

When the "Bad" Becomes the "Good" and the "Good" Becomes the "Bad": Prevention Orientation Reverses the Performance-Approach and -Avoidance Goals' Effects on Performance



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Consistently across meta-analyses (Murayama & Elliot, 2012; Wirthwein et al., 2011):

Performance-Approach Goals
(aiming at outperforming others)



Academic
Achievement



Performance-Avoidance Goals
(aiming at not performing more
poorly than others)

According with the **Fit Effect** between Achievement Goals and Regulatory Focus, Performance-Approach and -Avoidance Goals' effects on achievement may depend on their combination and congruency with **Regulatory Strategies**: **Promotion** (seeking positive outcomes) and **Prevention** (seeking not negative outcomes). Promotion is congruent with approach goals and Prevention is congruent with avoidance goals (Higgins, 1997; Renkema & Van Yperen, 2008).

General Hypothesis: Educational systems in Western societies orient individuals by-default toward Promotion rather than Prevention Strategy in achievement tasks. Hence, the classical positive effect of Performance-Approach Goals and the negative effect of Performance-Avoidance Goals on Achievement are due to their respective (**mis**)fit with the by-default Promotion Strategy Orientation among students.

Prediction 1: students should be more Promotion-oriented than Prevention-oriented in achievement-related tasks.

Prediction 2: Promotion Strategy Orientation should increase and Prevention Strategy Orientation should decrease the positive effect of Performance-Approach Goals and the negative effect of Performance-Avoidance Goals on Achievement.

Study 1 : Achievement on a cognitive task

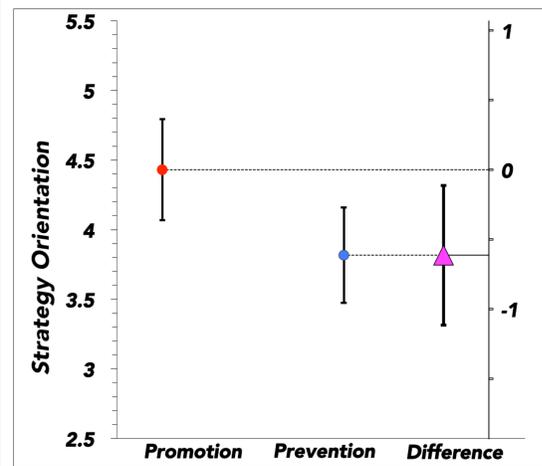
Sample: 79 students (54 women) from social sciences, with a mean age of 22.08 (± 2.71) years.

Procedure: **1)** Participants performed a first set of anagrams for 5 minutes (covariate measure). **2)** They reported their Perf.-Approach and -Avoidance Goals endorsement and their Promotion and Prevention orientation on the task. **3)** They performed a second set of anagram task for 5 minutes (performance measure).

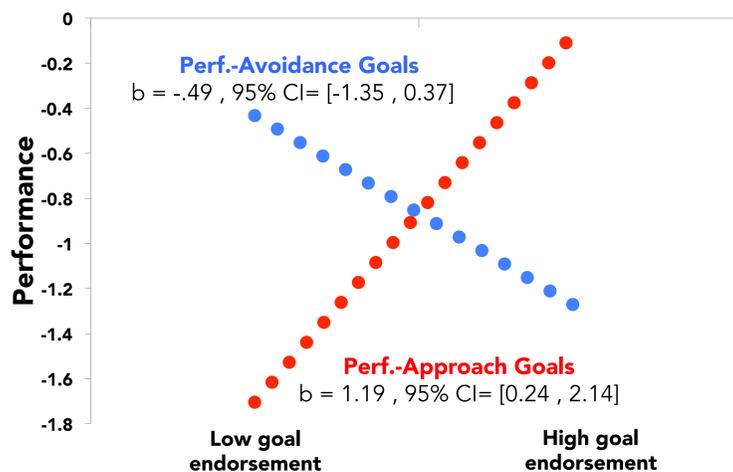
Result 1) Mean Difference in Strategy Orientation
Mdiff = -0.61, 95% CI = [-1.11, -0.11]

Result 2) Perf.-Approach Goals interacted with Prevention, **b** = -.47, 95% CI = [-0.80, -0.14]

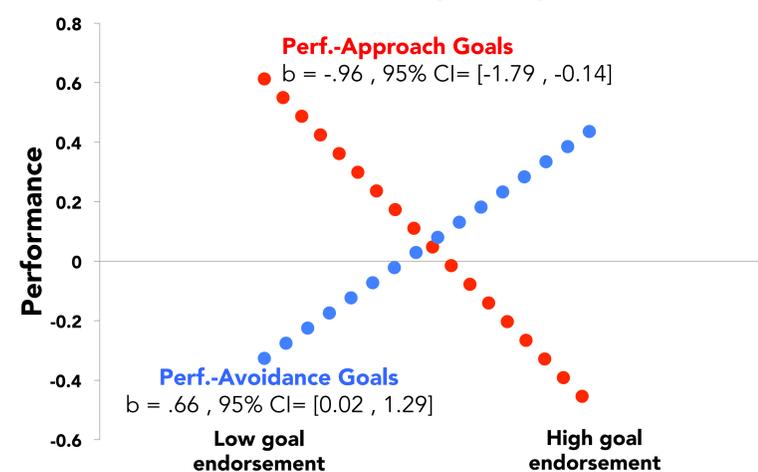
Result 3) Perf.-Avoidance Goals interacted with Prevention, **b** = .25, 95% CI = [0, 0.50]



Means and 95% Confidence Intervals of Promotion and Prevention Strategy Orientation and their difference.



Performance Goals' effects on anagram performance (centered on the mean) under low level of Prevention Orientation (-1.5 SD)



Performance Goals' effects on anagram performance (centered on the mean) under high level of Prevention Orientation (+1.5 SD)

Study 2 : Achievement on a course exam

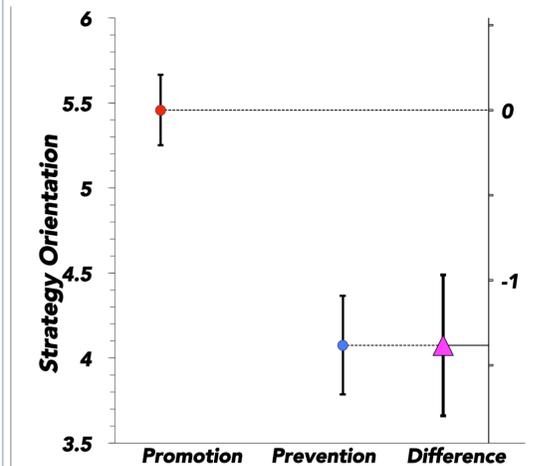
Sample: 139 students (105 women) from social sciences, with a mean age of 22.18 (± 2.72) years.

Procedure: Participants reported their Perf.-Approach and -Avoidance Goals endorsement and their Promotion and Prevention orientation at the beginning of a semester in social psychology course. They estimated their academic level (covariate measure). Grades at the final exam were used as the measure of performance.

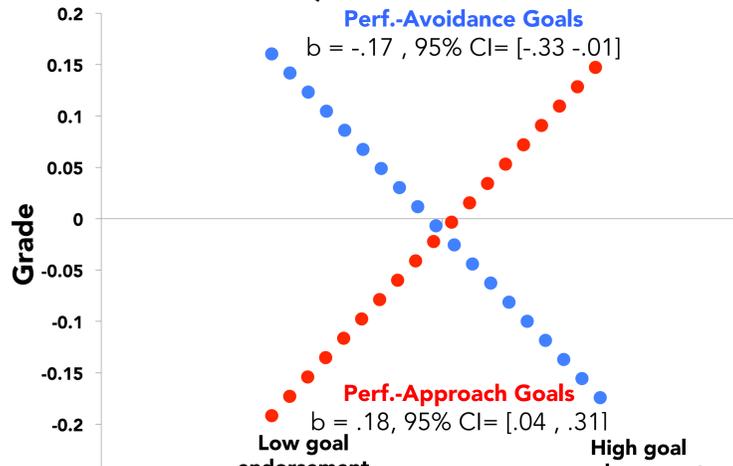
Result 1) Mean Difference in Strategy Orientation
Mdiff = -1.38, 95% CI = [-1.80, -0.97]

Result 2) Perf.-Approach Goals interacted with Prevention, **b** = -.06, 95% CI = [-0.11, -0.02]

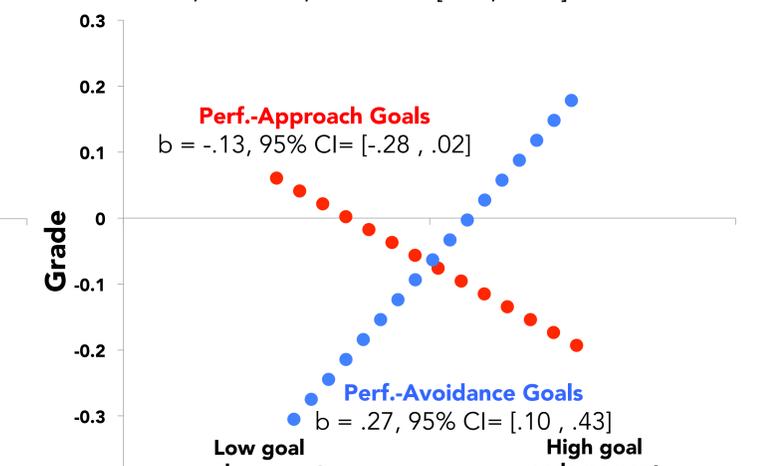
Result 3) Perf.-Avoidance Goals interacted with Prevention, **b** = .10, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.16]



Means and 95% Confidence Intervals of Promotion and Prevention Strategy Orientation and their difference.



Performance Goals' effects on exam grade (centered on the mean) under low level of Prevention Orientation (-1.5 SD)



Performance Goals' effects on exam grade (centered on the mean) under high level of Prevention Orientation (+1.5 SD)

In both studies, **1) students were on average more Promotion- than Prevention-oriented. 2) Performance Goals endorsement yielded classical effects under a low level of Prevention Orientation... 3) but they reversed under a high level of Prevention Orientation!**

4) No Promotion Orientation effect has been detected.

The results suggest that the classical Performance goals' effects on achievement may be due to an asymmetrical strategy orientation among students. They raise the possibility that these effects are due to structural influences beyond the sole intrapersonal motivation. They could also help understand cultural differences in these goals' consequences, most notably the positive effects of Performance-Avoidance Goals' on achievement in Asian students, whose culture orient individuals more toward avoidance than approach motivation (Elliot et al., 2001).

References

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