focused on developing one's personal interests and potential. In contrast, extrinsic goals such as financial success, physical attractiveness, and social popularity are said to be directed toward external indicators of worth (e.g., wealth or fame). Whereas intrinsic goals have a beneficial effect on well-being, extrinsic goals would be unrelated or even negatively related to this (Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Duriez, 2008). In addition, pursuing extrinsic over intrinsic goals relates to poorer academic performance (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006) and less persistence in physical exercising (Sebire, Standage, & Vansteenkiste, 2009), and has some social costs. Among other things, a predominantly extrinsic goal pursuit predicts poorer quality of love relations and friendships (Kasser & Ryan, 2001), less ecological engagement (Brown & Kasser, 2005) and cooperation when resources are scarce (Sheldon, Sheldon, & Osbaldiston, 2000), and heightened Machiavellianism (McHoskey, 1999) and racial and ethnic prejudice (Duriez, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & De Witte, 2007; Van Hiel, Cornelis, &

Roets, 2010). Differential effects would be due to the fact that, whereas intrinsic goals are consistent with the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, belongingness and relatedness, extrinsic goals are at odds with the satisfaction of these needs (Duriez & Luyckx, submitted for publication).

The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goals that is made within SDT should not be confused with the distinction SDT makes between intrinsic motivation on the one hand and various types of extrinsic motivation on the other hand and the way in which these types of motivation are classified (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT classifies these types of motivation in terms of their underlying causality orientation, which can either be autonomous or controlled. Whereas the intrinsic–extrinsic goal distinction refers to differences in what people pursue in life, the autonomous–controlled distinction refers to differences in why people pursue whatever it is they pursue. According to SDT, any goal (whether intrinsic or extrinsic in nature) can be pursued for autonomous or controlled reasons. The intrinsic goal of community contribution, for instance, can be pursued for autonomous reasons (e.g., because one finds community contribution important) or for controlled reasons (e.g., because others expect you to contribute to the community and not doing so might meet with disapproval).

Some researchers question SDT's claim that some goals are inherently more need-satisfying and congruent with the self than others, advocating that the differential effects of an intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuit are qualified by differences in underlying causality

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orientation (Carver & Baird, 1998; Carver & Scheier, 2000; Srivastava, Locke, & Bartol, 2001). The strong version of this thesis suggests that the intrinsic–extrinsic goal distinction can be reduced to the distinction between an autonomous and a controlled causality orientation and that the effects of different goal pursuits can be explained (i.e., are mediated) by differences in causality orientation. With respect to well-being, for instance, Carver and Baird (1998) argued that, whereas intrinsically oriented individuals would be happier because they pursue their goals in a more volitional (i.e., autonomous) way, extrinsically oriented individuals would display more ill-being because they feel more controlled in their goal pursuits, whether due to external (e.g., coercion) or intrapersonal pressure (e.g., guilt feelings). However, although research demonstrated a clear relation between an intrinsic goal pursuit and an autonomous orientation and between an extrinsic goal pursuit and a controlled orientation (with correlations typically around .30), research seems to converge on the conclusion that goal pursuits predict well-being even when controlling for the associated causality orientation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2008), and similar results were reported in the exercise domain (Seire et al., 2009). A weaker version of the same thesis would be that the effects of different goal pursuits are moderated instead of mediated by the underlying causality orientations: An extrinsic goal pursuit would have a detrimental effect only when the underlying orientation is controlled but not when this orientation is autonomous. Consistent with this, experimental studies on performance and persistence (e.g., Vansteenkiste et al., 2004) suggest an interaction effect between the type of goals a behavior is said to serve (i.e., intrinsic versus extrinsic goals) and the way in which this behavior is introduced (i.e., in an autonomy supportive versus controlling fashion).

As for the acclaimed social costs of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuits and the potential role of the associated causality orientations, previous research did not only show that a predominantly extrinsic goal pursuit is associated with increased racial and ethnic prejudice (Duriez et al., 2007; Van Hiel et al., 2010), but also provides initial evidence for the importance of causality orientations (Hodgins, 2010). Elaboration on the idea that causality orientations co-determine one's threshold for experiencing (social) threat, with people having a predominantly controlled orientation being more likely to experience things as threatening, Hodgins (2010) showed that a controlled orientation relates to a larger magnitude us-them divide than an autonomous orientation. Following Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a larger us-them divide is expected to relate to increased stereotyping and increased anti-outgroup attitudes (Hodgins, 2010), and hence, to affect attitudes about multiculturalism. The present study aims to investigate the potential mediating or moderating role of causality orientations in the relationship between intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuits and multicultural ideology.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 440 Flemish speaking first-year psychology students (Mean age = 18.34, SD = 1.68; 85% female) having Belgian nationality and belonging to the Flemish majority. Although being present at the time of data collection was mandatory (with those being present receiving course credit), participation was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed.

2.2. Measures

Participants filled out a Dutch 18-item Aspiration Index (Duriez et al., 2007), indicating on five-point Likert scales anchored by

Completely disagree and *Completely agree* to what extent they value six types of goals (3 items each). These six goals were the extrinsic goals of financial success (e.g., 'It is important for me to have expensive possessions'; alpha = .83), image (e.g., 'It is important for me to achieve the 'good look' that I am searching for'; alpha = .75) and fame (e.g., 'It is important for me to be admired by others'; alpha = .70), and the intrinsic goals of growth (e.g., 'It is important for me to develop myself and learn new things'; alpha = .74), community contribution (e.g., 'It is important for me to help people in need'; alpha = .80) and affiliation (e.g., 'It is important for me to express my love for special people'; alpha = .84). As in previous studies (e.g., Duriez et al., 2007), systematic response sets were controlled for by subtracting an individual's overall mean score from each individual score. A higher-order exploratory factor analysis was then conducted on these six scales. The scree plot pointed to a one-factor solution in which intrinsic goals had a positive loading (>.40) and extrinsic goals had a negative loading (<-.40). Subsequently, after reversing the intrinsic items, an intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuit score (EXT) was computed by averaging all items (alpha = .83; Mean = -0.55; SD = 0.38). A positive score indicates a tendency to pursue extrinsic rather than to intrinsic goals.

An autonomous versus controlled orientation was assessed with the Dutch General Causality Orientations scale (Soenens, Berzonsky, Vansteenkiste, Beyers, & Goossens, 2005), consisting of 12 vignettes describing hypothetical situations (e.g., "You have been offered a new position in a company where you have worked for some time"). Each situation was followed by an autonomous (e.g., "I wonder whether this new job will be interesting") and a controlled (e.g., "I wonder whether I will earn more money?") response. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each response reflected how they would act, feel, or think in this situation on a five-point Likert scale anchored by *Completely disagree* and *Completely agree*. Again, systematic response sets were controlled for by subtracting an individual's overall mean score from each individual score, after which an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The scree plot pointed to a one-factor solution on which autonomy items loaded positively (>.40) and control items loaded negatively (<-.40). After reversing the autonomy items, an autonomous versus controlled orientation score (CON) was computed by averaging all items (alpha = .76; Mean = -0.52; SD = 0.32). A positive score points to a predominantly controlled orientation.

Finally, participants completed a Dutch version of the multicultural ideology scale (9 items; Berry & Kalin, 1995), assessing degree of support for a culturally diverse society in which different ethnic and cultural groups maintain and share their culture. Items (e.g., 'Belgians should accept that their society consists of different cultural groups') were rated on a seven-point Likert scale anchored by *Completely disagree* and *Completely agree*. After reversing the negatively worded items, multiculturalism scores were computed by averaging the items (alpha = .88; Mean = 4.61; SD = 0.90).

3. Results

Correlation analyses showed that EXT related positively to CON ($r = .48, p < .001$) and that both EXT and CON related negatively to multiculturalism ($r_s = -.36$ and $-.32, p < .001$, respectively). Although there were no age differences in CON ($r = -.01, ns$) and multiculturalism ($r = .04, ns$), there were age differences in EXT ($r = -.15, p < .01$), indicating that older participants were more likely to value intrinsic goals. Univariate ANOVAs revealed no gender differences in EXT [$F(1, 440) = 0.86, ns$] and multiculturalism [$F(1, 440) = 0.14, ns$], but showed that boys (Mean = -0.40, SD = 0.25) were less likely than girls (Mean = -0.50, SD = 0.29) to experience

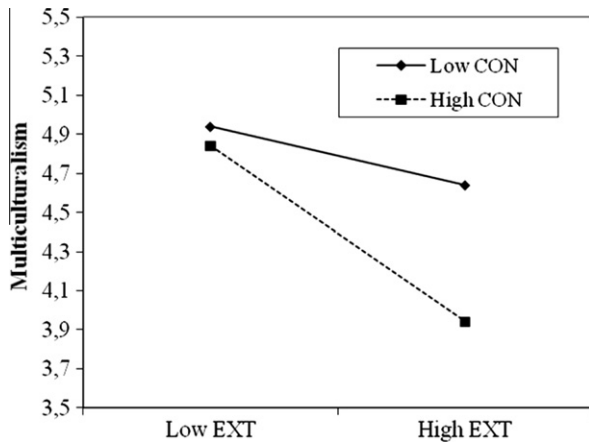


Fig. 1. Simple slopes of an intrinsic versus extrinsic (EXT) goal pursuit predicting multiculturalism at varying levels of autonomous versus controlled (CON) orientation. High levels are one standard deviation above and low levels are one standard deviation below the mean.

their actions as volitional [$F(1, 440) = 7.39, p < .01$]. Given these results, age and gender were controlled for in the primary analyses.

Hierarchical regression analyses then examined whether causality orientation mediated or moderated the relationship between goal pursuit and multiculturalism. In Step 1, age and gender were entered. In Step 2, EXT was added to examine its main effect on multiculturalism. In Step 3, CON was added to check whether this significantly reduced the effect of EXT, as can be expected in the case of mediation. Finally, in Step 4, the interaction term between EXT and CON was added in order to test for moderation. Prior to calculating this interaction term, EXT and CON were standardized. After controlling for gender in Step 1 ($R^2 = .00$; $F(2, 435) = 0.35, ns$), Step 2 ($\Delta R^2 = .13$; $F(1, 434) = 65.14, p < .001$), Step 3 ($\Delta R^2 = .03$; $F(1, 433) = 12.83, p < .001$), and Step 4 ($\Delta R^2 = .02$; $F(1, 432) = 10.17, p < .01$) all added to the prediction of multiculturalism. Although a Sobel test ($= -3.42, p < .001$) indicated significant mediation, adding CON reduced the original effect of EXT ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$) by only 29%, leaving this effect highly significant ($\beta = -.28, p < .001$). In the final model (Step 4), age and gender did not have a significant effect ($\beta = .01$ and $-.01, ns$, respectively), but multiculturalism was predicted by EXT ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$), CON ($\beta = -.20, p < .001$), and their interaction ($\beta = -.15, p < .01$). Further analyses indicated that the simple slope at low levels of CON (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) was $-.00$ ($t = -.01, ns$), whereas the simple slope at high CON levels (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) was $-.38$ ($t = -3.23, p < .01$). Figure 1 displays this interaction effect.

4. Discussion

Although previous studies have shown that a predominantly extrinsic goal pursuit is associated with increased racial and ethnic prejudice (Duriez et al., 2007; Van Hiel et al., 2010), results of the present study nuance this acclaimed social cost of a predominantly extrinsic goal pursuit. Specifically, results suggest that the relationship between goal pursuit and prejudice is qualified (i.e., moderated) by differences in the underlying causality orientation, with attitudes towards multiculturalism being less positive only among people predominantly pursuing extrinsic goals for controlled reasons.

In order to test the idea that attitudes towards multiculturalism become less positive only among people predominantly pursuing extrinsic goals for controlled reasons more strictly, future research might want to conduct experimental studies in which, for example,

a real or fictitious future contact with members of an ethnic minority is portrayed as serving either an intrinsic or an extrinsic goal and in which participation in this intergroup contact is portrayed as either volitional (i.e., autonomous) or controlled (i.e., as would be the case when it takes place in a school context and is portrayed as obligatory). In addition, future research might want to investigate why people pursuing extrinsic goals for autonomous reasons have a more positive multicultural ideology than people pursuing extrinsic goals for controlled reasons. One reason might be that people pursuing extrinsic goals for autonomous reasons perceive competition over limited resources as inherently good for society (which would be consistent with a capitalist ideology) and/or joyful, and do not mind that their odds of “winning” might decrease due to the arrival of extra competitors. Another reason might be that people pursuing extrinsic goals for autonomous reasons have more confidence in their competence and, hence, do not regard the arrival of (often low-status) newcomers as a threat to their personal status and materialist ambitions.

It should be stressed though that a predominantly extrinsic goal pursuit is rather strongly positively correlated with a predominantly controlled causality orientation ($r = .48, p < .001$). As a consequence, the co-occurrence of having a predominantly extrinsic goal pursuit and a predominantly autonomous causality orientation is rather exceptional. Nevertheless, results of the present study have important implications for people interested in combating racial and ethnic intolerance. The take-home message of previous research on this topic was that, in the light of globalization and increasing migration, it is important for a society to promote intrinsic goals and downplay the importance of extrinsic goals. Although this message is not contradicted by the results of the present study (who do show a main effect of an intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuit), results suggest that combating racial and ethnic intolerance does not necessarily equal combating materialism. In fact, results suggest that there is no need to alter people's goals and values: The same beneficial effect can be achieved by promoting volitional functioning.

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