Self-Regulation When it is Challenging: Motivation and Difficulties in Daily Life

by

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Abstract

Despite good intentions, people often encounter challenges and obstacles in pursuit of their goals. The types of difficulties people experience each day have been well-documented (e.g., desires and temptations, resource depletion, social influences). However, despite these difficulties, some people are still able to attain their goals. Research on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests that relative autonomous motivation (RAM) may explain inter-individual (and intra-individual) differences in effort and persistence when self-regulation is difficult (e.g., Ntoumanis et al., 2014). In two manuscripts, a series of daily diary designs are used to examine the role of motivation when self-regulation is difficult. The first focuses on the role of RAM during goal striving in a healthy eating across each day (Study 1) and during lunches (Study 2). These studies provide some evidence that students with higher (vs. lower) RAM are more likely to attain more difficult healthy eating goals, which may be due to perceiving fewer obstacles in pursuit of these goals, or through the use of more effective (i.e., approach-based) strategies. Then, the second manuscript involves undergraduate students enrolled in online (Study 1) and in-person classes (Study 2) during the Covid-19 pandemic, and focuses on how their situational motivation to do schoolwork may be impacted when they experience motivational interference. Mixed findings emerged regarding the impact of motivational interference on students’ situational motivation but further evidence highlighted the protective effects of RAM when interference occurred. Taken together, these manuscripts contribute to a growing body of research on the study of self-regulation in daily life and on the role of RAM when difficulties arise.