

# THE ROLE OF DISPOSITIONAL SELF-AWARENESS IN IDENTIFYING GOAL-RELATED OBSTACLES AND PERCEIVED GOAL PROGRESS

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## Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between dispositional self-awareness, identification of goal-related obstacles, and progress in the pursuit of a current personal goal. Based on theoretical assumptions proposed by Kreibich, Hennecke, and Brandstätter (2020), self-awareness is expected to facilitate the identification of obstacles that hinder goal attainment. The present study extends this framework by examining the broader relationship between dispositional self-awareness, obstacle identification, and their consequences for perceived goal progress. A total of 235 participants reported on a current personal goal and completed measures assessing obstacle identification (Kreibich, Hennecke, & Brandstätter, 2020), goal progress (Werner et al., 2016), and dispositional self-awareness using the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale–Short Form. As theoretically expected, dispositional self-awareness positively predicted the identification of goal-related obstacles. However, increased identification of obstacles was associated with lower subjective perceptions of goal progress. These findings challenge assumptions regarding the uniformly beneficial role of heightened self-awareness and suggest that, in the context of achievement difficulties, greater awareness of obstacles may come at a psychological cost rather than facilitating goal attainment.

*Keywords:* Self-awareness, goal obstacles, goals.

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## 1. Introduction

Achieving goals, whether in life or in everyday situations, is an integral part of our lives. Whether in the areas of health, work, sports, or relationships, it is assumed that most human behavior is goal-oriented (Kreibich, Hennecke, & Brandstätter, 2020). An integral but often overlooked part of the goal-achievement process is self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to the ability to direct one's activities to goal over time and across changing circumstances (Kanfer, 1990). These definitions also make it clear that self-regulation is usually considered a conscious process (Diefendorff & Lord, 2008) that requires deliberate attention to be successful. The key aspects of the self-regulation process are therefore conditioned by self-monitoring and self-awareness (Hoyle, 2010).

The current study examines the role of self-awareness in the process of achieving goals. Self-awareness is defined as an individual's ability to reflect on their thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Duval & Silvia, 2002). Individual differences in self-awareness create a tendency for people to acquire different levels of self-focused attention, which can serve as a potential antecedent for identifying obstacles (Kreibich, Hennecke, & Brandstätter, 2020). When individuals find that obstacles stand in the way of a set goal, they may respond accordingly, for example, by identifying compensatory means to deal with the obstacle (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Myrseth & Fishbach, 2009). On the other hand, however, individuals who constantly identify many obstacles may be overwhelmed by this experience and therefore be at a disadvantage (Kreibich, Hennecke, & Brandstätter, 2020). Nevertheless, empirical evidence connecting self-awareness and goal achievement is quite limited.

The aim of the study is to conceptually replicate Study 1 by Kreibich, Hennecke, and Brandstätter (2020) by examining the relationship between dispositional self-awareness and the identification of obstacles in achieving a current goal. Current research suggests that self-awareness can have a positive impact on the process of self-regulation and goal achievement, helping individuals identify obstacles, maintain motivation, and adjust their behavior (London, Sessa, & Shelley, 2023).

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Dispositional self-awareness

Self-Reflection and Insight Scale Short by Silvia, P. J. (2022) was used. Respondents answered individual items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Given the study's aim to verify dispositional self-awareness, we decided to use the 6 items of the Self-reflection subscale in our research, with internal consistency in the original validation study of  $\alpha = .89$ .

### 2.2. Identification of obstacles

With the aim of achieving conceptual replication, we adopted four items from the study by Kreibich, Hennecke, and Brandstätter (2020) through which we operationalized the ability to identify obstacles to achieving goals. The first two items focused on determining the respondent's tendency or ability to identify obstacles, while the second two focused on determining the frequency of identifying obstacles in the process of achieving a goal. Before completing the items, respondents were first familiarized with the concept of obstacles - "*Aspects that prevent you from achieving your goal*" (Oettingen & Stephens, 2009) and then responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The internal consistency of all four items in the study by Kreibich, Hennecke, and Brandstätter (2020) was  $\alpha = .76$ .

### 2.3. Overcoming obstacles

In our analysis of the literature, we identified that overcoming obstacles as part of the two-stage self-regulation model by Myrseth and Fishbach (2009) had not been precisely operationalized by any methodology. The original version of the scale we constructed contained eight items rated (based on Myrseth, Fishbach theory, 2009) on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). After iterative verification of psychometric properties and removal of items that weakened the internal consistency of the scale, the final version consists of 6 items.

### 2.4. Goal progress

We operationalized goal attainment in the study using three items from Werner et al. (2016) measuring goal progress. The full wording of the items was: "*I have made significant progress toward this goal*," "*I feel that I am on track to achieve this goal*," "*I feel as if I have already achieved this goal*." Respondents answered the items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The internal consistency of all three items in the study by Werner et al. (2016) was in the range of  $\alpha = .93$ – $.96$ .

### 2.5. Goal attainment phase

Two items we constructed to determine the stage at which respondents currently find themselves in achieving their goal: "*At what stage are you currently at in achieving your goal?*", to which respondents answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = I am at the beginning, 7 = I am at the end) and "*Where do you see yourself in terms of achieving your goal?*", to which respondents answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very far from achieving the goal, 7 = very close to achieving the goal). The items were designed with the intention of explicitly verifying the goal attainment phase, based on the assumption that the assessment of this phase is highly subjective and biased by the nature of the respondents' goals and perspectives. For this reason, the results relating to the goal attainment phase were interpreted with appropriate caution and considering the potential subjectivity of the assessment. The internal consistency of both items assessing the goal attainment phase was  $\alpha = .848$  (95% CI [.802 - .883]) and Spearman–Brown coefficient  $r_{sp} = .848$  (95% CI [.802 - .883]).

### 2.6. Procedure

Beyond descriptive statistics, content analysis of respondents' goals, tests of normal data distribution, and verification of other conditions for more advanced statistical methods, the main aim of study was to conceptually replicate Pearson's correlation between dispositional self-awareness and identification of obstacles. This analysis ensured a partial conceptual replication of the results of Study 1 by Kreibich, Hennecke, and Brandstätter (2020).

## 3. Participants

The research sample consisted of 229 respondents, of whom 168 (73.4%) were women and 61 (26.6%) were men. Given the focus of the research on university students, the average age of respondents was 21 years ( $M = 20.93$ ,  $SD = 1.826$ ). The research sample was obtained through available selection and snowball selection of respondents, conducted online using Microsoft Forms administered by researchers. The final data set did not contain any missing data.

## 4. Results

Conceptual replication of correlations was preceded by descriptive analysis, the results of which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of descriptive analysis data.

	Dispositional self-awareness	Obstacles identification	Overcoming obstacles	Goal progress	Goal attainment phase
Mean	31.50	20.54	30.79	12.92	7.900
SD	6.933	4.654	6.379	3.996	2.666
Skewness	-0.412	-0.362	-0.236	-0.207	0.025
SD	0.161	0.161	0.161	0.161	0.161
Kurtosis	-0.570	-0.463	-0.713	-0.576	-0.650
SD	0.320	0.320	0.320	0.320	0.320
Minimum	13.00	8.000	15.00	3.000	2.000
Maximum	42.00	28.00	42.00	21.00	14.00

Table 2. Results of Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis.

	Dispositional self-awareness	Obstacles identification	Overcoming obstacles	Goal progress	Goal attainment phase
Dispositional self-awareness					
p-value					
95% CI					
Obstacles identification	,200**				
p-value	,002				
95% CI	[,051 – ,337]				
Overcoming obstacles	,137*	-,063			
p-value	,038	,344			
95% CI	[,003 – ,267]	[-,208 – ,081]			
Goal progress	,063	-,180**	,525***		
p-value	,341	,006	< ,001		
95% CI	[-,065 – ,190]	[-,313 – -,042]	[,426 – ,614]		
Goal attainment phase	,069	-,165*	,373***	,588***	
p-value	,297	,012	< ,001	< ,001	
95% CI	[-,056 – ,190]	[-,305 – -,019]	[,254 – ,485]	[,486 – ,680]	

Based on the correlation results, we can primarily conclude that there is a significant relationship between dispositional self-awareness and the identification of obstacles ( $r = .200$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [.051 – .337]). The relationship between dispositional self-awareness and overcoming obstacles ( $r = .137$ ,  $p = .038$ , 95% CI [.003 – .267]) also proved to be significant.

We found other significant relationships between identifying obstacles and goal progress ( $r = -0.180$ ,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI [-0.313 – -0.042]), between identifying obstacles and the goal achievement phase ( $r = -0.165$ ,  $p = .012$ , 95% CI [-.305 – -.019]). We also identified significant relationships between overcoming obstacles and goal progress ( $r = .525$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.426 – .614]), between overcoming obstacles and the goal achievement phase ( $r = .373$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.254 – .485]), and between goal progress and goal attainment phase ( $r = .588$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.486 – .680]).

## 5. Discussion

Self-regulation and goal attainment are an important key to successful human functioning, Study serves as a partial replication, testing known relationships between dispositional self-awareness and obstacle identification, and provides an original iteration in the form of verifying the relationship between dispositional self-awareness, obstacle identification, obstacle overcoming, and goal progress using.

The results of this study will serve as a starting point for further studies that will address causal relationships within self-awareness and the identification of obstacles to achieving health goals.

Conceptual replication confirmed; there is a relationship between dispositional self-awareness and the identification of obstacles. A weaker relationship between dispositional self-awareness and overcoming obstacles has also been demonstrated. Therefore, dispositional self-awareness plays a role in goal-oriented self-regulatory mechanisms.

Surprisingly, there is no relationship between identifying obstacles and overcoming obstacles. Furthermore, dispositional self-awareness is not related to either goal progress or goal attainment phase. This corresponds to some extent with the literature. Duval & Silvia (2002) suggest that dispositional self-awareness itself cannot influence the results of goal attainment. It is rather a second-order predictor that influences first-order predictors, which in turn influence the results of the self-regulation mechanism.

Another significant relationship is the negative relationship between identifying obstacles and goal progress, which also suggests an interesting twist. The literature often points out that it is sufficient to monitor the identifying obstacles variable and, based on that, we can say that the goal will be achieved (London, Sessa, & Shelley, 2023). Our results show the opposite, a higher level of identifying obstacles leads to a reduction in goal progress (a possible indication of a U-curve where low and high identification of obstacles leads to deterioration, but an adaptive level should lead to an improvement in goal progress). Individuals who constantly identify many obstacles may be overwhelmed by this experience and therefore may be less successful in achieving their goals (Kreibich, Hennecke, & Brandstätter, 2020). On the other hand, overcoming obstacles has been nicely demonstrated as a variable that is strongly positively related to goal progress and the goal achievement phase. We can conclude that identification of obstacles is not enough. If you overcome obstacles, only then do you achieve your goal.

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