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Exploring the Association Between Goal Difficulty and Well-Being

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Exploring the Association Between Goal Difficulty and Well-Being

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Psychology | St. Norbert College



INTRODUCTION

- Difficult goals → higher levels of both effort and performance (Locke & Latham, 2002)
 - Want the difficulty to be just right
- Positive relationship between goal progress and emotional well-being (Wiese & Freund, 2005)
 - More difficult the goal – the stronger the relationship between goal progress and emotional well-being

Hypotheses

- Goal difficulty is beneficial for well-being
 - Especially when goal is specific & autonomously pursued

METHODS

Participants

- 150 St. Norbert College students
- 92.0% White, 87.3% female

Measures & Procedures

- Longitudinal study
 - 4 parts over a semester
 - N= 46 at Time 4

Time 1

- Goal Description
 - Specificity – coded by independent raters
 - Goal Difficulty - 2 questions, ex: "This goal is difficult to achieve"
 - Goal Autonomy - 2 questions, ex: "When working toward this goal, I feel like I'm doing what I want to be doing"
- Well-Being
 - SPANE - (Diener, et al. 2009)
- Personality
 - TIPI - (Gosling, et. al, 2003)

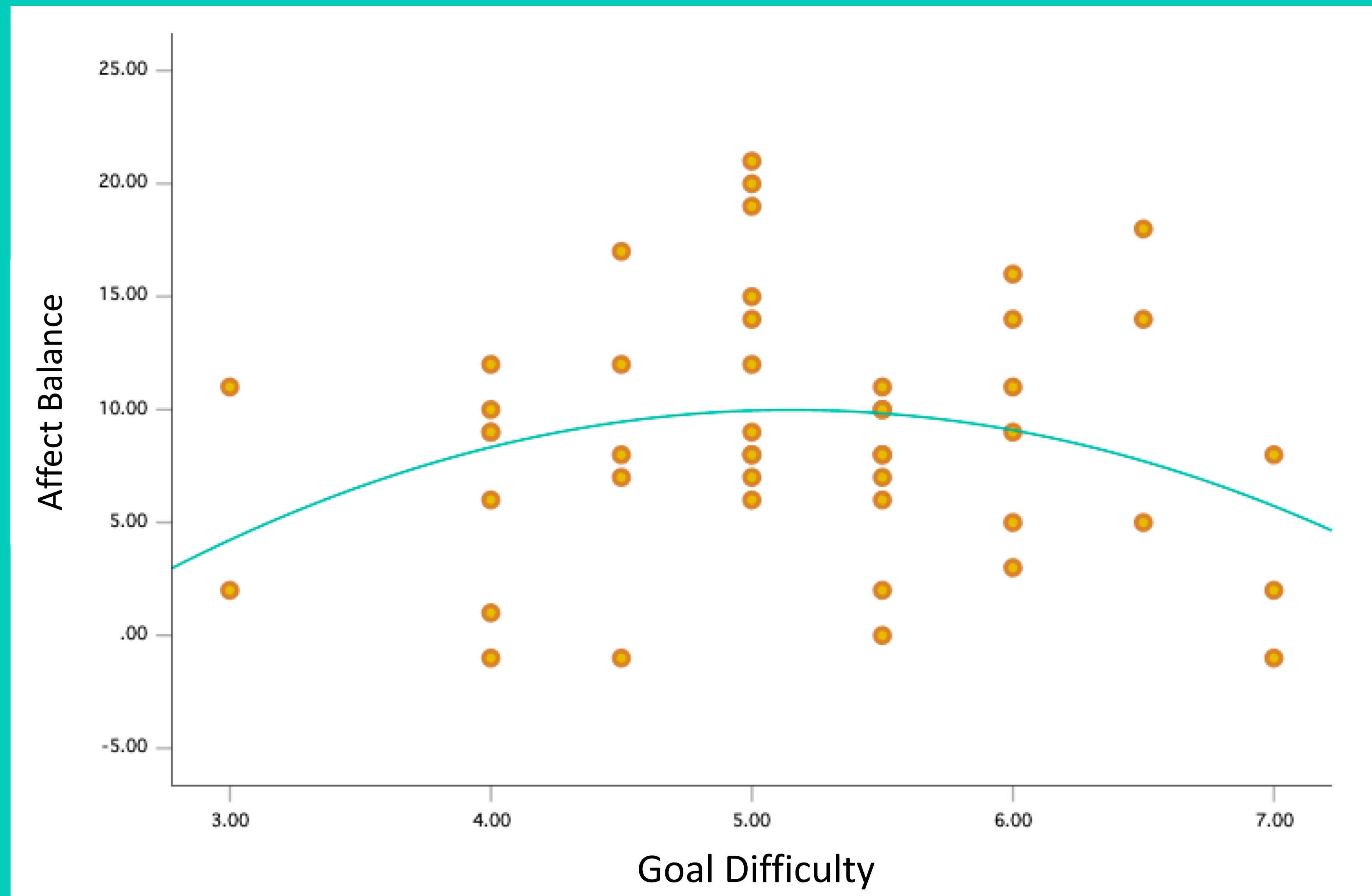
Times 2 & 3

- Progress
- Well-being

Time 4

- Goal achievement
- Well-being

Not all difficult goals are beneficial for one's well-being



Marginally significant effect of conscientiousness & neuroticism on affect balance, but no effects of goal difficulty, specificity, or autonomy

Goal Difficulty Squared

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Goal Difficulty	-.085	.821	-2.100	1.213	.592
Goal Difficulty Squared	-.085	.474	-1.226	.689	.574
T1 Affect Balance	.238	.138	-.080	.477	.158
Neuroticism	-.247	.624	-2.229	.290	.128
Conscientiousness	.281	.744	-.027	2.978	.054

Goal Difficulty and Autonomy

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Goal Difficulty	-.018	.708	-1.528	1.335	.892
Goal Autonomy	.114	.668	-.747	1.951	.373
DiffxAutonomy	.163	.490	-.362	1.619	.207
T1 Affect Balance	.278	.138	-.047	.511	.100
Neuroticism	-.260	.604	-2.240	.199	.099
Conscientiousness	.256	.707	-.086	2.770	.065

Goal Difficulty and Specificity

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI		p
			LL	UL	
Goal Difficulty	-.133	1.046	-2.808	1.416	.509
Goal Specificity	.084	1.610	-2.272	4.232	.546
DiffxSpecificity	.123	1.399	-1.918	3.732	.520
T1 Affect Balance	.192	.147	-.137	.458	.281
Neuroticism	-.274	.619	-2.326	.173	.089
Conscientiousness	.245	.761	-.249	2.823	.098

RESULTS

Analytic Plan

- Correlation- goal difficulty and affect balance
- Hierarchical regression- goal difficulty, goal difficulty², affect balance
- Regression- goal difficulty, goal autonomy, goal specificity, affect balance
 - Control variables- T1 affect balance, conscientiousness, & neuroticism

Results

- Marginally significant curvilinear relationship* between goal difficulty & affect balance ($B = -1.254, \beta = -.273, SE = .682, p = .075$)
 - *when omitting outliers (below 2SD)
- Association between goal difficulty and affect balance was not moderated by specificity or autonomy (see tables)

DISCUSSION

- Few effects of goal difficulty on well-being, even when goal autonomy and goal specificity are considered
- Indicates that as a participant's goal difficulty increased, the effect of goal difficulty on their well-being decreased
- Suggests an optimal level of goal difficulty
- Nonsignificant results could be due to small sample size at time of the final survey
- C & N as moderators on relationship between goal difficulty & affect balance

References available upon request!