

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: "EASIER SAID THAN DONE": PROMISES
AS FALSE PROXIES IN GOAL PURSUIT

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This study investigated goal activation following a promise to complete the goal. Because promising is a statement of commitment to a goal, it is generally assumed to increase goal activation. However, when individuals have the motivation to infer progress on the goal, and when information is accessible which would facilitate such an inference from the act of promising, goal activation should decrease following the promise. We hypothesized and found that when promises are made after competing goals have been activated *and* when positive affect is experienced following the promise, goal activation is lower than when a promise is not made. Only when competing goals were not activated and positive affect was experienced did promising lead to greater goal activation than not promising. These results add to current work on feedback processes in goal pursuit, and demonstrate the paradoxical effects of promising to complete a goal.

“EASIER SAID THAN DONE”: PROMISES AS FALSE PROXIES IN GOAL
PURSUIT

By

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Chapter 1: Theoretical Rationale

Promising to complete a task represents an explicit declaration of commitment to a goal, which implies a guarantee of goal attainment. When a promise is made to another person, it includes an interpersonal component whereby a sense of moral duty to attain the goal is implied. Philosophers disagree about the importance of the interpersonal nature of the moral duty, but have reached consensus that fulfillment of a promised goal represents an ethical obligation, and breaking a promise constitutes a moral wrongdoing (e.g. Kolodny & Wallace, 2003; Scanlon, 1990; 1998). Of course, even though ethical considerations may have a powerful influence toward fulfillment of the promised goal, not all promises are carried through to completion. The aim of the present research is to investigate the cognitive activation of promised goals in order to suggest cognitive mechanisms for the increased or decreased likelihood of goal attainment as a result of promising. Indeed, a major premise of the current paper is that under some circumstances promising to complete a goal will lead to decreased activation of the goal and decreased likelihood that the promised action will be completed.

As stated above, promises represent goals which an individual has somehow explicitly committed to. Current theorizing about goal systems may help us understand the processes associated with promise-making and specific conditions in which promises will be substituted for action towards that goal. Goals are conceptualized as cognitive structures (Kruglanski, 1996a), thus the same psychological principles which guide the activation of other cognition apply to the activation of goals. Goals may be more or less available, accessible, salient, and

applicable in different contexts (e.g. Higgins, 1996). From this perspective, we can investigate the psychological processes that would lead to changes in the activation of a promised goal. It seems plausible to assume that goal activation is a necessary condition for goal pursuit and attainment. From that perspective, the more activated the promised goal, the more likely it is to be completed.

Once a commitment to a goal is made, the actor monitors goal progress (Atkinson & Raynor, 1978; Feather, 1990; Gollwitzer, 1999; Locke & Latham, 1990; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Soman & Shi, 2003). Many different types of information may serve as feedback on the status of goal directed action, including cognitions (Fishbach & Dhar, 2006; Oettingen, 2000; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen, Pak, & Schnetter, 2001), affect (Clore et al., 2001), and behavior (Fishbach & Dhar, 2006). This information may be used to suggest the appropriate activation level of goals to the individual. The less progress that has been made towards the goal, the greater activation of the goal is required. Similarly, an assessment that progress has been made signals that the goal can be deactivated and resources can be shifted to another goal system. For example, when a person completes the last of a series of math problems which constitute the necessary homework for an evening, the person is freed to begin another homework assignment, work task, or leisure activity. When commitment is inferred, increases in goal activation follow. Promising to complete a goal represents a case in which an explicit statement of commitment is made. However, it is possible that the act of promising can paradoxically be interpreted as goal progress because it represents an action consistent with movement toward the

goal. The present research addresses variables that impact whether the promise is encoded as goal-commitment or goal-progress.

Previous research has investigated specific types of information which may influence whether individuals infer progress versus commitment to a goal, and the impact this has on subsequent goal directed behavior. Fishbach & Dhar (2006) found that manipulating perceived commitment and perceived progress toward a goal resulted in differential effects on the pursuit of alternative and competing goals. To manipulate perceived commitment versus progress, Fishbach and Dhar had participants complete a questionnaire about goal progress in which the comparison point was either extremely far from what the participants had accomplished or very close to what the participant had accomplished. For example, participants leaving a gym were asked in one study how close they were to their ideal weight, and the response scale ranged from -25 to +25 pounds or from -5 to +5 pounds. When the comparison point was very far, suggesting low progress (hence augmenting commitment), participants engaged in goal consistent behavior. However, when the comparison point was very close, suggesting considerable goal progress, participants engaged in goal inconsistent behavior. For example, participants were more likely to choose a chocolate bar as payment for participation when information was accessible which suggested they had made progress towards their weight goal. But they were more likely to choose an apple when provided with low progress information suggesting that they should stay committed to their goal. In other words, information suggesting movement toward the goal may lead to deactivation of the goal whereas

information suggesting a lack of movement toward the goal may lead to continued or increased goal activation.

The Fishbach and Dhar (2006) research represents a case in which a relatively “objective” movement (or lack thereof) is framed according to some standard in order to create a sense of progress or commitment. However, the inference of progress may occur in subtler, and more subjective, ways as well. In fact, research has suggested that fantasizing about the successful attainment of a goal leads to decreased goal activation (Oettingen, 2000). Across four studies, Oettingen and Mayer (2002) found that fantasizing about future attainment of a goal reduced goal directed behavior as compared with fantasizing negatively about attainment of the goal and having a positive expectancy about a goal. This suggests that participants who fantasized about goal attainment were able to treat the fantasy as progress towards the goal and to substitute the thoughts about attainment for actual attainment. In order for fantasizing to result in goal directed behavior, the discrepancy between the fantasized event and the current progress towards that event must be noticed *and* elaborated (Oettingen, Pak, & Schnetter, 2001). When the inconsistency is left unelaborated, the person can be distracted from the reality by the fantasy’s positivity or desirability (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2002; Oettingen, 2000; Oettingen & Wadden, 1991). This suggests that individuals may infer goal progress when the information about progress is less concrete and “objective” than in the Fishbach and Dhar (2006) experiments. That is, participants do not even need information about their actual progress towards a goal, but rather are capable of substituting fantasy for reality. As stated by Oettingen &

Mayer (2002; p. 1199), “one’s fantasies about the future can be based on mentally experiencing having attained the outcome, moving smoothly toward it, or both.”

The research conducted thus far on the deactivation of a goal due to information suggesting progress has concerned either actual movement toward the goal or thoughts about such movement. A specific informational content of particular relevance to goal feedback which has not yet been investigated in this type of paradigm, and which may be particularly relevant to promise-making, is the experience of affect. As argued below, in some cases, the experience of positive affect may lead to increases in goal activation, whereas in other circumstances it might lead to a decrease in goal activation. I will consider each in turn.

Consider first the possibility of goal deactivation being prompted by positive affect. Carver and Scheier’s (1990) cybernetic control model suggests that individuals monitor the rate of progress towards a goal in reference to a relevant criterion. When progress exceeds the criterion positive affect is experienced, and when it falls short of the criterion negative affect is experienced. Affect as information theory (e.g. Schwarz & Clore, 1996; In press) suggests that experienced affect may serve as information in inference rules, including inferences relevant to goal pursuit and promises that have been made. A person may infer progress towards the goal from an experience of positive affect because the experience of positive affect signals effective movement toward the goal. As found in research reviewed above (e.g. Fishbach and Dhar, 2006; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002), inferences of goal progress often lead to decreased goal activation and decreased goal directed behavior.

Yet positive affect may also lead to continued or increased activation of a goal. The experience of positive affect may afford the inference that a goal is desirable, enjoyable, or attainable. Each such inference would be expected to increase the activation of the goal and to inspire increased goal directed behavior. As stated by Clore et al. (2001, p. 43), “positive affective cues serve as an incentive, reward, or “go” signal for using currently accessible information and pursuing currently accessible inclinations, whereas negative affective cues serve as an inhibition, punishment, or “stop” signal”. Moreover, “Whether experienced as self-confidence, as success, or as an indication that one’s beliefs and expectations are valid, positive affect should serve as a go signal (or reward) and negative affect should serve as a stop signal (or punishment) for using whatever goal, strategy, information, or response is most accessible” (Clore et al. 2001, p. 43).

Therefore, the experience of positive affect when promising should sometimes lead to increases in goal activation, whereas at other times it could lead to decreases in goal activation. By accounting for the motivation of individuals regarding the importance of making immediate progress on a goal, we can make specific predictions about circumstances in which individuals will infer progress as a result of feeling good about a promise to complete a goal and when individuals will infer commitment as a result of such a feeling.

The use of any information is driven by the motivation of the individual making the inference (Kruglanski, 1989; 1996b). That is, information is used to construct syllogisms which fit the needs of the individual at a given moment. In the context of feedback information in goal pursuit, individuals may be motivated to infer

progress in some instances and motivated to infer commitment at other times. As mentioned above, the motivation to attain a goal quickly or immediately may lead to the use of information such that progress is inferred. This would allow for the inhibition of the focal goal so that resources could be freed for an alternative goal system (Kruglanski et al., 2002). The activation of competing goals (e.g. Kopetz & Kruglanski, In preparation) represents a specific motivating influence which can be expected to have an impact on the motivation to infer progress versus commitment to a goal. When competing goals are activated, the individual is motivated to infer progress on the current task because an alternative goal system requires resources. Consistent with this idea, Webster (1993) found that when participants were told they would be doing a future task that was enjoyable (vs. not enjoyable), they moved more quickly through their current task.

The Present Research

The present research sought to investigate the notion that promising to complete a goal may lead to increases in goal activation under some conditions and to decreases in under other conditions. We predicted that when information was accessible that suggested the inference of goal progress *and* when motivation to make such an inference was present, goal activation would be lower following a promise than when no promise was made. The logic of the predictions for this study are based on the differential use of positive affect as information about goal-progress or goal-commitment, depending on the processing motivation of the actor. It was hypothesized that when a person has competing goals activated and when they experience positive affect, the activation of their focal goal would decline after

promising (vs. not promising) to complete the focal goal. This was expected because the participants with activated competing goals would be motivated to make the inference that the action of promising constituted progress towards their focal goal. The positive affect in this case is expected to serve as information that would facilitate the inference because positive affect is typically experienced after goal attainment (as discussed above; Carver & Scheier, 1990).

However, it was also hypothesized that when the person's competing goals aren't active the focal goal will be more activated upon they having promised (vs. not having promised) to complete the focal goal. That is because in the absence of competing goals the individual is likely to infer commitment from a promise, and the positive affect may facilitate this inference by assuming that positive feedback about the promise reflects commitment to the goal (Clore et al., 2001). Finally, it was hypothesized that when participants experience neutral affect, there would be no difference in the activation of the focal goal in the promise vs. no promise conditions because in the absence of positive affect it is less likely that participants would have sufficient information available for making such inferences.

If this pattern of results is found, this research will highlight the paradoxical effects of promising to complete a task. Previous research has generally assumed that the setting of a goal, and a commitment to that goal, increase the activation of the goal and the likelihood of attaining the goal. The predicted pattern of results would suggest that this is not always the case. In addition to the specifics of goal setting and promises, this research would highlight the role that affect as information can play in goal activation. Although theories of goal directed action (reviewed above) place an

emphasis on affect as feedback about the progress of goal pursuit, little direct research has been conducted on this topic. Moreover, the (likely unconscious) cognitive processes that drive the inferences of progress and commitment toward goals will be investigated with an eye towards exploring the motivational forces that drive such inferences. This approach to the regulation of goal systems represents a more nuanced approach than has been articulated previously.

Chapter 2: Methodology

To test the hypotheses, participants were asked to generate and think about a goal. Next, they entered one word into the computer to represent the goal. They then listed goals that were either in competition with the focal goal or that had already been completed. Participants then either promised to complete their focal goal or listed reasons for subscribing to the goal. Following this, participants were presented with pictures in order to induce a positive mood or a negative mood. Finally, participants completed a lexical decision task in which the word representing their focal goal was included. The reaction time to that word served as the dependent measure of goal activation. Faster reaction times to the word were taken to indicate greater accessibility of the focal goal.

Methods

Participants

159 undergraduate psychology students at the University of Maryland participated in the experiment in exchange for extra credit. Participants were 18 to 28 years of age, with a mean age of 20. 54 (34%) of the participants were men and 105 (66%) were women. Gender of participants didn't produce any significant effects and will be, therefore, not considered in subsequent discussions.

Procedure

Participants completed all procedures on an IBM compatible computer. First, they were asked to think about something they would like to do for another person. Specifically, participants were asked to "...think about something that you would like

to do for someone close to you, such as your significant other, close friend, or close relative. It should not be too trivial such as responding to an email if you email each other regularly. Nor should it be too large such as making a marriage proposal. Please think about exactly what you would like to do and how you will do it for 2 minutes.” For the remainder of this paper, this will be referred to as the *Focal Goal*. Once two minutes had elapsed, the computer prompted participants to enter one word into the computer to “summarize or stand for the action” they thought about. Participants entered a large variety of goals, such as “visit,” “surprise,” “gift,” “dinner,” “card,” and “shoes.”

Next, the presence (vs. absence) of competing goals was manipulated by randomly assigning participants to one of two conditions. This was done in order to manipulate participants’ motivation to interpret the action of writing about their goal as goal progress. In order to activate competing goals, participants were asked to list 3 activities they “would like to accomplish today”. In the control condition competing goals were not manipulated, and instead participants listed 3 activities they “already accomplished today”.

In addition, I orthogonally manipulated whether participants promised to complete their focal goal or not. After they listed their goals, participants were randomly assigned to either the promise the no-promise condition. In the promise condition, participants were asked to “Please write a pledge to complete the thing that you would like to do for someone else. The written statement should begin with “I promise...” and should be 5-7 sentences in length. Please write your promise below.” In the non-promise condition, participants were instructed to list the reasons they had

for the goal with the instructions “Please write 5-7 sentences about your reasons for wanting to do the thing you would like to do for someone else. This should begin with “My reasons for...”

In order to be sure that the promise was sincere, participants responded to an item which read, “sincere goals are written about differently than insincere goals. Do you actually intend to complete the goal you wrote about?” Six participants were excluded from data analysis because they responded “no” to this question.

Additionally, we orthogonally manipulated the affect of participants following the writing assumed to serve as information from which they could make inferences about the significance of writing about their focal goal. Appropriate affect was induced by randomly assigning participants to one of two conditions. In both, participants were told they would be presented with a series of pictures “to clear their mind” prior to performing a word recognition task. Five pictures from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 2005) were presented to participants for 12 seconds each, totaling one minute of exposure. In the positive affect condition, 5 pictures were presented which had been pre-tested to arouse positive affect (e.g. a smiling baby, dolphins playing with a soccer ball). In the neutral affect condition, 5 pictures were presented which had been pre-tested to be neutral (e.g. a blue towel, a shipyard).

Dependent Measure. Participants completed a lexical decision task in which they were told that the task required them to respond as quickly and as accurately as possible to the question whether a string of letters was a meaningful word or not. An X marked the location on the computer screen in which the word was to appear and

was displayed for 2 seconds. The letter string then appeared after a very brief delay. Participants pressed one key if the letter string represented a meaningful word and different key if it did not. Participants responded to an equal number of each response type over the course of the trials. Specifically, participants were presented with the word which was entered to represent the focal goal, 6 non-words (e.g. pind), and 5 neutral words (e.g. table). The presentation order of the targets was randomly determined for each participant.

The trial of interest to this experiment is one in which the word entered into the computer to represent the focal goal was displayed and responded to. The response latency for this word was used as a measure of goal-activation (Shah & Kruglanski, 2003). Faster reaction times to the word indicated greater goal activation. Because participants generated the goals idiographically, it was only possible to use the self-generated word in the lexical decision task rather than multiple words which may relate to the goal. If this word had been presented multiple times, the first presentation may have influenced response latencies to the subsequent presentations. For this reason, only one presentation of the word representing the focal goal was measured. The response latencies to the neutral words were also recorded, and the average of the response latencies across the five words was computed.

Manipulation Check. Following the dependent measure, participants responded to three items, which served as a manipulation check on the affect induction. Participants were asked the extent they felt “positive-negative,” “pleasant-unpleasant,” and “good-bad.” Participants responded on 7-point semantic differential

scales in which scores at the upper end of the scale (7) reflected a positive valance and scores at the lower end of the scale (1) reflected a negative valance. Responses were averaged across the items to compute a composite. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93.

Results

Manipulation Check

To check the effectiveness of the affect manipulation, we ran the appropriate three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Indeed, there was a significant main effect for affect condition such that participants exposed to the positive pictures ($M = 4.97$) reported significantly higher affect than participants exposed to the negative pictures ($M = 4.58$), $F(1, 145) = 4.42$, $p = .04$. For all other effects, $p > .15$.

Goal Activation

All of the response latencies were logarithmically transformed to lessen the influence of outliers (cf. Fazio, 1990). Because the speed of participants' incorrect responses would have been difficult to interpret in terms of accessibility, only correct responses were used in calculating these response time averages (see Bargh, Chaiken, Govender, & Pratto, 1992). All participants responded correctly to the word representing their focal goal, so no participants were excluded for this reason.

A 2 (promise) X 2 (competing goals) X 2 (affect) ANOVA yielded the predicted three-way interaction for goal activation, $F(1, 145) = 6.23$, $p = .01$. The only other significant effect was the predicted Promise X Competing Goals interaction, $F(1, 145) = 5.34$, $p = .02$. As shown in Table 1, the Promise X Competing Goals interaction held only in the Positive Affect condition, $F(1, 145) =$

11.32, $p = .001$. As predicted, the Promise X Competing Goals interaction was not significant in the neutral affect condition, $F(1, 145) = .86, p = .36$. When the response latency to neutral words is controlled for, the results for goal activation do not change.

To test for the potential effect of the manipulations on response latencies to words generally, we conducted a 2 (promise) X 2 (competing goals) X 2 (affect) ANOVA for the reaction time to neutral words. No significant effects emerged in this analysis. For all effects, $p > .21$.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of response latency to focal goal for each condition (milliseconds)

	Positive Affect		Neutral Affect	
	Competing Goals	No Competing Goals	Competing Goals	No Competing Goals
Promise	703 (40)	554 (39)	603 (39)	645 (35)
No Promise	565 (37)	680 (37)	613 (37)	654 (39)

Positive Affect condition.

As predicted, when no competing goals had been activated, participants responded significantly faster to their focal goal when they had promised to complete the goal ($M = 554\text{ms}$) than when they listed reasons for having the goal ($M = 680\text{ms}$), $t(36) = 2.40, p = .02$. However, when competing goals had been activated, they were slower to respond to their focal goal when they promised to complete the goal ($M =$

703ms) than when (in the control condition) they listed reasons for having the goal ($M = 565\text{ms}$), $t(35) = 2.16$, $p = .04$.

When participants promised to complete their goal, they responded faster to their focal goal when they did not have competing goals activated ($M = 554\text{ms}$) than when they had competing goals activated ($M = 703\text{ms}$), $t(38) = 2.18$, $p = .04$.

However, when they listed reasons for having their goal, they responded slower to their focal goal when they did not have competing goals activated ($M = 680\text{ms}$) than when they had competing goals activated ($M = 564\text{ms}$), $t(33) = 2.34$, $p = .03$.

Possibly, listing reasons led participants to reassess the importance of the goal especially if the reasons that came to mind were not particularly compelling (e.g.

Wilson & Lafleur, 1995)

Neutral Affect condition.

As predicted, in the neutral affect condition there were no differences between any of the four cells of the design. With no competing goals having been activated, there was no difference in recognition time of the focal goal when participants had promised to complete the focal goal ($M = 645\text{ms}$) as compared to when they listed reasons for having that goal ($M = 654\text{ms}$), $t(38) = .04$, $p = .97$. When competing goals had been activated, there was no difference in recognition time of participants' focal goal when they promised to complete the focal goal ($M = 603\text{ms}$) as compared to when they listed reasons for having it ($M = 613\text{ms}$), $t(36) = .15$, $p = .88$.

When participants promised to complete their goal, there was no difference in recognition time of their focal goal when they did not have competing goals activated ($M = 645\text{ms}$) as compared to when they had such goals activated ($M = 603\text{ms}$), $t(38)$

= 1.18, $p = .25$. When they listed reasons for having their goal, there was no difference in recognition time of their focal goal when they did not have competing goals activated ($M = 654\text{ms}$) as compared to when they had them activated ($M = 613\text{ms}$), $t(36) = .77$, $p = .45$.

Chapter 3: Discussion

The results from this experiment suggest that an inference of progress is sometimes made following a promise to complete a goal. This seems to occur for two reasons. First, the inference of progress is more likely to occur when participants have the motivation to make such an inference. In this study, this occurred when participants had competing goals activated, which presumably reminded them of other important pursuits that also needed to be undertaken. By inferring progress on the promised goal, participants were able to free cognitive resources previously directed toward the focal goal and instead mobilize and channel those resources toward the competing goals. Second, the deactivation of a goal following a promise is more likely to occur when information is accessible which can be used to make an inference of goal- progress. In this study, participants motivated to make the inference did so when they were in a good mood following a promise but not when they were in a neutral mood. This presumably occurred because the affect could serve as information in an implicit syllogism in which “if I feel good, then I have made progress on my goal” serves as the major premise and “I feel good” serves as the minor premise, leading to the conclusion that “I have made progress on my goal”.

When participants were not motivated to infer progress on the goal (in the absence of active competing goals), positive affect served as information that the promisory writing they did was a valid statement of intention. This “go” signal resulted in greater goal activation after promising to complete the goal than after writing about the reasons for possessing the goal. The act of communicating a

commitment did just what one would generally expect. It increased commitment to the goal.

These results are consistent with research on the deactivation of a goal following fantasizing about goal attainment (e.g. Oettingen, 2000; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen, Pak, & Schnetter, 2001) and when information regarding the progress of goal attainment is made salient (Fishbach and Dhar, 2006). In addition, these results support ideas from business which suggest that various types of talk such as planning, analysis, and meetings are substituted for action (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Moreover, the results are consistent with current affect as information theory (Clore et al., 2001; Schwarz & Clore, 1996; In press) and current theorizing about the nature of affective feedback in goal pursuit (Carver & Scheier, 1990; 1998).

This research builds on previous work by highlighting the motivational and cognitive processes that occur unconsciously while monitoring the progress and commitment to one's goals. In the case of promising, we found evidence for the ironic effect that a statement of commitment is sometimes inferred as progress toward a goal and leads to the goal's deactivation. This research extends the body of work on false proxies in goal pursuit (Fishbach & Dhar, 2006; Oettingen, 2000; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen, Pak, & Schnetter, 2001) by including new informational types (affect), adding a motivational component, and underscoring the pervasiveness of the effect. In addition, this study is the first to our knowledge which includes a measure of the cognitive activation of a goal in a research paradigm on the false proxy effect.

Although the emphasis of this research has been to suggest the possible ironic deactivation of a goal following inferred goal progress, the potential utility of promising to complete a goal should not be overlooked. When competing goals were not activated and when positive affect was induced, activation of the focal goal was greater following a promise than following listing reasons for the goal. This suggests that in order for promises to lead to increased commitment and allocation of resources for a goal, the promise must be made during a time in which ample resources for the continued pursuit of the focal goal are available.

The current research suggests specific mechanisms for the deactivation of a goal following a promise, but further research is needed to make the results generalizable to other informational contents and other forms of motivation which would lead to such inferences. Because the hypothesis for the experiment were derived regarding the accessibility of information relevant to an inference of goal progress and the motivation to make such an inference of progress, future research should manipulate these variables in other ways. For example, information such as the difficulty of promising should serve the same role as positive affect such that the difficulty of promising may lead to the inference of progress. When individuals exert considerable energy in making a progress they may infer that such energy constitutes progress whereas a very easy promise does not constitute progress towards a goal.

The motivation to make inferences of progress should also be manipulated in other ways. In addition to competing goals serving as motivation to make an inference of progress, individuals high on the personality dimension of locomotion (Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2002) are motivated to move quickly from goal to

goal, which should lead to a motivation to infer progress on the focal goal so that resources can be shifted to other goals. In addition, the activation of competing goals could be manipulated in a way that does not include feelings of accomplishment in the control condition. Rather than having participants in the control condition list goals that have already been accomplished (as in the present study), participants could list their favorite colors or some other irrelevant item.

The present study was limited in that the interpersonal aspect of communication involved in promising was not investigated. In this design, participants promised to do something for someone else, but did not make such promise to another person. In order to highlight the interpersonal nature of promising, future research should utilize experimental designs in which the promise is made directly to another person.

Although this experiment used methodology which allowed for the measurement of the cognitive activation of the goal, it did not include behavioral measurement. Future research should use behavioral measurement in order to demonstrate the predicted impact on action, such that promising leads to decreased goal directed behavior when information is accessible to make inferences of progress, and when the individual has the motivation to make such an inference. The link between the situation in which the promise is made and the likelihood of goal directed behavior should be mediated by the cognitive activation of the goal.

It is important that we do not generalize aspects of these variables which may not remain constant across individuals and situations. The specific information used in this experiment may fit other inference rules, and hence lead to other inferences in

different circumstances. Although progress towards a goal seems to have served in an inference rule with ultimately decreased goal activation in this study, as well as decreased goal related behaviors in other research (e.g. Fishbach & Dhar, 2006), there are times in which inferred progress towards a goal may increase goal directed behavior (Hull, 1934; Kirvetz, Urminksy, & Zheng, 2006). Uncovering the possible moderators of the link between perceived progress and goal directed behavior could be fruitfully pursued in future research.

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