2000

Why do we sit at different lunch tables? : goal framing and intergroup relations.

Sarah E. Zemore

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses

Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/2370

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.
WHY DO WE SIT AT DIFFERENT LUNCH TABLES?
GOAL FRAMING AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

A Thesis Presented
by
SARAH E. ZEMORE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

May 2000

Department of Psychology
WHY DO WE SIT AT DIFFERENT LUNCH TABLES?
GOAL FRAMING AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS

A Thesis Presented
by
SARAH E. ZEMORE

Approved as to style and content by:

Susan T. Fiske, Chair
Icek Aizen, Member
Paula R. Pietromonaco, Member
Melinda Novak, Department Head
Psychology
ABSTRACT

Proposed that people tend to avoid others when they focus on negative possible outcomes (i.e., when generating avoidance goals) but approach others when they focus on positive possible outcomes (i.e., when generating approach goals). A second proposal suggested that people avoid outgroup members more than they do ingroup members because they focus chronically, and disproportionately, on negative possible outcomes in their intergroup interactions. To test these proposals, 192 heterosexual participants engaged in dyadic interactions with either a Straight (ingroup) or Gay (outgroup) partner, under one of 3 goal framing instructions: Approach, Avoid, or Control. Measures of avoidance (chair distance, eye contact, and period of time that contact was maintained) were collected throughout the interaction. Predictions stated that the Avoid group would demonstrate more avoidance than Controls, who would demonstrate more avoidance than the Approach group; a second prediction specified that participants in the Gay, Control condition would show more avoidance than would participants in the Straight, Control condition. Results failed to confirm the predictions, though other, exploratory analyses do provide interesting leads.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals Guide Behavior</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctions Between Approach and Avoidance Goals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Framing vs. Outcome Expectancies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Goals Prompt Task Disengagement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Goals May Also Prompt Social Avoidance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Frames: Avoidance Goals and Intergroup Relations</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediators Between Goal Framing and Avoidance in Social Interactions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Directions in Goal Framing</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. METHOD</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Interaction</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance During the Interaction</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Interaction Measures: Participant Self-Reports</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Confederate Ratings</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation Check, Debriefing</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RESULTS</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale Construction</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing the Central Hypotheses</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Approaches</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Remaining Dependent Variables</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlations Between Mood and Goal Framing</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Findings</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest obstacles to smooth intergroup relations is, arguably, simple avoidance. Physically and mentally, people disengage from others who differ from them in identifiable ways. Avoidance poses a serious threat to intergroup harmony because, politically and interpersonally, people care most for their friends and families: Strangers are excluded from the net of care.

Why do people avoid outgroup members? The current research proposes that people avoid outgroup members because people have the wrong goals for their interactions. People avoid outgroup members because they focus disproportionately on the risk of negative outcomes, rather than the possibility of positive outcomes, in their interactions with them. People worry about saying something offensive or naive, they worry about provoking anger or awkward misunderstandings. The novelty and complexity of intergroup relations easily overwhelms the well-intentioned. Meanwhile, people seldom view intergroup relations as opportunities for satisfying positive goals, such as making friends or learning about new lifestyles. People are so occupied with following the rules -- whether or not there really are any rules -- that they overlook the fact that good things come from cross-group relations.

To support this thesis, this paper reviews the literature on goals and behavior, giving special emphasis to distinctions between approach and avoidance framing. Early sections present evidence that avoidance framing produces interpersonal disengagement, concluding that, because intergroup contexts cue avoidance frames,
people disengage from outgroup members. Later sections discuss potential mediators of the relation between goal framing and avoidance. A final section presents and discusses an experiment designed to test the proposed relations.

Goals Guide Behavior

The idea that goals guide behavior has sparked and sustained the work of several contemporary theorists. For example, Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) have contended that “self-completion,” or, the attainment of meaningful goals, spurs identity development; similarly, Emmons (1986) has argued that “personal strivings” shape and define personality. More broadly, Snyder and Cantor (1998) have proposed that people’s individual, interpersonal, relationship, and group-level “agendas” guide both their personality and their social behavior (see also Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987, on “life tasks”). In other fields, Elliott and Dweck (1988) have suggested that goals influence achievement efforts, and Fiske (1993) has explored the impact of goals on social perception. This literature argues that goals can be used to understand, and to predict, human behavior.

Additional work has produced more precise models of how goals influence behavior, including, for example, Carver and Scheier’s (1990) dual-process model. Their model defines goals as composites of two representations: 1) higher-level representations of outcomes that serve as endpoints to behavior, and, 2) lower-level representations that specify overt movements toward or away from those outcomes. Similarly, goal sequences can be activated in two ways: 1) through the conscious formation of intentions, or, 2) through the simple activation of associated schemas.
This means that goal pursuit may be elicited in a more or less conscious and controlled manner.

Consistent with these ideas, empirical evidence affirms the link between (both conscious and unconscious) goals and behavior. Demonstrating the power of consciously activated goals, Ajzen and colleagues (e.g., Ajzen, 1985) reliably find significant correlations between intentions and behavior. Other work confirms a role for unconsciously activated goals (e.g., Carver, Ganellen, Froming, & Chambers, 1983; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996). For example, Wilson and Capitman (1982) activated a “romance” schema by asking participants (under different pretexts) to read a boy-meets-girl story. When an attractive girl entered the room moments later, participants who had read the story displayed more behaviors directed toward romantic outcomes than participants who had read a different story.

Distinctions between Approach and Avoidance Goals

The previous paragraphs detailed evidence for the link between goals and behavior. To examine how goals might condition avoidance more specifically, this section turns to the distinction between approach and avoidance framing.

Distinctions between approach and avoidance framing have proven fundamental to research on goals. Despite their differences, variants agree that goals can be divided into two types: those that focus on positive outcomes (approach), and those that focus on negative outcomes (avoidance). The following examples illustrate.

A first variant derives from Carver and Scheier’s (1990) model of self-regulation. This model distinguishes between discrepancy-reducing (approach) and
discrepancy-amplifying (avoidance) feedback loops. Discrepancy-reducing loops encourage movement toward a desired outcome, while discrepancy-amplifying loops encourage movement away from an undesired outcome.

Differing only in terminology, Higgins (1996) distinguishes between a promotion focus and a prevention focus. People operating under a promotion focus are alert to opportunities; survival in the world means attaining accomplishments and fulfilling aspirations. Those using a prevention focus concentrate on avoiding potential dangers; survival in the world means attaining safety and meeting obligations.

In a third variant, Tversky and Kahneman (1981) distinguish between gain and loss framing, where gain framing implies a focus on positive outcomes, whereas loss framing implies a focus on negative outcomes.

Last, Wurf and Markus (1991) suggest that people have positive possible selves and negative possible selves. By their account, people guide their behavior by approaching visions of themselves as they would ideally like to be, and by avoiding visions of themselves as they fear they might become.

Each of these variants shares the central approach/avoidance distinction, though they do emphasize different factors in goal activation. Carver and Scheier (1990), with Tversky and Kahneman (1981), emphasize that environmental contexts cue goals, whereas Higgins (1996), together with Wurf and Markus (1991), recognizes important individual differences in how people frame events. While acknowledging
the importance of individual differences, this paper focuses on situational determinants of goal framing.

**Goal Framing vs. Outcome Expectancies**

Before moving to the remainder of the review, we take a moment to clarify the distinction between goal framing and outcome expectancies. **Goal framing** -- the target of the current research -- relates to the relative salience of positive and negative outcomes (e.g., for someone with an avoidance frame, negative possible outcomes are more salient than positive possible outcomes). **Outcome expectancies** describe the subjective probabilities associated with positive and negative outcomes (e.g., for a pessimist, negative outcomes seem more likely than positive outcomes). In practice, outcome focus and outcome expectancies seem to be closely related, each influencing the other. For example, increasing the salience of a given outcome tends to inflate estimates of its probability (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973); likewise, increasing the likelihood of a given outcome could increase its salience. Nevertheless, there are times when goal framing is not consistent with outcome expectancies. Certainly, perceivers may believe that negative outcomes are unlikely but still ruminate on them; alternately, perceivers may believe that positive outcomes are improbable but still fantasize about them. In all likelihood, goal framing is really a joint function of a perceiver’s outcome expectancies and the evaluations attached to these expectancies, so that extremely positive or extremely negative outcomes figure prominently in people’s thoughts and behavior even when they seem unlikely (e.g., in gambling or phobic reactions). Regardless, the central point holds that goal framing and outcome
expectancies are theoretically distinct: Framing describes a passive cognitive set, whereas expectancies describe conscious beliefs. Beyond this, establishing the functional relations between the constructs remains a task for future research.

**Avoidance Goals Prompt Task Disengagement**

Several lines of research already testify to the link between approach/avoidance framing and behavior (e.g., Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994). Some of this research supports the idea that avoidance framing produces avoidant reactions:

Research on achievement-related goals suggests that approach goals elicit task persistence, while avoidance goals elicit task disengagement. Moreover, and in consequence, goals framed in terms of positive outcomes elicit better performance than goals framed in terms of negative outcomes. Note that it is possible (though yet unproven) that goal-conditioned experiences of success or failure reciprocally influence how events are framed in the future. Once having failed a task, and with the memory of failure fresh in their minds, people may be increasingly likely to frame future encounters in terms of negative outcomes. On the other hand, experiences of success should also produce memories, and hence, a tendency to focus on positive possible outcomes.

As one example of this work, Roney, Higgins, and Shah (1995) manipulated regulatory focus on an anagram task by having participants focus on either positive or negative outcomes. Participants in the positive-outcome-focus condition read: “If you are able to solve 22 out of the 25 anagrams, you will get to play the ‘Wheel of Fortune’ game. Otherwise, you will do the ‘unvaried repetition’ task.” Participants in
the negative-outcome-focus condition read: “If you get 4 out of the 25 anagrams wrong, you will do the ‘unvaried repetition’ task. Otherwise, you will play the ‘Wheel of Fortune’ game” (p. 1154). As expected, persistence on the anagrams task was greater in the positive-focus condition, as was performance.

Dovetailing with these findings, work on possible selves suggests that a focus on positive (rather than negative) possible futures enhances effort, and, hence, performance (Wurf & Markus, 1991). In a representative study (Ruvolo & Markus, 1986, in Wurf & Markus, 1991), one group of participants imagined themselves succeeding, such that “everything they hoped for had been realized and that things had gone as well as they possibly could have.” A second group envisioned failure, such that “they had worked very hard and everything had gone as badly as it possibly could have.” Here, people who imagined positive futures persisted longer at a left-handed writing task than did people who imagined negative futures.

Research on control and self-efficacy comes to analogous conclusions, revealing that people who believe that positive outcomes are likely work longer, and hence perform better, than the less optimistic (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Diener & Dweck, 1980; Feather, 1961). Thus, in a study by Sherman, Skov, Hervitz, and Stock (1981), participants explained either why they might succeed, or why they might fail, at an anagrams task. Next, participants predicted their level of performance. Participants who explained why they might succeed later predicted, and achieved, higher performance than those who explained why they might fail.
In conclusion, the research on achievement suggests that avoidance framing prompts task disengagement. Still, it remains unclear that this conclusion generalizes to interpersonal contexts. Do avoidance goals cause people to avoid others, just as they would avoid nonsocial tasks? To answer this question, the next section explores the literature on goal framing within social interactions.

Avoidance Goals May Also Prompt Social Avoidance

The preceding research implies that avoidance framing produces interpersonal avoidance. People who focus on negative outcomes in their interactions with others should be quick to disengage from those interactions. However, limited evidence actually substantiates this claim. Further, the scant data available focus exclusively on intergroup contexts, neglecting intragroup processes.

William Ickes’s (1984) work comes closest to a direct study of how goal framing shapes interpersonal avoidance. For this study, White participants reported on their desires to either seek out or shun (e.g., approach vs. avoid) interaction with Black students. Several weeks later, both White and Black students were called to the lab, in pairs, for brief interactions. As predicted, Whites predisposed to avoid interactions with Blacks looked and smiled at their partners less than those predisposed to initiate interaction. Given that looking and smiling imply mental avoidance, these findings confirm that avoidance goals prompt social avoidance.

While intriguing, results from Ickes’s (1984) work do not lend themselves to broad conclusions about goal framing. First, results were qualified by race of the experimenter: Avoidance goals exerted their influence only when the experimenter
was Black, such that the White participant was the minority. Further concerns derive from the correlational nature of the study. In particular, avoidance goals may have been confounded with third variables (e.g., prejudice level), weakening conclusions concerning framing’s causal role. Last, Ickes’s work focuses on how the motivations to approach or avoid a particular group affect behavior, whereas our question concerns the broader processes of outcome framing.

With a stretch, Macrae and colleagues’ research on rebound effects can also be interpreted as support for the link between framing and interpersonal avoidance. In one study, Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, and Jetten (1994) showed participants a color photograph of a male skinhead. Half the participants were told that they should try to avoid stereotyping the target, and the other half were given no special instructions. In a subsequent encounter, participants who had been told to suppress their stereotypes sat farther from the target than did controls. Again, consistent with work on achievement-related goals, these results suggest that the attempt to avoid undesirable outcomes (here, undesirable thoughts) can provoke behavioral avoidance. Still, because stereotype suppression is not a perfect operationalization of what is meant by avoidance framing, the observed relations require further confirmation.

Last, research on cooperative interdependence indirectly supports the thesis that approach/avoidance framing influences interpersonal avoidance. Complementing Ickes’s (1984) and Macrae et al.’s (1994) findings, this work suggests that focusing on the possibility of positive outcomes in intergroup relations prompts the development of friendly, personalized relationships (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp,
1978; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1953). As in the preceding work, however, looseness in the connections between the manipulated variables and goal framing, and between the dependent variables and avoidance, means that further work is needed to establish causal patterns.

To sum up, past research is suggestive of, but by no means conclusive on, general relationships between avoidance framing and interpersonal avoidance.

Chronic Frames: Avoidance Goals and Intergroup Relations

By this juncture, we stand to address the critical point of this paper. Our key thesis has been that people avoid outgroup members because they frame intergroup relations in terms of avoidance goals, and previous pages provided tentative evidence to this effect. The following section defends the proposal that intergroup contexts chronically, and automatically, evoke avoidance goals.

Theoretically, the choice to frame situations in terms of either approach or avoidance goals is arbitrary. People can choose to focus on either the positive, or the negative, possible outcomes of their interactions. Nevertheless, different socialization experiences could make one type of goal predominant over the other. Consistent with these ideas, Higgins and colleagues (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994) speculate that reinforcement history may condition chronic outcome focus. They propose that the frequent occurrence of positive outcomes, combined with the relatively infrequent occurrence of negative outcomes, conditions chronic approach framing. Alternatively, the predominance of negative outcomes over positive outcomes conditions chronic avoidance framing.
Operating through the same mechanism, our societal and personal histories of intergroup relations may have subtly conditioned us to frame relations with outgroup members in terms of avoidance goals. Americans have borne witness to flatly catastrophic conflicts between majority and minority groups (e.g., World War II). Exacerbating the problem, television, newspapers, and magazines daily expose Americans to a biased sample of outcomes, with the weight on negative outcomes. (Violence and conflict make snappy headlines, but cooperation and friendship rarely make the news at all.) Meanwhile, people typically have limited experience with rewarding relations across group boundaries. Thus, in representations of intergroup relations, negative outcomes may predominate, and this could prime people to focus on the negative, rather than the positive, possible outcomes in their interactions with outgroup members.

Mediators Between Goal Framing and Avoidance in Social Interactions

Until now, the evidence has pointed to a relation between avoidance framing and interpersonal avoidance. Still, the translation from goals to behavior remains murky. How, precisely, might avoidance goals condition interpersonal avoidance? It is to this question that the review now turns.

Earlier, we described Carver and Scheier’s (1990) proposal that goals can influence behavior either consciously, through the formation of intentions, or, more automatically, through situational construals. According to this view, goal framing shapes people’s behavior in two distinct ways. However, given that people may, or
may not, be aware of the relation between their goals and behavior, there are actually 3 ways that goals may influence behavior.

First, people may have conscious goals to approach or avoid outcomes in an interaction, and their behavior may follow directly from conscious choices about the achievement of those goals. Second, people may have conscious goals in an interaction, yet their behavior may be an unconsciously produced result of those goals. Third, people’s goals in an interaction may be unconscious, and their behavior may also be an unconscious consequence of those goals.

In the first case, goals translate into behavior smoothly and obviously (i.e., through the deliberate formation of intentions). However, goal translation in the latter two cases requires elaboration. If people are not aware of their goals, or, if they are not aware of how their goals are influencing their behavior, then how can goals affect behavior?

One possibility is that negative emotion mediates the relationship between goal framing and avoidance. Several findings suggest that avoidance goals provoke greater negative emotion than approach goals. Coats, Janoff-Bulman, and Alpert (1996) found that participants who generally framed life in terms of avoidance goals evaluated themselves less positively on measures of self-esteem, optimism, and depression. Further, participants primed with avoidance goals reported lower perceptions of success and satisfaction with their performance on creative tasks. Similar results obtain in a study by Elliott, Sheldon, and Church (1997). Here,
avoidance goals were related to decreases in subjective well-being from the beginning to the end of the semester, relative to approach goals.

If avoidance goals provoke negative emotion, then negative emotion could mediate avoidance by serving as a negative reinforcer for social withdrawal (since withdrawal puts an end to the negative emotion). Alternatively, negative emotion could mediate avoidance by priming mood-congruent material, and hence, unfavorable evaluations of interaction partners. People who feel rotten may dislike their interaction partners, and, as a result, break off their relations. In either case, generally negative emotions could prompt avoidance.

Other findings implicate a narrower role for anxiety. As one example, Higgins’s work (e.g., Roney, Higgins, & Shah, 1995; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997) suggests that achievement tasks framed in terms of negative outcomes cause greater change in agitation-calm-related emotions, and less change in dejection-cheerfulness-related emotions, than those same tasks framed in terms of positive outcomes. In short, the potential for anxiety is greater under avoidance framing than approach framing. In a second example, Ickes’s (1984) study produces convergent findings, revealing that both White and Black members of avoidance dyads reported greater anxiety around their interactions than did members of approach dyads.

Anxiety constitutes a clear candidate for mediation of the goal-behavior link. In humans as in other species, anxiety reliably prompts escape behavior (Gray, 1982, 1987) and avoidance of social interactions in particular (Watson & Friend, 1969; Stephan & Stephan, 1985).
And yet, further possibilities exist. Along different lines, goal framing effects could be mediated by the specificity of action plans that different goals imply. While approach goals may cue concrete behavioral plans, avoidance goals might not suggest clear procedures for avoiding negative outcomes. In the absence of clear indications for how to behave, people who frame their interactions in terms of avoidance goals may prefer to exit the situation, rather than tolerate the strain of uncertainty. Wurf and Markus (1991) concur with these speculations, remarking that “Negative possible selves... only provide an indication of what not to do. By themselves, they cannot direct one’s actions or effectively regulate behavior” (p. 56). Moreover, evidence already suggest that, when people have specific, concrete plans to supplement their goal intentions, goal attainment becomes more likely (Gollwitzer & Brandstätter, 1997; Gollwitzer & Schaal, 1998). When people furnish their goal intentions with implementation intentions, the initiation of goal-directed responses becomes automatized: People respond quickly, efficiently, and appropriately to situational cues, initiating the correct behaviors and resisting temptations and bad habits.

Last, when people interact with members of stereotyped groups, the relations between goals and avoidance may also be mediated by stereotyping. Fiske and Neuberg’s (1990) continuum model of impression formation suggests the link. This model suggests that, when people are motivated to be accurate, and when cognitive resources are available, people tend to seek out, and remember, counterstereotypic information; otherwise, they rely on easily-accessed stereotypes. Motivation and capacity drive individuation. However, people operating under avoidance framing
tend to lack both resources. Evidence already suggests that avoidance framing undermines intrinsic motivation (Elliott & Haraciewicz, 1996). Further, the very attempt to avoid negative outcomes -- where outcomes include one's own thoughts and behaviors -- can consume cognitive capacity (Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Ford, 1997; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988). Thus, people operating under avoidance framing may be particularly likely to stereotype their interaction partners, and, to the extent that such stereotypes are negative, avoidance should follow.

Actually, the tendency to stereotype under avoidance framing may be compounded by the activation of negative emotions, including anxiety, discussed earlier. Research on mood and stereotyping has repeatedly demonstrated that high-arousal, negative moods encourage stereotyping (see Mackie & Hamilton, 1993, for a review). For example, Esses and Zanna (1995) found that participants subjected to a negative mood manipulation were more likely than controls to attribute unfavorable stereotypes to Native Indian, Pakistani, and Arabic people.

In support of the above proposals, studies of intergroup relations indirectly confirm that avoidance goals produce stereotyping. Macrae et al.'s (1994) work, mentioned in the preceding sections, illustrates this process. In their study, people told to suppress their stereotypes of skinheads showed faster response latencies to skinhead-related words than did controls. Similarly, Wegner (1997; in Bargh, 1997) found that participants attempting to suppress their stereotypes of women responded to them more pejoratively than participants who were not told to suppress their stereotypes.
To conclude, when people form conscious intentions to realize their goals in interaction with outgroup members, the influence of goals on behavior may be direct. Alternately, when people are unaware of how their behavior is connected to their goals, the relationship between goals and avoidance may be mediated by 4 variables. Goals may condition avoidance through their influence on negative emotions in general, through their influence on anxiety in particular, or through the specificity of the behavioral plans that they cue. When people interact with members of stereotyped groups, goals may condition avoidance through the additional mediation of stereotyping.

New Directions in Goal Framing

The research reviewed in this paper suggests, but does not demonstrate, relationships between goal framing, avoidance, and mediating variables. The current research aimed to test these relationships by manipulating goal framing and ingroup/outgroup status, and by measuring a set of potential mediators. We expected that, in the absence of overt manipulations (i.e., in control conditions), people would tend to avoid outgroup members and approach ingroup members (consistent with the tendency to frame intergroup interactions in terms of avoidance goals, but intragroup interactions in terms of approach goals). However, we also expected that encouraging people to frame their interactions in terms of approach or avoidance goals, regardless of partner status, should temper, or even erase, differences in how people responded to ingroup and outgroup members. That is, instating avoidance goals should prompt all
participants to avoid their partners, whereas instating approach goals should prompt all participants to approach their partners.

To test these ideas, the experiment used a 2 (partner orientation: Straight or Gay) x 3 (goal framing: Approach, Avoid, or Control) design. Heterosexual participants arrived at the lab in pairs under the pretext of a study on “Group Interactions.” Half the participants met a “straight” partner, representing a member of the ingroup; the other half met a “gay” partner, a member of the outgroup. Both “straight” and “gay” partners were female confederates (hence, the majority of participants, who were female, interacted with a same-sex partner). Participants from both groups were assigned to one of 3 framing conditions, reading instructions that primed an approach goal, an avoidance goal, or no goal. Immediately after the instruction period, all participants interacted with their partners. Following the interaction, confederates and experimenters recorded how close participants moved their chairs to confederates, the amount of time that participants maintained contact, and eye contact, forming the composite measure of avoidance. The following hypotheses were formulated:

a. A main effect for partner. Given societally unfavorable attitudes toward homosexual people, we expected that participants interacting with “gay” partners would demonstrate more avoidance than participants interacting with “straight” partners.

b. A main effect for goal framing. Consistent with the research on framing effects, a second prediction specified that participants primed with avoidance
goals would demonstrate more interpersonal avoidance than controls, who would demonstrate more avoidance than participants primed with approach goals.

c. Differences across control groups. This paper argued that people chronically and automatically employ avoidance goals in their interactions with outgroup members, whereas this is not the case for interactions with ingroup members. Thus, a third prediction specified that, in interactions involving “gay” partners, participants primed with approach goals would differ from the other two groups, whereas control participants would not differ from participants primed with avoidance goals. Conversely, in interactions involving “straight” partners, participants primed with avoidance goals would differ from the other two groups, but control participants would not differ from participants primed with approach goals.

d. Mediators between goal framing and avoidance. We assumed that goal framing would influence avoidance indirectly (i.e., not entirely through the deliberate formation of intentions). Thus, for both Straight and Gay conditions, we expected that self-reported negative emotion, anxiety, and behavioral plan specificity might mediate relations between goal framing and avoidance.

e. Experienced emotion. In line with research on outcome focus and self-regulation (e.g., Roney et al., 1995; Higgins et al., 1997), we formulated additional predictions about the emotions that people would experience under
different goal framings. We predicted that avoidance goals would produce
greater changes in agitation-calm-related emotions than dejection-cheerfulness-
related emotions, whereas the reverse would hold for approach goals.
CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

209 participants were recruited from Psychology courses at the University of Massachusetts in exchange for course credit. Discarding 8 participants for suspicion, and another 9 because they did not identify as heterosexual, yielded a final N of 192 (41 males, 151 females). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 6 experimental conditions. Data were collected over two semesters, with minor changes in the second semester directed at solving problems identified in the first (these noted later).

Pre-Interaction

Participants were scheduled in pairs. In addition, two female confederates arrived as the study commenced.

To begin, participants read a page of instructions. The instructions stated that the goal of the study was to “explore how people discuss intergroup relations, and how these discussions affect their thoughts and feelings about each other.” Participants also read that, toward that goal, two groups of people had been recruited for the study: A first group was from the general UMass student body, and a second was from the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Student Union (LGBSU). According to the instructions, each participant would be paired with another student to discuss intergroup relations, such that half were paired with a partner from the same group as they, whereas the other half were assigned to an outgroup member. In fact, each participant was assigned to
one of the confederates. Finally, participants read that the study involved two parts: an introductory period, and a discussion. During the introductory period, participants would take turns introducing themselves to their partners, with the order of turns being randomly determined. Following the introductions, a general discussion would ensue. These last instructions aimed only to support the cover story. In reality, the experiment stopped after participants had introduced themselves to confederates.

**Partner identification.** After participants had read their instructions, the experimenter indicated whom, among the others, each participant had for a partner. To manipulate partner orientation, everyone received an identification slip.

Over the fall semester of data collection, the experimenter gave participants **prewritten slips** specifying the names and alleged orientations of their partners. Half received slips indicating that their partner was from the general UMass student body (Straight condition), and half received slips indicating that their partner was from the LGBSU (Gay condition). To maintain appearances that confederates were actual participants, the experimenter also gave confederates (blank) identification slips. Because slips were prewritten and folded, the experimenter and confederates remained blind to condition.

This procedure changed slightly for spring data collection. During fall collection, it became evident that some participants thought we had given confederates slips falsely identifying them (participants) as gay. Thus, over spring collection, we allowed participants and confederates to complete the identification slips themselves, and then exchange them. Participants received **blank slips**, where they themselves
recorded their first names and location of recruitment (circling “general UMass student body,” rather than “LGBSU”). This time, confederates received the prewritten slips identifying their alleged orientations. Confederates pretended to open and complete these slips themselves, but, in fact, did not open them at all. When all present had completed, or pretended to complete, their slips, they exchanged and read them. Thus, once again, both experimenter and confederates remained blind to condition.

**Framing manipulation.** Following partner identification, participants completed a questionnaire “designed to prepare you for your introductions.” This questionnaire attempted to manipulate goal framing. Note that confederates faked completing these questionnaires as well, maintaining the illusion that they were actual participants.

At the outset, we isolated the effects of goal framing from the effects of outcome expectancies by providing participants with constant outcome expectancies. However, the precise phrasing of this information instated a particular goal frame. Participants assigned to the Approach condition read the following: “About 90 per cent of the time, people get along in this study.” Avoidance groups read that “About 10 per cent of the time, people do not get along in this study.” Finally, Control groups read that “About 90 per cent of the time, people get along in this study; about 10 per cent of the time, they do not get along.” The remainder of the questionnaire reinforced these frames.

Over the fall semester, Approach groups read a short paragraph instructing them to brainstorm for all of the **pleasant** things that could possibly result from their
interactions. Participants used one blank page to record their responses, guided by 3 prompts ("I might...", "My partner might...", and "In the long run, good outcomes might include..."). Conversely, participants assigned to the Avoid condition brainstormed for all of the unpleasant things that could possibly result from their introductions. These participants responded to the same 3 prompts, with the exception that the third prompt became, "In the long run, bad outcomes might include...".

Participants assigned to the Control group brainstormed for all of the things that could possibly result from their introductions, leaving them to focus on either pleasant or unpleasant outcomes, as they wished. Again, Control participants responded to the same 3 prompts, with the exception that the third prompt became, "In the long run, possible outcomes might include...".

For spring data collection, the procedure was altered in an attempt to strengthen the manipulations while allowing participants more freedom in determining the content of their responses. Spring manipulations provided higher estimates of the likelihood of unpleasant interactions (participants expected negative interactions one quarter of the time). These questionnaires also used more vivid, evocative phrasing. Last, Approach and Avoid groups responded to a single prompt ("I would like to..." or "I would like to avoid..."), and Control participants listed both what they wanted to happen, and what they wanted to avoid. Despite these changes, spring manipulations were essentially equivalent to fall manipulations. Confirming this view, multivariate analyses indicate that scores on the dependent measures do not reliably differ as a function of semester.
Mood Checklist. Once participants had finished the framing manipulation, the experimenter directed everyone to complete a first mood checklist. Checklists were prefaced with the justification that measuring mood would later allow us to control for mood’s “unpredictable effects on impression formation.”

The checklist we chose was adopted from Higgins et al. (1997), selected because it was used throughout Higgins’s work, and should produce theoretically comparable results. Higgins’s checklist requires participants to indicate how much, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very strongly), they are currently experiencing each of 12 emotions. Four items measure dejection (disappointed, discouraged, low, sad). 4 measure agitation (agitated, on edge, uneasy, tense), two measure calm (calm, relaxed), and two measure cheerfulness (happy, satisfied). Summing agitation-related and calm-related items (reverse-scored) produces an overall score for agitation-calm-related emotions. Similarly, summing dejection-related and cheerfulness-related items (reverse-scored) yields an overall score for dejection-cheerfulness-related emotions. Last, summing over all items (reverse-scoring where appropriate) produces a general measure of negative emotion.

Avoidance During the Interaction

Following the mood checklist, participants were paired with their partners and taken to the interaction rooms.

Chair distance. Each room was equipped with one regular chair and one swivel chair. Confederates entered the room ahead of participants and selected the regular chair, leaving the swivel chair -- at the opposite end of the room -- for their
partners. This forced participants to select the swivel chair. When participants had moved their chairs to a stable point, confederates noted the position, to be recorded following the interaction.

**Time.** Confederates also measured the amount of time participants maintained contact. All participants were told that they had been assigned to introduce themselves first, and were given a list of possible topics. The experimenter stressed that “You’ll have **up to** 5 minutes to introduce yourself, but you don’t have to take the full 5 minutes... You should just say as much as you want to say, and then open up the outside door.” When the experimenter left, participants began their introductions, and confederates started their timers. Confederates stopped their timers as soon as participants opened the outside door, recording the result following the interaction.

**Eye contact.** As a third measure of avoidance, confederates attended to, and recorded, eye contact. Following the interaction, confederates rated, on a scale from 1 (almost none) to 9 (almost constant), the amount of eye contact that their partners maintained during their introductions.

**Post-Interaction Measures: Participant Self-Reports**

When the interaction was over, the experimenter took participants and confederates to separate rooms so that they could complete the remaining measures in private.

**Mood Checklist II.** To begin this phase, participants completed a second mood checklist, identical to that administered prior to the interaction.
Behavioral plan specificity. Participants also completed measures of how easy it was for them to think of specific behavioral plans. The first, open-ended, asked, “What did you try to do or say in your introduction to make it go well, or to keep it from going poorly? List all the strategies you tried.” Summing the number of strategies listed provides a measure of behavioral plan specificity. Participants then rated, using a scale from 1 (disagree very much) to 9 (agree very much), how much they agreed with each of two statements: “I found it easy to think of specific things to say and do in my introduction,” and, “I found it difficult to think of specific things to say and do in my introduction.” Summing scores on these items (reverse-scoring where necessary) provides a second measure of behavioral plan specificity.

Perceived success. In the same phase, participants reported on how successful they had been at achieving their goals. Using a scale from 1 (disagree very much) to 9 (agree very much), participants indicated their agreement with two statements: “In my introduction, I feel that I achieved the goals I wanted to achieve,” and, “In my introduction, I feel that I failed to achieve the goals that I wanted to achieve.” Summing scores on these items (reverse-scoring where necessary) produces a measure of perceived success.

Following completion of these measures, the experimenter returned once more and apologized that the experiment had run out of time. Rather than proceeding with the second introduction and discussion, participants would have to skip to the final questionnaire.
The Heterosexual Attitudes Toward Homosexuals (HATH) scale. To “help us interpret our results,” the experimenter administered the final measure, the Heterosexual Attitudes Toward Homosexuals (HATH) scale (Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980). This scale allowed us to explore, and control, any effects of underlying prejudice on avoidance. While we realized that experimental condition could contaminate scores, we chose to administer the HATH during the same session because prescreening was simply unfeasible (the questionnaire was too long). In any case, a subsequent analysis of variance (ANOVA), using goal framing and partner orientation as independent variables, and HATH scores as the dependent variable, indicate that experimental condition did not significantly influence scores on the HATH.

Participants rated their agreement, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree), with each of twenty statements about homosexual people (e.g., “Homosexuality should be accepted completely into our society”). HATH scores range from 0 to 180, with higher scores indicating more tolerant attitudes toward homosexuality. In past administrations, the HATH has shown high internal reliability (split-half reliability coefficients ranging from .86 to .92) and good test-retest reliability (Pearson product-moment correlations ranging from .74 to .81) (Cerny & Polyson, 1984; Larsen et al., 1980). Moreover, The HATH demonstrates good construct validity. Larsen et al. (1980) found that business-oriented people score lower than liberal arts majors, that highly religious people score lower than less
religious people, and that people who perceive their peers to have tolerant attitudes also have more tolerant attitudes.

**Additional Confederate Ratings**

While participants filled out their questionnaires, confederates completed supplementary ratings of their interactions. Using 9-point scales, confederates rated their own comfort levels ("How comfortable were you?") and various characteristics of their partner's behavior (e.g., "How friendly was your partner's behavior?"). Using 15-point scales, confederates also rated the quality of their interactions along 5 related dimensions (e.g., enjoyable, relaxed).

**Manipulation Check, Debriefing**

To finish, participants completed demographic questions and manipulation checks. One key question asked participants whether or not they had introduced themselves to a heterosexual or a gay person. Several questions probed for suspicions about the true purpose of the study. The last question asked participants to indicate their sexual orientations, assuring them that their responses would be held in the strictest confidentiality.

When the experiment had run to completion, the experimenter began a careful debriefing. She ensured that participants had understood both the nature and the purposes of the deceptions. She emphasized that, because the situation is naturally tense for everyone, people should not use their experiences in the study to make generalizations about themselves, or about their interactions with others. Finally, she
provided participants with course credit slips and a number to contact if they wished to obtain a copy of the results, or to ask further questions about the study.
CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Scale Construction

To determine whether or not aggregate measures of avoidance should be created, we began by exploring the relationships among the 3 measures of avoidance (i.e., chair distance from the confederate, time spent in interaction with the confederate, and eye contact). Correlations among these measures were generally low, although measures of time and eye contact showed higher correlations than did the other measures (for time and eye contact, \( r = .40, p < .001 \); for time and distance, \( r = .22, p < .01 \); for distance and eye contact, \( r = -.02, p = .82 \)). Given these results, we chose to analyze each measure separately rather creating composite variables.

To produce aggregate measures of mood, we averaged ratings on each of the 6 agitation-calm related emotions, and on each of the dejection-cheerfulness ratings, for each of the two mood questionnaires, reverse-scoring as appropriate; given that mood ratings across timepoints were highly correlated (for anxiety, \( r = .74, p < .001 \); for dejection, \( r = .91, p < .001 \)), we then summed scores across questionnaires, producing overall measures of anxiety (12-item \( \alpha = .92 \)) and dejection (12-item \( \alpha = .92 \)).

Aggregate measures for behavioral plan specificity and perceived success were calculated by summing each pair of items aimed at tapping these constructs, reverse-scoring as appropriate (for behavioral plan specificity, items correlated at \( r = .85, p < .001 \); for perceived success, items correlated at \( r = .81, p < .001 \)).
Confederate ratings of their own comfort levels, their partners, and their interactions were highly intercorrelated (rs ranged from .76 to .90, ps < .001); thus, these ratings were converted to standard (z) scores and summed, producing a composite measure of partner ratings of the interaction (3-item α = .93).

Finally, to create an overall scale of prejudice, scores on the HATH were averaged, reverse-scoring where appropriate (20-item α = .92).

Testing the Central Hypotheses

The primary purpose of the study was to explain and predict avoidance. Our central hypotheses stated a main effect for partner orientation, a main effect for goal framing, and differences across control conditions. To test these predictions, we submitted each behavioral measure of avoidance to a 2 (semester: Fall vs. Spring) x 2 (partner orientation: Straight vs. Gay) x 3 (goal framing: Approach, Avoid, or Control) ANOVA.

Results do not support the predictions. Regarding the main effect for partner orientation, these analyses reveal that, if anything, participants avoided Straight partners more than they did Gay partners. Goal framing had no consistent effects. Control conditions did differ on one of the analyses, but not in the expected way.

The ANOVA on chair distance produces only a main effect for partner orientation, $F(1, 188) = 4.09, p < .05$, revealing that participants interacting with a Gay partner sat closer to their partners ($M = 52.03$ inches from the wall) than did participants interacting with a Straight partner ($M = 48.57$ inches from the wall).
The ANOVA on eye contact reproduces the main effect for partner orientation, $F(1, 191) = 5.05, p < .05$, revealing that participants interacting with a Gay partner made more eye contact with their partners ($M = 6.60$) than did participants interacting with Straight partners ($M = 6.02$). The effect is qualified, however, by a significant orientation x frame interaction, $F(2, 191) = 3.70, p < .05$. This interaction reveals that the difference between participants interacting with Gay partners and participants interacting with Straight partners derives substantially from Control participants: Contrasts reveal that Control participants interacting with Gay partners made significantly more eye contact with their partners than did Control participants interacting with Straight partners, whereas the remaining 4 groups cannot be reliably differentiated.

The ANOVA on time produces no significant effects.

**Alternative Approaches**

Reviewing the results, we concluded that outliers might be obscuring hidden patterns behind the data. Thus, we ran the same analyses excluding outliers on each measure (i.e., participants scoring two or more standard deviations from the mean). This strategy failed to yield improvements: excluding outliers, ANOVAs on chair distance produce only the main effect for partner orientation, while ANOVAs on eye contact and time produce no significant effects.

We also realized that prejudice level might moderate the expected relationships. Yet, looking across conditions, scores on the HATH are not associated with any of the avoidance measures. Further, dividing participants into High and Low
prejudice groups, and analyzing these groups separately, does not clarify the results. Instead, these analyses produce scattered and generally marginal effects.

A third possibility was that time of data collection might moderate sensible patterns in the data. Nevertheless, the absence of significant 2-way or 3-way interactions between semester and our major independent variables counseled against analyzing each semester separately.

The Remaining Dependent Measures

The research design also called for assessment of participant anxiety, dejection, behavioral plan specificity, and perceived success, and confederate ratings of the interaction were recorded as supplementary measures. For exploratory purposes, 2 (semester) x 2 (partner orientation) x 3 (goal framing) ANOVAs were also conducted on these measures. However, these analyses all reveal no significant effects.

Correlations between Mood and Goal Framing

An auxiliary goal of the study was to investigate the impact of goal framing on mood. Earlier sections hypothesized that, consistent with Higgins and colleagues’ research (e.g., Higgins et al., 1997; Roney et al., 1995), avoidance framing would produce greater changes in agitation-calm-related emotions than dejection-cheerfulness-related emotions, whereas the reverse would hold for approach goals.

These predictions were tested by computing 8 Pearson correlations. For the first set of 4, we computed correlations between change in anxiety (post-test minus pre-test scores) and perceived success, and change in dejection (post-test minus pre-test scores) and perceived success, for both Approach and Avoid conditions. For the
Control condition, we divided participants into Gay and Straight partner conditions, computing separate pairs of correlations for each, yielding another 4 total.

Unexpectedly, these analyses produce only one (marginally) significant correlation. In the Approach condition, change in agitation and perceived success are negatively correlated ($r = - .24$, $p = .056$), suggesting that, for these participants, achieving their goals decreased anxiety. More generally, such weak results argue that the framing manipulations were ineffective.

Other Findings

A last approach to the data emphasized exploration rather than hypothesis-testing. In this stage, we computed Pearson correlations between all of the dependent variables. To simplify interpretation and reduce the probability of finding spurious relationships, we used a composite measure of avoidance for these analyses, computed by standardizing scores of chair distance, time, and eye contact, reverse-coding, and summing. These analyses produce the first interesting results. The general pattern of results suggests meaningful associations between anxiety, behavioral plan specificity, and avoidance. Results also reveal associations between avoidance measures, participants’ perceived success, and confederate ratings of the interaction, suggesting that avoidant behavior constitutes a significant influence on how people feel about their interactions with others.

Across conditions and across measures, anxiety was significantly related to participants’ avoidance of their interaction partners ($r = .21$, $p < .01$). Moreover, the ease with which participants were able to think of things to say and do in their
interaction (i.e., behavioral plan specificity) was significantly associated with both anxiety ($r = -.28, p < .001$) and with avoidance ($r = -.24, p < .001$). Thus, the more anxious participants felt, the more difficult they found it to think of specific things to say and do within their interactions, and the more they tended to avoid their partners.

Correlations like these suggest meaningful patterns, but do not clarify which variable (anxiety or behavioral plan specificity) has the critical, causal influence on avoidance measures. To better determine causality, we conducted two partial correlations, in accordance with Baron and Kenny’s (1986) recommendations. Baron and Kenny recommend analyzing relationships between two variables (say, A and B) and an outcome variable (say, C) with two sets of partial correlations, one exploring the relationship between A and C, controlling for B, and the other exploring the relationship between B and C, controlling for A. If controlling for A eliminates the effect of B on C, then variable A can be assigned a central, meditational role in the relationship between B and C; if controlling for B eliminates the effect of A on C, then variable B is assigned the meditational role.

Correspondingly, a first partial correlation analyzed the relationship between anxiety and avoidance, controlling for the influence of behavioral plan specificity. A second partial correlation analyzed the relationship between behavioral plan specificity and avoidance, controlling for the influence of anxiety. Results suggest that anxiety and behavioral plan specificity jointly influence avoidance. The correlation between anxiety and avoidance drops only slightly when behavioral plan specificity is controlled ($r = .15, p < .05$); meanwhile, the correlation between behavioral plan
specificity and avoidance, controlling for anxiety, also shows a very minor decrease \( r = -.20, p < .01 \).

Interestingly, associations between anxiety and the other variables appear to be especially strong for participants interacting with Straight (not Gay) partners. Correlations between anxiety and avoidance, and between anxiety and behavioral plan specificity, were substantially higher for participants interacting with Straight partners than they were for participants interacting with Gay partners (analyzing the former relationship, compare Straight, \( r = .25, p < .05 \), to Gay, \( r = .17, p = .10 \); analyzing the latter relationship, compare Straight, \( r = -.35, p < .001 \), to Gay, \( r = -.21, p < .05 \)). By contrast, correlations between behavioral plan specificity and avoidance remain strong across partner conditions (compare Straight, \( r = -.23 \), to Gay, \( r = -.25 \), both \( ps < .05 \)). This suggests that anxiety played a distinctly more influential role in interactions with Straight partners than it did in interactions with Gay partners.

Anxiety’s role in interactions with Gay partners seems a riddle, but a possible solution lies in understanding the influence of a fourth variable, prejudice level. In interactions involving a Gay partner, prejudice level (as assessed by the HATH) correlated negatively with anxiety, so that, the less prejudiced participants were, the more likely they were to feel anxious in their interactions \( (r = -.32, p < .01; \) compare to Straight, \( r = -.02, p = .82 \)). Paradoxically, the least prejudiced participants felt the most anxious in their interactions with Gay partners. However, these same participants may also have been the most motivated to approach their partners (hence the anxiety), and the most knowledgeable about what to say and do. If so, then their
motivation and knowledge could override the effects of anxiety, leveling relationships between anxiety and avoidance, and anxiety and behavioral plan specificity. In other words, prejudice may have suppressed relationships between anxiety and the other dependent variables in this condition.

Exploring the relationships between anxiety and avoidance, and anxiety and behavioral plan specificity, while controlling for prejudice level, should resolve this question. In fact, correlating anxiety and avoidance levels in the Gay condition, controlling for prejudice level, increases the correlation nonsignificantly (without the control, \( r = .17, p = .10 \); controlling for prejudice level, \( r = .19, p = .08 \)). Controlling for prejudice level in the relationship between anxiety and specificity of behavioral plan increases the correlation more dramatically (without the control, \( r = -.21, p < .05 \); controlling for prejudice level, \( r = -.29, p < .01 \)). These results do hint that prejudice level may have suppressed anxiety's influence in interactions with Gay participants. They also support the more general point that people who are motivated to behave appropriately in interaction with outgroup members tend to feel anxious about their interactions, and that this anxiety can prevent them from fully realizing their goals by making it difficult for them to think of things to say and do and difficult to retain close contact.

A further set of results suggests that avoidance constitutes a socially important variable. Avoidance was associated with both participants' and confederates' impressions of the interaction. Avoidance was negatively correlated with participants' impressions that they had achieved their goals for the interaction (\( r = -.16, p < .05 \)) and
negatively correlated with confederates’ aggregate ratings of the interaction ($r = .58, p < .001$). These relationships hold constant across Straight and Gay conditions. Avoidant behaviors, like making infrequent eye contact, sitting far away, and breaking off the interaction early on, significantly detracted from the quality of the interaction, for both participants and their partners, whether Gay or Straight.

A more fine-grained analysis reveals that, though none of these behaviors had special impact on participant ratings of the interaction, eye contact had, by far, the most striking impact for confederates. Participants’ eye contact correlated highly with confederate ratings of their partners, confederate ratings of their own comfort levels, and confederate ratings of the general tone of the interaction ($rs$ ranged from .56 to .72, all $ps < .001$). Participants’ time in the room seems to have had a weaker impact on confederate ratings, correlating significantly, though not strongly, with confederate ratings. Finally, chair distance was largely irrelevant to confederates, showing no significant correlations with any of the confederate ratings. Apparently, both amount of eye contact and length of conversation substantially influenced confederates’ experiences, but just where participants sat mattered little. Of course, readers will note that common method variance/halo effects may account for the special relationship between eye contact and confederate ratings of the interaction. Confederates used relatively objective means to assess time and chair distance; however, they used the same, subjective rating scales to rate eye contact, their partners more generally, their own feelings, and the conversation.
To conclude, although the manipulated variables (i.e., goal framing, partner orientation) did not affect the dependent measures in the expected ways, results do reveal meaningful relationships between how participants felt in their interactions, how they behaved, how they saw themselves, and how they were seen by others.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Several explanations can account for the failure to find effects. A first specifies that participants simply did not read, understand, or follow the instructions. However, this explanation seems unlikely. Across semesters, I supervised participants as they read the introduction, framing instructions, and slips of paper identifying their partners. Further, when questioned about the experiment during the debriefing, the vast majority of participants reported having understood both the experimental procedures and the alleged orientations of their partners.

Written measures confirm this picture. On their final questionnaires, 93 per cent of participants indicated that the instructions had been clear, and most correctly reported the orientations of their partners. Correspondingly, a Chi Square comparing the frequency with which participants reported having had a Gay or Straight partner, looking across orientation conditions, produces a $X^2$ value of 108.4, $p < .001$. Also, analyses of the framing questionnaires from the fall semester of data collection suggest that participants generally wrote what we wanted them to write. After coding participants’ statements as expressing primarily approach, avoidance, or neutral goals, we performed a second set of Chi Squares to compare the frequencies of each type of statement across the 3 framing conditions. For each statement type (approach, avoidance, and neutral), the Chi square statistic reaches significance ($p < .001$); further, an examination of the means reveals that participants in the Approach condition produced primarily approach goals, participants in the Avoid condition
produced primarily avoidance goals, and participants in the Control condition produced primarily neutral thoughts. Still, it is possible that participants generated the appropriate outcomes for the framing questionnaire and yet reverted to their own, idiosyncratic cognitive sets upon entering the interaction (see below).

A related explanation for the null results asserts that participants did not believe that their partners were, in fact, what their slips of paper revealed them to be. This explanation seems equally improbable. Most participants expressed genuine shock upon learning that their partners were confederates of the experimenter. Although participants in the first semester of data collection were less likely to believe that their “gay” partners were really gay, only a few participants were highly suspicious, and these were eliminated from the analyses.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation for the current results states that the manipulations failed because people strive to create positive impressions of themselves, regardless of their other motivations and beliefs. By this account, participants were aware of, and worried about, how their behavior would impress their partners and the experimenter. As a result, they actively controlled where they sat, how much eye contact they made, and how long they spent in the room, overriding more subtle processes. This account would explain why participants sat closer to, and made more eye contact with, their “gay” partners: They were trying to demonstrate just how comfortable they were. Also substantiating this view, my post-experimental conversations with participants suggest that, while most students did not guess precisely what we were looking for, they were aware that they were being observed
throughout the experiment, and they were concerned about behaving in a friendly, prosocial manner. If this reasoning holds, then using dependent measures that are truly covert, or at least outside the circle of conscious control, would have produced stronger results. Alternately, preventing participants’ usual desire or ability to manage their behavior (e.g., by making sexual orientation seem peripheral -- not central -- to the study, or by requiring participants to perform mental arithmetic during the interaction) might have produced superior results.

A second, also plausible, explanation states that the manipulations failed because people tend to reject new (and especially negative) ways of construing their interactions. According to this account, participants resisted framing effects because they tended to explain away, or quickly forget, the outcomes they generated prior to their interactions, reverting instead to cognitive defaults. One imagines that this kind of suppression would be especially likely under avoidance framing, given that people find it uncomfortable to ruminate on potential disaster. Supporting this explanation, a survey of the framing questionnaires reveals that participants frequently paired the outcomes they generated with arguments against their likelihood. For example, students in the Avoid condition wrote statements like, “She could end up hating me, but I’m sure that won’t happen.” Here again, more covert manipulations might have produced superior effects, resisting this kind of active argumentation.

A last potential pitfall concerns the validity of our avoidance measures. The current project may have failed to produce effects because our measures of avoidance accounted for the quantity, but not the quality, of nonverbal behavior. That is,
although we measured chair distance, we did not record chair orientation; although we measured amount of eye contact, we did not record type of eye contact. By thus constricting our measures, we may have lost information. Indeed, research on nonverbal behavior suggests that subtle, qualitative distinctions matter. For example, powerful people do not necessarily make more total eye contact than do the powerless; yet, whereas powerful people make as much eye contact when listening as they do when speaking, the less powerful look more when listening than they do when speaking (see DePaulo & Friedman, 1998, for a review). Neglecting to account for such distinctions probably decreased the accuracy of our measures and reduced the likelihood of confirming our hypotheses. Future research would profit from a more thorough review of the measurement, and meaning, of nonverbal behavior.

The current project fell short of confirming its central hypotheses. At the same time, the more exploratory analyses do provide intriguing leads. Correlational analyses suggest that, when people feel anxious about their interactions, they tend to avoid their interaction partners. These findings parallel Stephan and Stephan’s (1985) proposal that anxiety about interacting with ethnic and racial outgroups can prompt rejection of outgroup members. Current results also suggest that, when people have no clear schemas for how to behave, they tend to disengage from their interactions. Such findings support Wurf and Markus’s (1991) hypothesis, and Gollwitzer and colleagues’ findings (Gollwitzer & Brandstaetter, 1997; Gollwitzer & Schaal, 1998), that having a clear script for reaching a goal provides the motivation and the means to succeed at that goal. Curiously, this research suggests that these processes operate
across intergroup and intergroup relations. Anxiety and uncertainty produced avoidance in both intragroup and intergroup dyads. Moreover, people avoided their “straight” partners as much as, if not more than, their “gay” partners.

From the current project’s perspective, intergroup and intragroup interactions look a lot alike. Indeed, the project cannot draw solid conclusions about why people avoid outgroup members because it did not find disproportionate avoidance of outgroup members. Still, the results do imply that anxiety and uncertainty drive avoidance in general. So, to explain people’s avoidance of outgroup members in particular, one need only assume that, normally, if not in the current research, anxiety and uncertainty are disproportionately high in intergroup relations. Perhaps this assumption is not far from the truth. The artificial constraints of laboratory interaction could easily have destroyed naturally-occurring differences in anxiety and uncertainty levels. Thus, to better address the sources of intergroup avoidance, future research might explore intergroup and intragroup interactions in more naturalistic settings.

In any case, similarities between intergroup and intragroup interactions should not obscure the real differences that did surface. For one thing, current results suggest that anxiety stems from different sources in intergroup and intragroup relations. More specifically, findings that low prejudiced participants felt more anxious around “gay” partners than did highly prejudiced participants suggest that the desire to appear nonprejudiced constitutes a unique source of anxiety in intergroup relations (see Devine & Vasquez, 1997, for theoretical confirmation of this). Moreover, other results suggest that anxiety and uncertainty do not necessarily have equivalent effects
across intergroup and intragroup relations. Correlational analyses suggest that anxiety played a less influential role in interactions with outgroup members, probably because less prejudiced people controlled the influence of anxiety on their behavior for the same reason that they felt anxious in the first place (i.e., a desire to please). Of course, such results, tentative as they are, do not bear intensive analysis. If nothing else, the current study testifies to the continuing complexity, and the mystery, of intergroup behavior.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


