Friend or Foe? The Dynamics of Interpersonal Relationships in Shared Goal Pursuit

Szu-chi Huang

Susan M. Broniarczyk

Ying Zhang

Mariam Beruchashvili*

* Szu-chi Huang is an Assistant Professor of Marketing (huangsc@stanford.edu) at Stanford Graduate School of Business, 655 Knight Way, Stanford, CA 94305. Susan M. Broniarczyk is a Sam Barshop Centennial Professor of Marketing (susan.broniarczyk@mccombs.utexas.edu), and Ying Zhang is an Associate Professor of Marketing (ying.zhang@mccombs.utexas.edu), both at the McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin, B6700, 1 University Station, Austin, TX 78702. Mariam Beruchashvili is a Professor of Marketing (mariam.beruchashvili@csun.edu) at California State University at Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330. Correspondence: Szu-chi Huang.

Contribution Statement

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, our findings add to the literature on interpersonal relationships in self-regulation processes (Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010; Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010) by capturing how consumers actively manage their relationships with others in shared goal pursuit situations. In addition, our work expands the framework of the dynamics of self-regulation into the social/group domain and examines how consumers' interaction with others changes from the initial stage to the advanced stage of a pursuit. Our work also substantiates the idea that motivation constitutes a dimension of similarity for categorization and knowledge exchange, and shows that being motivated by a shared individual goal greatly affects one's perceived closeness with a person and consequently one's interaction and information sharing behaviors. The second major contribution lies in the applicability of our work – our findings provide insight into how consumers who are working on the same individual goal can facilitate knowledge exchange and collective wisdom, leading to greater joint welfare. From the marketers' perspective, this paper provides insights on the autonomous information-sharing behaviors of consumers in shared goal pursuit and the key drivers behind the effectiveness of shared-pursuit programs, such as Weight Watchers, AA, and smoking cessation programs.

Abstract

We examined how individuals' perceived relations with others in the same stage of shared goal pursuit may change during the course of goal pursuit. Through one qualitative field study, one longitudinal study, and three lab studies, we found that consumers tended to view others in shared pursuit as "friends" to seek support from them during the early stage of the pursuit and that goal attainability was a concern; however, once consumers reached the advanced stage of the pursuit, they conversely viewed others in shared pursuit as "foes" and sought to reduce the remaining discrepancy more efficiently than others to reach the goal sooner, even when the attainment of the goal was available to every individual in the pursuit. This shift in the relationship further influenced consumers' interaction with others, such as through the sharing of shopping deals and food nutrition information.

It is October 20, 2006, 4:26pm. Ruby[1] is attending the Weight Watchers meeting that she has recently joined with the goal of losing 30 pounds. She has never been thin and has always been prone to weight gain, but it became dramatic in graduate school. She gained a great deal of weight first during her Master's work and then during her PhD studies. She has been struggling to lose the weight since then.

> *"Going into the meetings and hearing other people's stories or telling your own, that's all a part of, you know, I'm doing this, I'm succeeding at this." Ruby, 33, said during a break from a Weight Watchers meeting. "The whole collective process helped with my own self-confidence. I talk at a lot [of] the meetings, and so I give my own suggestions for things, or I talk about what was working for me."*

Ruby felt that fellow attendees of the Weight Watchers meetings were supportive and understanding of her weight struggle, and she thoroughly enjoyed hearing their stories as well as sharing her own; by contrast, Sandra felt that she no longer needed the support of others from Weight Watchers to reach her goal, and she was primarily concerned with comparing her relative weight loss progress to that of other group members.

> *"I don't talk too much [at the meetings]," Sandra, 52, expressed a completely different feeling about the shared weight loss program. "If I stay, I go in to get weighed mostly and then leave. I have enough confidence that I can do it myself now."*

Similar to Ruby, Sandra has struggled with her weight all her life – she has been a yo-yo dieter, alternating between gaining and losing. However, there is one major difference between these two women. Ruby has just begun her weight loss pursuit at Weight Watchers, whereas Sandra had already lost 20 pounds successfully and has only five more pounds to lose to reach the target that she set for herself. Currently, Sandra only attends meetings to be weighed and to be informed of her progress compared with other members of the group; if she did happen to stay

[1] The names are aliases because of the confidentiality agreement between the researcher and the members of the Weight Watchers program. More details regarding these data are discussed in the Study 5 method section.

longer at the meeting, she neither interacted with fellow Weight Watchers members nor shared information to help others.

Ruby and Sandra are similar to many of us. We all pursue important life goals, and interestingly, we often are not alone in these pursuits, despite the individual nature of most of these goals. Similar to Ruby and Sandra, we may have friends who are also attempting to lose a few pounds, or we may have a colleague who is also working hard to quit smoking. How, then, do we perceive and interact with these people who are pursuing the same individual goals as we are?

This paper examines how people's perceived closeness with others in the same stage of shared goal pursuit (i.e., pursuing the same individual goal and in approximately the same stage of pursuit) may change during the course of goal pursuit. We build our research on the literature on interpersonal relationships in self-regulation processes (e.g., Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010), and we propose that consumers either perceive others in shared pursuit as "friends" to seek support from them or regard them as "foes" and seek to accelerate goal attainment relative to others' progress, even when one's success is objectively independent from that of others. Individuals' views of these relationships thus have many important behavioral consequences, including influencing the decision of whether to share helpful goal-related information with others.

The examination of shared goal pursuit processes (i.e., what occurs when people are pursuing the same individual goal) is important for several reasons. From the consumer perspective, helping others in their pursuit could enhance one's own confidence and motivation in his/her own pursuit. On a collective level, the sharing of helpful tips facilitates knowledge exchange and leads to greater joint welfare. From a marketer perspective, the autonomous information-sharing behaviors of consumers can help to generate word of mouth and can serve as

a free, yet credible, advertisement to promote products and services (Phelps, Lewis, and Mobilio 2004; Liu 2006). In addition, marketers and government agencies have designed various programs for consumers to accompany one another in pursuing similar individual goals (e.g., Weight Watchers, AA, smoking cessation programs) under the assumption that these programs facilitate goal attainment for most people. Therefore, it is important for us to examine how consumers perceive and interact with others who share the pursuit of the same individual goal.

Interpersonal Relationships in Goal Pursuit

Prior research provides important evidence on how interpersonal relationships can influence goal pursuit (for a review, see Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010). For instance, the mere presence of significant partners makes related goals more accessible, triggering the pursuit on an unconscious level (Fitzsimons and Bargh 2003). Interpersonal relationships can also deplete or bolster our self-regulation resources (Ackerman et al. 2009; Knowles, Finkel, and Williams 2007) and provide social support to facilitate such pursuits (Uchino 2004). In addition, it has been found that people assume active roles in managing their interpersonal relationships to ensure successful goal attainment. For example, people automatically bring to mind and become closer to others who can help them make further progress on their goal (i.e., instrumental others) when a goal is active (Fitzsimons and Shah 2009) and when significant progress toward a goal has not been made (Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010).

Although the majority of research on interpersonal relationships in self-regulation focuses on the influence of socially close others, such as one's parents, a good friend, or a romantic partner, relatively little research has investigated the influence that the people who are pursuing

the same individual goals may have on one another. Observing others as they pursue a goal could remind and activate the same goal in one's association network, consequently leading one to initiate the same pursuit (e.g., the Goal Contagion Effect, Aarts, Gollwitzer, and Hassin 2004). Interestingly, the extent of this contagion effect is proportional to the perceived effort in others' pursuits, such that the more effort others invest in a pursuit, the higher the accessibility of the goal and thus the more motivated one becomes in one's own pursuit (Dik and Aarts 2007). In addition to initiating such a pursuit, one can also vicariously complete the pursuit by observing others completing their goal pursuits (McCulloch et al. 2011).

However, apart from mimicking others' goal pursuit processes, it is unclear how people actually *perceive* and *interact* with others who are in a similar stage of pursuing the same individual goal. In particular, when everyone is attempting to advance on a shared individual goal, do they regard one another as friends or foes? Consequently, do they share goal-related information to help one another, or do they keep helpful tips to themselves?

Others in Shared Goal Pursuit – Friend or Foe?

Friend for companionship. When people pursue a similar goal (e.g., aiming to lose weight) and are in the same stage of pursuit, they are striving for the same ultimate end state (e.g., a fitter self), and such shared similarity could create a sense of companionship and draw people closer ("we are in the same boat!"). Indeed, similarity between individuals leads to greater interpersonal attraction, trust, and understanding, and people tend to affiliate with others who share similar interests, have a similar social status, or are in a similar situation (Cohen and Zhou 1991; Ruef, Aldrich, and Carter 2003; Makela, Kalla, and Piekkari 2007; Schacter 1959).

In addition, similarity can be a basis for people to form a psychological group in their minds, generating a strong sense of identification with similar others (Self-Categorization Theory, Williams and O'Reilly 1998; Monge and Contractor 2003). Following this line of reasoning, we expect that consumers should feel greater psychological closeness to others who are in a similar goal pursuit situation – that is, people who are pursuing a similar individual goal and are in a similar stage of the pursuit. For example, for someone who is starting a diet to move toward her fitness goal, knowing that another colleague is also starting a similar pursuit would make her feel closer to this colleague.

When similarity breeds closeness and people seek companionship from others who are in a similar goal pursuit situation, they should be more willing to help others in their pursuits. Abundant evidence shows that people are more favorable and helpful toward similar others (e.g., Singh and Tan 1992; Byrne and Nelson 1964). For example, clerks approve a greater number of loans for applicants who hold attitudes and values that are similar to their own (Golightly, Huffman, and Byrne 1972), and people in general are more altruistic and willing to make greater monetary investment to help socially close others (Rachlin and Jones 2008). Even when the sense of similarity is built on a less profound reason, such as having the same surname or wearing similar apparel, this similarity can still lead to greater liking, closeness, and likelihood of helping (Guéguen, Pichot, and Dreff 2005). It follows that if consumers feel close to others in a similar goal pursuit situation, then they would be more responsive to the requests of others and be more willing to help, such as sharing helpful goal-related information with them (e.g., sharing dieting tips with others who are also attempting to lose weight).

Foe to compete against. By contrast, people could also regard others pursuing the same individual goal as competition, which would result in distancing from one another (vs. close

companionship). As prior research shows, people conduct social comparisons as they encounter other people; that is, we view others as performance benchmarks that we would like to exceed (Festinger 1954). As a result, knowing that one is performing better or worse than others can affect both emotion and motivation (Festinger 1954; Blanton 2001; Buunk and Gibbons 2007).

However, social comparisons are also selective. The Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model (SEM model, Tesser 1988) proposes that when the domain is self-relevant, people are more likely to compare and feel threatened by the performance of others. In addition, because similar others provide a meaningful standard for self-evaluation (Festinger 1954), prior literature has also suggested that people are more likely to compare with similar others under stress (Schachter 1959; Gerard and Rabbie 1961), such as in the work environment, in marriages, and in hospital settings (Buunk, Schaufeli, and Ybema 1994; Kulik and Mahler 2000). Likewise, people tend to compare and compete with others who are expected to perform at approximately the same level as themselves (Goethals and Darley 1977; Wheeler and Zuckerman 1977). Therefore, "similar others" in the shared pursuit of an important individual goal are likely to become targets of comparison and thus competition. Specifically, because people who are in the same situation would provide a meaningful standard for comparison, one should be more likely to compete with peers who are in the same stage of the same individual pursuit, such that attaining the goal sooner than one's peers becomes greatly enjoyable and falling behind is threatening and painful.

Because people could perceive others in shared pursuit as competition, they should then be reluctant to help these peers make further progress on their goals, and this reluctance should in turn manifest through their behaviors, such as hiding helpful goal-related information. For instance, prior research has found that similarity between a help giver and a help seeker on an ego-central task – which is likely to occur in the context of pursuing an important goal – can

pose a threat and can thus inhibit helping behaviors (Nadler 1987). Similarly, people give less improvement information to relationally close others (e.g., friends rather than strangers) to prevent being outperformed by close others when future comparison opportunities arise (Pemberton and Sedikides 2001).

Therefore, although it is plausible to expect that people view others in shared goal pursuit as friends to seek companionship from them and to share goal-related information with them, it is equally plausible to hypothesize the opposite; that is, people would perceive others in shared pursuit as foes to distance themselves from them and thus would be reluctant to share valuable goal-related information.

A Switch from Friends to Foes – The Stage in Shared Goal Pursuit

What determines whether people perceive others in the same pursuit as friends or foes? This article explores one important factor: the stage in shared goal pursuit. Based on the theory of dynamics of self-regulation (Fishbach, Zhang, and Koo 2009; Koo and Fishbach 2008) and the findings indicating that people have different concerns as they progress from the initial stage to the advanced stage of goal pursuit (Huang and Zhang 2011; Huang, Zhang, and Broniarczyk 2012), we theorize that individual perceptions of others in shared pursuit will depend on the current stage in the pursuit. That is, depending on whether people (and their peers) have just begun to pursue a goal or have made substantial progress and are approaching the end point, they would either view one another as companions or as competition.

There are, of course, many types of combinations with respect to the stage in a shared goal-pursuit situation. That is, while one could have just begun the pursuit of a weight loss goal,

his/her colleague could have been working on the goal for a while and is thus becoming close to reaching his/her ideal weight. This article focuses on the situations in which peers in shared pursuit are at roughly the same stage of the pursuit because being in the same stage would generate the highest level of perceived similarity and thus the closest companionship as well as the most threatening comparisons of progress, depending on the stage.

Specifically, when people first begin to pursue a goal, they are concerned about whether the goal is attainable and whether they should commit to this pursuit (Huang and Zhang 2011; Koo and Fishbach 2008). As a result, in this early stage of goal pursuit, people are likely to derive motivation based on the expectation that they can eventually attain the goal (Atkinson 1957; Bandura 1997; Liberman and Förster 2008; Lewin 1951; Locke and Latham 1990). One way for people to enhance the perceived attainability of a goal is to relate to other people who are also pursuing the same goal and are in the same stage of pursuit because knowing that "we are in the same boat" signals that the goal is indeed attainable for most people. As a result, in the initial stage of goal pursuit, one would view others in the same pursuit as "friends" to seek companionship from them and to share goal-related information with them. For example, for a person who just joined the Weight Watchers program and is worried about whether he/she can lose 30 pounds to reach his/her goal weight, he/she will view other customers in the same stage of the program as companions because this view would enhance one's belief that losing 30 pounds is indeed possible for everyone in the program. As a result, one feels close to other customers in pursuit of the same goal, and they are willing to share dieting tips with one another.

However, once this person has been on track and experienced a significant amount of progress on the goal, he/she will feel relatively certain that the goal is indeed attainable through one's own continued effort. At that point, one no longer needs to draw support from others in the

same pursuit. Rather, the focus in this advanced stage of pursuit is to accelerate the rate of discrepancy reduction to attain the goal (Brunstein and Gollwitzer 1996; Carver and Scheier 1998). Therefore, in this advanced stage of goal pursuit, people derive motivation from the estimate of the remaining discrepancy (Higgins 1987; Koo and Fishbach 2008; Locke and Latham 2002) and mobilize effort based on how much work remains to finally attain the goal (Brehm and Self 1989; Wright and Kirby 2001). This intense monitoring of progress would lead people to actively compare one's progress against others, especially those in shared pursuit, because these same-pursuit peers provide a meaningful standard for comparison. As a result, in the advanced stage of goal pursuit, one would be more likely to view others who are in a similar pursuit as "foes" to compare with and compete against; consequently, they will be reluctant to share goal-related information to help others in their pursuit. For example, for a person who has lost a significant amount of weight in the Weight Watchers program and is now focusing on reaching his/her target weight as soon as possible, he/she will view others in the same stage of the program as a comparison benchmark and as competition, and will seek to lose more weight than them every week. As a result of such competition, one would feel more distant from other customers who are in the same pursuit and would be reluctant to share dieting tips to help others lose more weight.

This paper reports five studies that captured how people's perceived closeness and information-sharing behaviors changed throughout the course of shared goal pursuit. Specifically, Study 1 tested our hypothesis in a longitudinal academic goal context and demonstrated how people's perceived closeness with others who were pursuing the same academic goal changed from the initial stage to the advanced stage of goal pursuit. In Study 2, we directly manipulated the stage of goal pursuit in the lab setting and measured both people's

perceived closeness and their information-sharing behaviors as proxies for the shift in relationship. Studies 3 and 4 tested the key driver behind the shift from friends to foes – the emergence and dominance of competitiveness in the advanced stage of goal pursuit; specifically, Study 3 measured people's zero-sum belief as a proxy for their inert competitiveness, and Study 4 directly captured the underlying mechanisms (i.e., drawing others closer to enhance perceived goal attainability in the initial stage and distancing others to treat them as comparison benchmarks and competition in the advanced stage of shared goal pursuit). Finally, Study 5 externally validated our hypothesized patterns through a real-world, large-scale qualitative field study with Weight Watchers.

Study 1 – The Shift in Closeness with Same-pursuit Peers vs. Significant Others

In Study 1, we test our hypothesis in an academic goal context over six weeks. We tracked students' perceived closeness with two groups of people: their peers in the same academic pursuit and a comparison group of significant others. The significant-other group was goal-facilitative but was not pursuing the same individual goal. We expect that people's perceived closeness with shared-pursuit peers would decrease (i.e., distancing) as they progressed to the end point of the pursuit, whereas their perceived closeness with significant others would not show the same negative trend because significant others would not be viewed as competition as people reached the advanced stage of goal pursuit.

Method

A total of 52 undergraduate students from a southwestern university participated in this study for a coffee-shop gift card. This study used a Stage in the Pursuit (mid-semester (week1) to the end of semester (week 6)) × Interpersonal Relationship (same-pursuit peer vs. significant other) design; both the stage in the pursuit and the interpersonal relationship were measured as within-subject variables.

The first part of the study was conducted during the middle of a semester (i.e., six weeks before the end of the semester) rather than at the beginning of the semester to ensure that the academic goal identified by the participants was realistic in terms of how much they could achieve. The cover story informed the participants that the researchers were interested in learning more about their academic goals, academic life, and relationships on campus. The participants were first asked to establish their academic goal for this semester and then asked to report their progress on a scale from 0 to 100 and to answer a few filler questions about this goal (e.g., "how important is it for you to do well at this school?").

All participants were then asked to identify a person of their acquaintance who was pursuing an academic goal that was similar to theirs and who was at a similar stage of progress (same-pursuit peer) as well as a person whom they knew and was not pursuing the same academic goal but facilitated their achievement of their academic goal (significant other). To ensure that this "same-pursuit peer" and "significant other" remained concrete in their minds, the participants were asked to type each of their names and to provide a short description (age, affiliation, and the nature of their relationship) for both the same-pursuit peer and the significant other. The participants were then asked to report their perceived closeness with each person on a 10-point scale (1 = not close at all, 10 = extremely close), embedded among other questions, such as their similarity in attitudes and opinions regarding students' benefits on campus.

After reporting these relationships, the participants continued with other studies in the lab session, provided their email address, and then exited the lab. Five follow-up surveys were emailed to the participants during the following five weeks, including one survey per week from the middle of the semester to the end of the semester. In each follow-up survey, the participants were first reminded of the academic goal that they had established in the lab and were asked to report their current progress on this goal on the same scale from 0 to 100. The participants were then reminded of the same-pursuit peer whom they had identified earlier (the name and the description that they provided in the first survey) and were then asked to report how close they were to this same-pursuit peer at the present moment on the same 10-point scale (1 = not close at all, 10 = extremely close). After a few filler items pertaining to their academic life, the participants were reminded of the significant other whom they had identified in the first survey (the name and the relationship) and then asked to report how close they were to this person at the present moment on the 10-point scale (1 = not close at all, 10 = extremely close). These follow-up surveys allowed us to track the natural shifts in the participants' interpersonal relationships from the earlier stages to the advanced stages of their academic goal pursuit. After the participants completed all five follow-up surveys, they received the coffee-shop gift card at the end of the semester.

Results and Discussion

We analyzed the data using a two-step mixed model to capture potential linear and curvilinear trends (the stage in the pursuit as the predictor in step 1, and the stage in the pursuit and the squared stage in the pursuit as predictors in step 2). As a manipulation check, we first

conducted the two-step mixed model analysis on the progress that the participants made on the academic goal during the six-week period. This analysis helped to ensure that the participants indeed made more progress as they advanced from the middle to the end of the semester. The analysis yielded a simple linear effect of the stage in the pursuit, $F(1, 42) = 6.62$, $p = .01$, such that the participants made greater progress on their academic goals from week 1 to week 6 ($M_{week1} = 62.9\%$, $M_{week2} = 66.8\%$, $M_{week3} = 72.6\%$, $M_{week4} = 78.5\%$, $M_{week5} = 71.4\%$, $M_{week6} = 83.4\%$).

We then conducted the same two-step mixed model analysis of the difference between the participants' perceived closeness with same-pursuit peers versus their perceived closeness with significant others from week 1 to week 6. The effect of the stage in the pursuit was significant in this analysis, $F(1, 42) = 6.29$, $p < .05$, suggesting that the participants viewed same-pursuit peers and significant others differently as they advanced in their academic goals from the middle to the end of the semester.

To further explore how the participants viewed same-pursuit peers and significant others, we then conducted two separate two-step mixed model analyses of these two dependent variables. The first analysis of the perceived closeness with same-pursuit peers from week 1 to week 6 yielded a significant effect of the stage in the pursuit, $F(1, 42) = 10.11$, $p < .01$ ($M_{week1} = 7.27$, $M_{week2} = 7.05$, $M_{week3} = 6.40$, $M_{week4} = 6.41$, $M_{week5} = 5.67$, $M_{week6} = 5.26$). There were no other effects in this analysis. In addition, the trend analysis confirmed that the participants' perceived closeness with same-pursuit peers showed a negative linear trend as they advanced from week 1 to week 6, $F(1, 18) = 8.22$, $p = .01$; that is, as the participants made more progress on their academic goal, they became increasingly distant from their same-pursuit peers. We then conducted the same two-step mixed model analysis of the participants' perceived closeness with

significant others from week 1 to week 6. The effect of the stage in the pursuit was not significant, $F(1, 42) = 0.00$, *ns*, but the effect of the squared stage in the pursuit was significant, $F(1, 39) = 5.58$, $p < .05$ ($M_{week1} = 8.40$, $M_{week2} = 8.20$, $M_{week3} = 7.89$, $M_{week4} = 7.72$, $M_{week5} = 8.17$, $M_{week6} = 8.00$). The trend analysis suggested that the participants' perceived closeness with significant others followed a quadratic trend from week 1 to week 6, $F(1, 18) = 5.68$, $p < .05$, such that the participants' perceived closeness with significant others declined slightly during the pursuit, but then increased again as they approached the end of their academic pursuit (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

In this study, we found that people distanced themselves from others who were pursuing the same academic goal as they made increasing progress toward the end point, whereas their relationship with significant others remained relatively unchanged throughout the pursuit. That is, individuals' treatment of others in shared goal pursuit situations displays a unique pattern – which is different from how they manage other types of interpersonal relationships, such as significant others – in fact, people tend to draw these shared-pursuit peers closer in the early stage of pursuit but gradually distance themselves as the end point approaches.

Although the trend analysis in this study captured the shifts of closeness from the middle of the semester to the end of the semester, the study results were based on participants' self-reported progress on their academic goals; thus, in our subsequent lab studies, we resolved this concern by directly manipulating participants' progress. More importantly, in the next study, we measured both people's perceived closeness with shared-pursuit others and their subsequent behavior – the sharing of helpful tips – to provide behavioral evidence for the hypothesized shifts in relationship (from friends to foes).

Study 2 – Perceived Closeness and Information-Sharing Behavior

In Study 2, the participants signed up for a lab survey session with a same-gender friend. We provided the participants with feedback on their own progress in the task (initial stage vs. advanced stage of the pursuit) and manipulated whether their friend was in the same stage of the same pursuit or not (shared-pursuit vs. control). Based on our hypothesis, when a participant knew that his/her friend was pursuing the same individual goal and was in the same stage as themselves, he/she would view the friend either as a companion or as competition, depending on the stage of goal pursuit. We compared the participants' perceived closeness with their friends before and after the manipulation of the shared-pursuit feedback to capture the shift in their relationship, and we also measured their subsequent information-sharing behaviors.

Method

A total of 160 undergraduate students from a southwestern university participated in this study for partial course credit. This study used a Stage in the Pursuit (initial vs. advanced) × Friend's Pursuit (shared-pursuit vs. control) between-subject design. In addition, we manipulated the participants' progress relative to their friends' progress in the shared-pursuit conditions (slightly ahead vs. slightly behind) to ensure that the proposed pattern would occur regardless of who was winning at the moment, as long as the participant was in approximately the same stage of pursuit as his/her friend.

The participants signed up for the session with a same-gender friend and were asked to complete a pre-session survey one week before the lab session. The pre-session survey asked the participants to report their demographic information and to indicate how close they were with their friend on 10-point scales (11 items adopted from Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto 1989; Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010; Schmitt, Silvia, and Branscombe 2000), such as "Relative to your other relationships, how close are you and XX (XX is the friend's name)," "XX and I have many things in common," "As a friend, I like XX," "XX is someone I would like to have as a close friend," and "I would like to meet and interact with XX more often." We created a pre-session closeness score by averaging the participants' answers to these questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$).

On the day of the lab session, each participant-friend pair was separated and seated in two separate rooms. The cover story informed the participants that some tasks in the session might require them to work remotely with their friend; thus, we have arranged for them to sit in different rooms and have remotely connected their computers (e.g., 1A in Room A) to their friends' computers (e.g., 1B in Room B). Because the studies were randomly allocated to each computer station, the participants were also reminded that they may or may not encounter such tasks. The cover story was implemented to ensure the credibility of the progress feedback and the seating arrangements.

The participants then continued to read that the first study in the session was a "Verbal Creativity Task." To enhance the perceived importance of the task, we told the participants that the task would gauge their vocabulary skills and the capacity to seek novel and creative solutions to verbal problems, a skill that was recently discovered by psychologists and educators (Pemberton and Sedikides 2001). Specifically, in this task, the participants were asked to rearrange the letters of one word to make as many new words as they could (each word that they

created must be at least 3 letters long). The participants were told that they would earn points for generating correct words and that the points they would earn depended on the number of words as well as the complexity of the generated words. If they reached 1,000 points at the end of the task, then they would win a $10 cash reward.

After the introduction, the participants commenced the task. After two sets of questions, the participants were asked to wait as the computer analyzed their performance thus far. The computer then provided different feedback to manipulate the participants' perceived stage in the pursuit of 1,000 points – half of the participants received feedback indicating that they were in the initial stage of pursuit (either 213 points or 216 points), whereas the other half of the participants were led to believe that they have reached the advanced stage of pursuit (either 813 points or 816 points). In addition, for those in the shared-pursuit conditions, the computer then displayed the progress that the participant's friend has made thus far in the task. To enhance the credibility of the progress feedback, the participants were asked to type the name of their friend on the screen as well as their own computer number to ensure that the system could access the paired computer that their friend was working on in the adjoining room. The computer then reported that their friends were in the same stage of pursuit as themselves, earning either 216/213 points (initial-stage conditions) or 816/813 points (advanced-stage conditions). To ensure that the relative performance (slightly ahead vs. slightly behind) would not influence the hypothesized pattern, we counterbalanced the manipulation of the scores, such that half of the participants in the initial-stage conditions would receive feedback of 216 points while their friend has earned 213 points (slightly ahead), and the other half of the participants in the initial-stage condition would receive feedback of 213 points while their partner had 216 points (slightly behind). Following the same procedure, we also counterbalanced the relative progress among the

participants in the advanced-stage conditions. In contrast, for the participants in the control conditions, the computer did not display the progress or the task that the participants' friends were working on in the session; therefore, these participants did not know whether their friends were pursuing the same goal, as there were several surveys/tasks in the session.

After the manipulations, we asked the participants to report how close they were with their friend on the same 10-point scales as in the pre-session survey. We created a post-session closeness score by averaging the participants' answers to these questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$). The participants were then given an opportunity to assist their friends who were working (or who may later work) on the same task; specifically, the participants could send "hints" to their friends about the words that could be generated from the original words that they have worked on thus far – a "hint" should not include the new word itself and could only be "clues," such as "the number after 9" or "a type of metal." We also assured the participants that the hints that they provided would be valuable to help their friends earn more points even if they were already working on this task because the computers in the adjoining room displayed the verbal creativity questions in the opposite order. We then measured the time that the participants spent on providing hints for their friends and the length of the hints as a behavioral reflection of their relationship with the friend at the moment – the closer they were with their friends, the more they would be willing to help their friends attain the goal, and thus the longer they would work on providing tips and the more detailed (lengthy) the tips would be.

Results and Discussion

Perceived closeness. We first calculated the shift in the participants' perceived closeness with their friends by deducting the pre-session closeness score from the post-session closeness score; a positive score suggests an increase in closeness, whereas a negative score suggests distancing. The ANOVA of the shift in the closeness score on the stage in the pursuit (initial vs. advanced), friend's pursuit (shared-pursuit vs. control), relative progress (slightly ahead vs. slightly behind), and all their interaction terms yielded the hypothesized Stage in the Pursuit × Friend's Pursuit interaction, $F(1, 152) = 6.53$, $p = .01$. There was no other effect in this analysis; thus, the results suggest that the relative progress between each participant and his/her friend (i.e., whether the participant was slightly ahead or behind) did not influence the perceived closeness. Further contrast analyses showed that among the participants in the initial stages of goal pursuit, those who knew that their friends were pursuing the same individual goal felt closer to their friends (M = .56) than those who did not know about their friends' pursuit (M = .20), $t(69) = -1.86$, $p = .06$. In contrast, this pattern was reversed for the participants who were in the advanced stages of goal pursuit, such that the participants who knew that their friends were in shared pursuit of the same individual goal felt more distant from them (M = - .05) than those who were not informed of their friends' pursuit (M = .40), $t(87) = 1.96$, $p = .05$ (see Figure 2a).

Insert Figure 2a about here

Information-sharing behavior. We conducted the same analyses on the participants' information-sharing behavior, including the time that they spent providing helpful hints for their friends and the length of these hints. An ANOVA of the time that the participants spent sharing hints yielded the hypothesized Stage in the Pursuit × Friend's Pursuit interaction, $F(1, 152) = 8.56$, $p < .01$. There was no other effect in this analysis. Further contrast analyses showed that among the participants at the initial stages of goal pursuit, those who knew that their friends were

in shared pursuit spent approximately the same amount of time developing tips (M = 115.99 seconds) as those in the control condition (M = 93.13 seconds), $t(69) = -1.01$, $p = .32$; however, among the participants who were in the advanced stages of goal pursuit, those who knew that their friends were in shared pursuit spent significantly less time developing tips (M = 86.71 seconds) than those in the control condition (M = 153.74 seconds), $t(87) = 3.20$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 2b).

Insert Figure 2b about here

Consistently, the ANOVA of the length of the tips also yielded the Stage in the Pursuit × Friend's Pursuit interaction, $F(1, 152) = 8.43$, $p < .01$. There was no other effect in this analysis. Further contrast analyses showed that among the participants in the initial stages of goal pursuit, those who knew that their friends were in the same pursuit provided directionally more helpful tips (M = 46.86 words) than those in the control condition (M = 31.40 words), $t(69) = -1.44$, $p = .15$, although the difference was not significant. In contrast, among the participants who were in the advanced stages of goal pursuit, those who knew that their friends were in the same pursuit provided less helpful tips (M = 33.74 words) than those who were not informed of their friend's pursuit (M = 69.35 words), $t(87) = 2.71$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 2c).

Insert Figure 2c about here

The results in this study showed that when pursuing the same goal as their friends, the participants felt that they were closer to their friends when they were just beginning the pursuit but became more distant as they moved closer to the end point, although the reward was available for everyone to attain. This shift in relationship from friends to foes also manifested through their information-sharing behaviors, especially in the advanced stage of shared goal

pursuit. In the next study, we further explored whether such a shift in relationship occurred because of feelings of competitiveness in the advanced stage of shared pursuit.

Study 3 – The Mechanism of Competitiveness

Study 3 served two important purposes. First, we aimed to eliminate the alternative explanation that the patterns observed in the prior study resulted from anticipated reciprocation/retaliation of others in the same pursuit (i.e., "if I do/do not help, then others will do the same"); thus, in this study, we paired the participants with phantom partners generated by the computer to ensure that they would not know their partners.

The second purpose was to test the underlying role of competitiveness. As discussed earlier, shared goal pursuit situations are not zero-sum games; thus, everyone in the pursuit could eventually reach the reward. For example, it is likely that everyone in the Weight Watchers program could lose 10 pounds of weight, and everyone in the frequent flyer program could earn sufficient mileage to redeem for a free flight. Therefore, not every individual would perceive these shared goal pursuits as contests, and the extent to which the dynamic "from friends to foes" occurs should depend on the extent to which people hold a zero-sum belief (Crocker and Canevello 2008). The higher one's zero-sum belief, the more likely one would regard shared-pursuit peers as competition after reaching the advanced stage of the pursuit and would thus no longer seek companionship from them. Finally, in this study, we tested the hypothesis through the context of shopping – finding good online deals – and examined whether the hypothesized interpersonal dynamics occurred in the consumer domain as well.

Method

A total of 129 undergraduate students from a southwestern university participated in this study for partial course credit. This study used a Stage in the Pursuit (initial vs. advanced) × Zero-sum Belief mixed design. The zero-sum belief was measured as an individual difference factor.

At the beginning of the session, the participants were informed that they would be paired with one of the students who were participating in the same study in the adjoining room because some tasks may have a remote communication component. The participants followed instructions to enter their demographic information into the pairing program and waited for the computer to assign a partner for them. After 15 seconds, all participants read that they were now paired with a participant in the adjoining room, and a short profile of this assigned partner was displayed on the screen for their information. The profile was manipulated such that each participant was paired with someone of the same gender and from the same school, but their preferences for leisure activities differed to enhance the credibility of the profile. Following the procedure in the prior study, a short survey was then presented, asking the participants to report how close they felt they were to this partner on eight 10-point scales, such as "I feel that my assigned partner and I have many things in common," "As a friend, I think I will like my assigned partner," and "My assigned partner is someone I can see myself being closer to." We created a pre-pursuit closeness score by averaging the participants' answers to these questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$).

After the pairing process, the participants commenced the session and completed two filler studies before entering the main task – an online shopping study. The participants were

invited to visit some shopping websites, and for each site, they would view the products and online prices and select those that they considered "good online deals" based on their knowledge of the retail price of these products. The participants were told that the more good online deals they identified (i.e., the cheaper the online products were, compared with their current price in the retail store), the more points they would earn. If they could earn 500 points at the end of the shopping task, then they would have saved 500 virtual dollars through identifying good deals online and would thus win a $30 Amazon gift card as a reward. The reward was guaranteed for everyone who could earn 500 points by the end of this task.

The participants viewed two online shopping websites, one for furniture and the other for electronics. We selected products that students were familiar with but would not shop for on a regular basis (e.g., sofas and home theaters), such that they would remain relatively uncertain about their performance; this design allowed us to convincingly manipulate participants' current stage in the pursuit by providing different progress feedback. Specifically, we manipulated the participants' progress while keeping their invested effort constant across the two stage in the pursuit conditions: all participants viewed a progress bar with 500 points anchoring on the right side of the bar, and whereas the participants in the initial-stage condition had approximately 1/5 of the bar filled (equal to approximately 100 points), the participants in the advanced-stage condition had approximately 4/5 of the bar filled (equal to approximately 400 points) after completing these two shopping sites. The screen also displayed their partner's current score, either 100 points (initial-stage condition) or 400 points (advanced-stage condition), such that each participant knew that his/her partner was pursuing the same goal and was in approximately the same stage of pursuit. Because we displayed the participants' own progress on the progress bar but provided the partner's progress information using the actual score, we ensured that the

participants did not become suspicious about having the same exact score as their partner (yet believed that their partners were in the same stage of pursuit). After the progress feedback, the same eight 10-point closeness scales were presented to gauge the participants' perceived closeness with their assigned partner at that moment. We created a post-pursuit closeness score by averaging the participants' answers to these questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$).

After the progress report, the participants continued to complete the task. After completing the task, the participants were asked to answer several filler surveys, one of which gauged their zero-sum belief (adopted from Crocker and Canevello 2008). Specifically, the participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed with statements such as "To succeed in this world, it is sometimes necessary to step on others along the way" and "My successes don't mean much if most other people succeed at the same task" on 10-point scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 10 = Strongly agree). We created a zero-sum scale by averaging the participants' answers to these questions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .69$). All participants were entered into a lottery for the reward.

Results and Discussion

Stage in the pursuit. We first calculated the shift in the participants' perceived closeness with their assigned partner by deducting the pre-pursuit closeness score from the post-pursuit closeness score; a positive score would suggest an increase in closeness, whereas a negative score suggests distancing. We then conducted t-test analyses of the pre-pursuit closeness score, the post-pursuit closeness score, and the shift of closeness, using the stage in the pursuit (initial vs. advanced) as the predictor. The analysis showed that although there was no significant

difference in the pre-pursuit closeness score ($M_{initial}$ = 6.76 vs. $M_{advanced}$ = 6.61), $t(127) = .55$, *ns*, people felt less close with their partners when they reached the advanced stage ($M = 5.59$) than when they reached the initial stage ($M = 6.18$) of the pursuit, $t(127) = 2.11$, $p < .05$. That is, there was a strong distancing effect between those who were in the advanced stage (shift of closeness score: $M = -1.02$) compared with the initial stage ($M = -.58$) of the pursuit, $t(127) = 2.47$, $p = .015$, again replicating the findings in prior studies.

Mechanism of competitiveness. Based on our hypothesis, we expected the level of competitiveness to be especially strong among those with a high zero-sum belief because although every participant could have earned the gift card, the people with a high zero-sum belief were more likely to view the task through this lens – these individuals would become competitive against their partners as they reached the advanced stage of the pursuit and no longer needed the closeness with the shared-pursuit other to confirm the goal's attainability. Therefore, we conducted a regression analysis on the shift of the closeness score using the two predictors, the stage in the pursuit (initial vs. advanced) and zero-sum belief, as well as their interaction. This analysis yielded the hypothesized main effect of the stage in the pursuit, $\beta = -.22$, $t(125) = -2.48$, $p < .05$, indicating that people became more distant from their partners when they were in the advanced stage than in the initial stage of goal pursuit. The results also revealed a main effect of the zero-sum belief, such that the people who held a stronger zero-sum belief felt more distant from their partners, $\beta = -.14$, $t(125) = -2.34$, $p < .05$. The Stage in the Pursuit × Zero-sum Belief interaction was only moderate, $\beta = -.09$, $t(125) = -1.43$, $p = .16$. As the relationship between the participants and their shared-pursuit peers manifested in the same direction (from friends to foes) but only intensified among those with a high zero-sum belief, the lack of a significant interaction was somewhat expected; our interest lied in whether the participants with a high zero-sum belief

would show a stronger shift from friends to foes because of their inner competitiveness. Therefore, following the spotlight analysis procedures (Irwin and McClelland 2001), we further explored the effect of the stage in the pursuit on the shift in the closeness score depending on the zero-sum belief. The participants with a high zero-sum belief (one standard deviation above the mean) were significantly more distant from their partners when they reached the advanced stage of the pursuit (M = - 1.34) than in the initial stage of the pursuit (M = - .66), β = - .34, $t(125)$ = - 2.76, $p < .01$. However, for individuals with a low zero-sum belief (one standard deviation below the mean), the stage in the pursuit did not affect their feeling of closeness, β = - .09, $t(125)$ = - .74, *ns.* We graphed Figure 3 based on the spotlight analysis (1 S.D. above versus below the mean).

Insert Figure 3 about here

The results of this study showed that although there was a general pattern that people became more distant from others in shared goal pursuit as they moved closer to the end point, this shift in the relationship from friends to foes manifested strongly among those with a high zero-sum belief because they were more likely to view goal attainment as a competition. In our next study, we directly measured the underlying mechanisms of goal attainability, comparison and competitiveness that led to the observed shift in relationship.

Study 4 – Goal Attainability, Comparison, and Competitiveness

Study 4 served a number of important purposes. First, we adopted a similar paradigm as in Study 3 to eliminate the alternative explanation of expected reciprocity and measured people's zero-sum belief as a proxy for their inner competitiveness. In addition, we directly manipulated

the participants' invested effort when manipulating their current stage of goal pursuit, such that those in the initial-stage condition invested less effort than those in the advanced-stage condition, to mimic real-life goal pursuit processes. This manipulation helped to eliminate the possibility that the perceived difficulty of the task, velocity, or perceived ability could be alternative factors leading to the observed pattern.

More importantly, we directly tested whether people indeed had different concerns in different stages of goal pursuit and thus sought companionship from others to confirm that the goal was attainable when they were in the initial stage of shared pursuit but conversely treated others as a comparison benchmark and as competition when they have reached the advanced stage of the pursuit. We tested this hypothesis in the context of consumers' sharing of nutrition information.

Method

A total of 113 undergraduate students from a southwestern university participated in this study for partial course credit. This study used a Stage in the Pursuit (initial vs. advanced) × Zero-sum Belief mixed design; the zero-sum belief was measured as an individual difference factor.

At the beginning of the session, the participants were informed that they would be paired with a student who was taking the study in the adjoining room. In addition, we informed the participants that the computer system setup was designed to ensure that the participants could send messages to help their assigned partners if they desired but that they could not receive any message in return; this approach was chosen to ensure that we could fully attribute the

information-sharing behaviors observed to the participants' own willingness to help (and perceived closeness) rather than to their expectation for reciprocation or fear of retaliation.

The participants then read the instructions of the first task and were asked to view and memorize the calorie and fat information for different food items. The participants were told that they would view 5-7 food items on each page and that they could spend as much time as they liked to memorize the nutrition information for each item on that page before clicking "Continue" to enter the question section. In the question section, the students typed the calorie and fat information of the food items that they saw earlier, and they would earn points based on how close their answers were to the accurate number. If the participants could reach 100 points at the end of the task, then they would win a $30 gift card.

The participants then commenced the task. For those in the initial-stage condition, they answered three pages of food-item questions and viewed a progress bar indicating that they were halfway through Stage 2, out of a total of five stages (the end of Stage 5 represented 100 points). In other words, the participants had earned approximately 30 points thus far. In contrast, the participants in the advanced-stage condition went through 7 pages of food-item questions, and the progress bar showed that they were halfway through Stage 4, out of a total of five stages. That is, they had earned approximately 70 points. In contrast to the prior studies, in which we manipulated the participants' current stage of goal pursuit while keeping their invested effort constant between the initial-stage and advanced-stage conditions, in this study we allowed the participants to actually spend different amounts of effort to reach the initial or advanced stage of goal pursuit, therefore ensuring that the perceived difficulty of the task, the speed of progress, and the perceived ability remained constant between the two conditions.

Under the cover story of providing a more holistic view of the task, the computer screen then indicated that the participants' paired partner has made similar progress and was in the same stage of pursuit as themselves (i.e., for the participants in the initial-stage condition, they were informed that their partner was also approximately halfway through Stage 2). We used progress-bar feedback to prevent direct comparison of the exact scores and to maintain the credibility of the feedback.

We then asked the participants to report their current feelings about the task. Specifically, to gauge the participants' perceived goal attainability, we asked them to report how difficult they thought it was to earn 100 points for the prize on a 10-point scale (1 = not difficult at all, 10 = very difficult to attain). To gauge whether the participants compared their progress against their partner's progress and viewed them as comparison benchmarks, we asked the participants to report whether they viewed their assigned partner as a partner who was confronting the same challenges as themselves or as a comparison benchmark that provided information about how well they were doing (1 = as a partner, 10 = as a comparison benchmark). In addition, we asked the participants whether they felt cooperative or competitive with their paired partner (1 = cooperative, 10 = competitive). These questions were inserted among filler items to disguise the true purpose of the questions.

After receiving progress feedback and reporting their current feelings, the participants were given an opportunity to share nutrition information with their paired partner who was working on the same task in the adjoining room. Specifically, the computer displayed all the answers that the participants had provided thus far as well as the error rate (in percentage form) alongside each answer (i.e., the deviation of the participants' answer from the accurate number, divided by the accurate number). The participants could then simply click/check the answers that

they wanted to submit to their paired partner to provide "reference values" for their partner as they encountered these questions. This procedure allowed us to measure the willingness of the participants to help their paired partner earn more points, as we were able to capture the quality of the shared tips – if participants shared many wrong answers with their partner, then this finding would indicate that they viewed the partner more as a "foe" than as a "friend" and that they felt competitive against the partner rather than feeling close to him/her. In addition, this one-click procedure circumvented the concern that the time that the participants spent typing tips to help their partners may have been affected by other factors (e.g., how much time they believed they had remaining in their own task) – which could be the reason for the weaker effects observed in the initial-stage conditions in Study 2.

After the opportunity to click and share their answers with the paired partner, the participants continued to complete the task. Upon completion, they answered a few filler surveys, one of which gauged their zero-sum belief using the same 10-point scales (1 = Strongly disagree, 10 = Strongly agree) that were used in Study 3. All participants were entered into a lottery for the reward.

Results and Discussion

Stage in the pursuit and competitiveness. Following the procedures in the prior study, we conducted a regression analysis on the error rate of the shared tips using the two predictors, the stage in the pursuit (initial vs. advanced) and zero-sum belief, as well as their interaction. This analysis yielded a moderate main effect of the stage in the pursuit, $\beta = .97$, $t(109) = 1.84$, $p = .07$, suggesting that people shared tips with their partners at a moderately higher rate of error when

they were in the advanced stage than in the initial stage of goal pursuit. Consistent with our prediction, this analysis also yielded a significant Stage in the Pursuit × Zero-sum Belief interaction, $\beta = -1.06$, $t(109) = -2.70$, $p < .01$. Following the spotlight analysis procedures (Irwin and McClelland 2001), we found that the participants with a high zero-sum belief (one standard deviation above the mean) shared significantly worse tips when they reached the advanced stage of the pursuit ($M = -468.37\%$ error rate) than in the initial stage ($M = +14.31\%$ error rate), $\beta = 2.41$, $t(109) = 3.21$, $p < .01$. However, for individuals with a low level of zero-sum belief (one standard deviation below the mean), the stage in the pursuit did not affect the quality of the tips that they shared, $\beta = -.47$, $t(109) = -.62$, *ns.* We generated Figure 4 based on the spotlight analysis (one S.D. above versus below the mean).

Insert Figure 4 about here

Goal attainability, comparison, and competitiveness. Based on our hypothesis, people seek companionship in the initial stage of goal pursuit to enhance the belief that the goal is attainable, and they conversely treat others as comparison benchmarks and compete against them when they reach the advanced stage of the pursuit.

To test these mechanisms, we first conducted a regression analysis on the error rate of the shared tips using the stage in the pursuit (initial vs. advanced), perceived goal attainability, and their interaction term as predictors. This analysis yielded a main effect of the perceived goal attainability, $\beta = -.61$, $t(109) = -2.15$, $p < .05$, suggesting that the more difficult it was for the participants to attain the goal, the better the quality of the tips they were willing to share with their assigned partners. More importantly, we found that for the participants in the initial stage of the pursuit, the perceived difficulty of goal attainment indeed negatively predicted the error rate of their tips, $\beta = -.81$, $t(54) = -3.05$, $p < .01$, such that the more difficult it was to attain the goal,

the better the tips they were willing to share with assigned partners. However, for individuals in the advanced stage of goal pursuit, the perceived goal attainability did not affect the quality of the tips that they shared, $\beta = -.40$, $t(55) = -.85$, *ns.*

We then conducted similar analyses on the mechanism of viewing others as comparison benchmarks. First, the regression analysis of the error rate of the shared tips using the stage in the pursuit, comparison benchmark, and their interaction term as predictors showed the hypothesized Stage in the Pursuit × Comparison Benchmark interaction, $\beta = .58$, $t(109) = 2.86$, $p < .01$; there were no other effects in this analysis. Specifically, for the participants in the advanced stage of the pursuit, the extent to which they viewed assigned partners as comparison benchmarks positively predicted the error rate of the tip, $\beta = .91$, $t(55) = 2.85$, $p < .01$, such that the more they viewed their assigned partners as comparison benchmarks, the worse the tips they shared. However, for individuals in the initial stage of goal pursuit, the feeling of comparison did not affect the quality of the tips that they shared, $\beta = -.25$, $t(54) = -1.16$, *ns.*

Finally, we conducted the same analyses on the feeling of competitiveness. The regression analysis of the error rate of the shared tips using the stage in the pursuit, competitiveness, and their interaction as predictors first yielded a main effect of competitiveness, $\beta = .51$, $t(109) = 2.09$, $p < .05$, suggesting that the more competitive the participants felt, the worse the quality of the tips they shared with their assigned partners. More importantly, this main effect was qualified by the hypothesized Stage in the Pursuit × Competitiveness interaction, $\beta = .61$, $t(109) = 2.48$, $p < .05$. Further analyses showed that for the participants in the advanced stage of the pursuit, the extent to which they viewed their assigned partners as competition positively predicted the error rate of the tips, $\beta = 1.12$, $t(55) = 2.93$, $p < .01$, such that the more they viewed their assigned partners as competition, the worse the tips they shared. However, for

those in the initial stage of goal pursuit, the perceived competitiveness did not affect the quality of the tips that they shared, $\beta = -.09$, $t(54) = -.36$, *ns.*

These analyses confirmed that although the perceived difficulty in attaining the goal drove people's information-sharing behavior in the initial stage of the pursuit, it was the extent to which people viewed others as comparison benchmarks and the perceived competitiveness that determined how they would treat shared-pursuit others in the advanced stage of the pursuit.

Study 5 – A Real-World Validation with Weight Watchers

Finally, Study 5 provides a qualitative field validation of perceived closeness in shared goal pursuit in the context of Weight Watchers, the world's largest and best-known commercial weight loss organization (e.g., Heyes 2006; Stinson 2001). According to the company information, approximately 1.3 million customers worldwide attend more than 45,000 Weight Watchers meetings led by 12,000 leaders. In 2011 alone, consumers spent nearly $5 billion on Weight Watchers branded products and services (www.weightwatchersinternational.com).

Weight Watchers represents a well-suited marketing context to test our hypothesis for several reasons: 1) all customers, typically strangers to one another before the program, are engaged in the pursuit of the same individual goal – achieving weight loss; 2) meetings are designed to encourage interactions and relationships among members in the form of active information sharing and in the development of companionship; 3) meetings also encourage public sharing of the weight loss progress of each member, allowing progress monitoring and competition to occur; 4) typically, members pursue their weight loss goals over a period of time that is sufficient to enable observation of how the relationship dynamics evolve in the initial

versus advanced stage of goal pursuit.

Method

As our purpose was to gauge how Weight Watchers members perceived one another (as friends or as foes) and whether these perceptions affected their information-sharing behaviors depending on the stage of weight loss pursuit, we used a set of qualitative data collected and published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010), which included both long interviews (51 participants in three different Weight Watchers meeting locations; see Appendix A for the informant profile table) and observations (across 143 meetings) from Weight Watchers in a Midwestern city.

The verbatim-transcribed data were entered into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo; we then followed analytic procedures recommended for qualitative data analysis (Spiggle 1994) and used an extended case method approach (Burawoy 1998) to identify instances reflective of interpersonal relationships, perceived closeness, and information-sharing behaviors in different stages of weight loss based on our hypothesis-based data summary scheme (please see Appendix B).

Results and Discussion

We operationalized the stage in goal pursuit based on the percentage of weight loss progress made at the time of interview/observation relative to one's goal weight; those who have achieved less than or equal to 50% of their goal weight were categorized as in their initial stage

of the pursuit, whereas those who have achieved more than 50% of their goal weight were categorized as in the advanced stage of the pursuit. Among the 51 interviewees, 18 individuals were in the initial stage of the weight loss pursuit; 19 had achieved more than 50% of their goal weight and were thus categorized as being in the advanced stage of the pursuit; 10 interviewees did not report their progress and 4 were group leaders, and thus we excluded these 14 individuals from the analysis.

For the customers in the initial stage of their weight loss pursuit, 55.6% mentioned thoughts related to companionship (Appendix B) and stated that they felt closer to and were more willing to assist fellow Weight Watchers members, compared with 21.1% in the advanced stage of the pursuit, χ^2 (1, N = 37) = 4.68, $p < .05$. In contrast, 57.9% of the customers in the advanced stage of weight loss expressed feelings of competitiveness and reluctance to share information with fellow members (Appendix B), compared with 0.0% in the initial stage of weight loss, χ^2 (1, N = 37) = 14.83, $p < .01$. That is, the customers in the initial stage of the pursuit viewed and treated shared-pursuit members as friends, whereas those in the advanced stage of the pursuit were more likely to perceive and treat them as foes.

Below, we summarize and discuss the comments from these Weight Watchers members regarding their feelings and interactions with other members in the program in the initial stage and the advanced stage of the shared pursuit.

"We're all in the same boat": Companionship and information sharing in the initial stage of goal pursuit. In the initial stage of goal pursuit, the majority of the informants sought the support of fellow Weight Watchers members to help them navigate the demands of the diet. The informants actively attended group meetings and perceived other Weight Watchers as "friends";

such companionship also appeared to be crucial to enhance the perceived attainability of a successful weight loss goal.

> *Meetings put out good camaraderie… I feel like they're my friends because they're there when I need them, and you know, we visit with each other before the meeting, and you know, especially the ones who're like me, just starting, really struggling, we even sit together, and we commiserate with each other, and I tell them about my week, they say, "oh, my week was worse," and you go, okay, maybe my week was not as bad, so we kinda dust each other off, and we, this, it's good camaraderie. (Anna)*

> *… it [being in a meeting] makes you a little bit more hopeful because you're not the only one in that boat. There's other people that are in the same boat, and they need to go there for the support, for reassurance too. That you know, hey, maybe you gained this week, but next week you'll come and lose. (Julie)*

The companionship that manifested itself at the group meetings appeared to be especially reinforced by information sharing – the informants voluntarily exchanged stories about their daily diets and shared information in the form of tips and advice for successful dieting:

> *I love sharing; I always say something about "oh, I found this 2 point snack or," you know, I like giving tips, I'm struggling myself, so I wanna help others… I'm learning how to do this [weight loss], and so, like, if I find some good recipe or, like for Thanksgiving, I made this, I made this low-point pumpkin pie, oh, it was delicious, it was just a point for a serving, so I was, I actually typed that up, and I had a bunch of it, so I gave that to the leader, so she was giving it out … I like helping out that way. (Cynthia)*

> *… so when I had lost 10 pounds… everybody in the meeting knows that, and they had asked me what had been working for me, and so I… shared some things that I'd been doing. (Susan)*

> *… just wanted to share … you know, how we think Skinny Cow ice cream is 2 points per serving, right?… I did calculate, and with sugar, it actually comes out close to 3 points a serving… just wanted to put it out there … I'm trying to figure this thing out, like we all do, and people have been helpful, so I wanna do my bit. (Emily, observation note, 5:30pm group meeting)*

"I can do it myself": Certainty of goal attainment, competitiveness, and distancing in the advanced stage of goal pursuit. As the informants become closer to reaching their goal weights (i.e., having achieved more than 50% of their weight loss goal), perceptions of fellow Weight

Watchers members as "friends in the same boat" receded. These advanced-stage informants felt more certain that they could attain the goal by themselves and therefore began to monitor their progress more intensely using others in the program as comparison benchmarks rather than companions:

> *… I don't like to talk about it to a lot of people because I don't want them to… I don't want to feel accountable to them, I don't wanna explain. I don't, I don't wanna explain to anybody why I'm doing what I'm doing. I just wanna do it for myself. (Sandra)*

> *… I had my downs, there… were weeks in there, I lost like quarter of a pound … maybe not in one week, but you know, I didn't think I could lose 25 pounds either, which I did, so… I think my body is different now, and I know what I gotta do, so I think I'll get there next week and hit lifetime. (Patricia)*

This certainty of goal attainment and the competitiveness induced led to a tendency to reduce interactions with fellow Weight Watchers members and even to withdraw from group meetings as a way of distancing themselves:

> *I lost 60 pounds, so I have 10 more to go. … I haven't been going to meetings every week, not actually after I lost 50 pounds; I just don't think I need to. I may go once a month, maybe twice, but that hasn't been the case … I already got everything I need to know from the program, so the fact that I lost 10 pounds without going there every week, I mean, it's not like they're my friends or anything, I don't need to see them every week. (Sharon)*

> *I'm not their friend … I don't wanna counsel other women necessarily on weight watching [in a meeting]. … I don't… don't want somebody to call me because she's gonna eat a chocolate chip cookie. (Sandra)*

Another manifestation of distancing was ceasing to share information with other Weight Watchers members. Some observation data also pointed to this pattern. Several informants who were at a more advanced stage of goal pursuit or who were about to attain the goal tended to sit in the back rows of the meeting room, remained silent throughout the meeting, and left shortly after the meeting was over.

> *I'm very close to getting to goal. I share a lot less now; I did all my sharing… 'cause you know, I'm kinda at a different place … you know, they gotta learn themselves … I just listen [at meetings], sometimes I don't stay, I just go in, get weighed, and leave. (Mary)*

Summary. The analysis of the qualitative dataset collected at Weight Watchers provides external support for how the dynamics of interpersonal relationships change depending on the stage of shared goal pursuit. We observed that the informants in the initial stage of goal pursuit tended to view fellow Weight Watchers members as "friends in the same boat" who were instrumental to successful goal attainment. These informants actively sought the company of Weight Watchers friends by attending group meetings at which they willingly engaged in interactions with others by absorbing and voluntarily sharing helpful diet-related information.

This pattern of perceived closeness and helpful behaviors reversed as the informants reached beyond 50% of their goal. The informants in the advanced stage of the pursuit enjoyed increased confidence in weight loss and therefore independence. This change induced competitiveness in that the informants monitored their goal progress more intensely and no longer perceived fellow Weight Watchers members as friends. Consequently, these informants distanced themselves by ceasing interactions with other Weight Watchers members: they minimized their attendance and avoided sharing helpful tips, remained silent at meetings, and left immediately after meetings were over. Some of them even withdrew from attending group meetings altogether.

General Discussion

Others who are pursuing the same individual goal as we are constitute a unique group in our social network; they are not our significant others or close friends, but we have one

important thing in common – we share the pursuit of the same individual goal. In some situations, this similarity could be the basis for building close companionship, whereas in others, it leads to distancing and competition. In this paper, we identified one important factor that would lead to such a shift from being friends to becoming foes: the stage in shared goal pursuit.

The results of five studies provided consistent support for the hypothesized dynamics. The longitudinal study in the academic goal-pursuit context (Study 1) showed that students treated others pursuing the same academic goal as friends when they were at the early to mid-point of the semester but gradually pushed them away as they reached the end point of the pursuit; this shift from friends to foes also differentiated the same-pursuit peers from other types of interpersonal relationships. Study 2 showed the same pattern in closeness perception, and this pattern also manifested in individuals' information-sharing behaviors.

In Studies 3 and 4, we tested the mechanism of competitiveness by measuring people's belief in the zero-sum rule and found that the hypothesized patterns were more pronounced among those who held a strong zero-sum belief: those who believed that others' gains would lead to their loses became more distant and were less willing to share goal-related information when they reached the advanced stage of goal pursuit. Such changes in perceived closeness and information-sharing behaviors resulted from people's different focuses in different stages of goal pursuit, as directly captured in Study 4. When people first began to pursue the goal, they sought companionship from others to confirm that the goal was indeed attainable, but once they had made substantial progress and goal attainability was no longer a concern, they became competitive with others in the pursuit and sought to reach the goal sooner. In addition, these two studies examined the proposed dynamic in the consumer domain, such as finding good shopping deals and sharing nutrition information.

Finally, through a large-scale qualitative dataset collected from Weight Watchers (Study 5), we found that members of the weight loss program treated others in the same program as friends and were more willing to share weight loss tips when they were all in the early stage of the pursuit; conversely, members treated others in the program as competition and were reluctant to share information when they were approaching their goal weight.

Implications for Self-Regulation Theories

Central to our theorizing is the unique role that "shared-pursuit peers" (i.e., others who are pursuing the same individual goal and are in the same stage of pursuit) play in the goal pursuit processes of consumers. We found that consumers manage this relationship differently as they make increasing progress in a pursuit. These findings have important implications for the research on interpersonal relationships in self-regulation processes (e.g., Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010). Prior research in this domain has focused primarily on how people treat significant and close others in their existing social network (Shah 2003; Uchino 2004; Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010); the limited number of papers that examined the influence of same-pursuit peers centered on the automatic processes (Aarts et al. 2004; McCulloch et al. 2011) rather than on one's active, strategic management of the relationship – how one actually perceives and interacts with shared-pursuit peers. Our research suggests that shared-pursuit peers indeed play a unique role in goal pursuit processes compared with other types of social relationships (e.g., significant others, as shown in Study 1), such that "being in the same boat" enhances one's perceived attainability of a goal early in the pursuit but could conversely induce a sense of competition in later stages of the pursuit.

Our work also adds to the literature on interpersonal similarity by showing that in addition to sharing the same social status, attitudes and values, surname and appearances (Cohen and Zhou 1991; Ruef et al. 2003; Guéguen et al. 2005), "working on the same individual goal" constitutes another powerful dimension of perceived similarity (even among strangers, as demonstrated in Studies 3 and 4). Indeed, recent research has shown that motivation could serve as a dimension of similarity for people's categorization and knowledge exchange. For instance, the work on interpersonal regulatory fit proposes that people tend to accept advice from instrumental others who have the same motivation orientation as them (e.g., Righetti, Finkenauer, and Rusbult 2011). In addition, the literature on the goal-oriented management of interpersonal relationships shows that others' instrumentality to one's pursuit of an important goal could constitute a dimension for the categorization of one's social network (Fitzsimons and Shah 2009). Our theory adds to these findings by showing that being motivated by the same individual goal greatly affects one's perceived relationship with other people and consequently one's interaction with them; the examination of such dynamics (i.e., determining when one treats shared-pursuit peers as friends versus competitors) thus further adds to the dialogue between the fields of motivation and perceived similarity in the social domain.

The present work also has specific relevance for the research on the dynamics of self-regulation processes (Fishbach, Zhang, and Koo 2009; Koo and Fishbach 2008) and the findings that people have different concerns as they accumulate more progress in goal pursuit (Louro, Pieters, and Zeelenberg 2007). Specifically, our findings expand the prior research on motivational dynamics to the social domain, and we propose that in addition to being motivated by different types of feedback and mental representations as separate individuals (Huang and Zhang 2011; Huang, Zhang, and Broniarczyk 2012), people also interact differently with others

who are pursuing the same end point as they move from one stage to another in the pursuit. These findings of the dynamics in the social domain are just as important as the self-regulatory dynamics at the individual level because they contributes to the understanding of whether and when people interact with shared-pursuit peers in a collaborative manner, how their commitment to goal-oriented social gatherings evolves during the course of pursuit, and the changes in their interaction with others, as validated in our Weight Watchers data in Study 5.

Another interesting aspect left unexplored in the present research is the motivational consequences of the shift in closeness and interaction with shared-pursuit peers. In Studies 2 and 4, we found that as people reach the advanced stage of goal pursuit, they tend to view shared-pursuit peers as "foes" and become reluctant to share helpful information. This desire to perform better and to "win" the alleged competition could lead to even more harmful behaviors, such as sabotaging, when opportunities arise (e.g., one can share misleading nutrition tips to make others regress on their dieting goal). How, then, would this affect one's own goal pursuit? Specifically, when one sabotages others' pursuit and thus alleviates the potential threat of social comparison (Festinger 1954; Tesser 1988; Blanton 2001; Buunk and Gibbons 2007), does it reduce one's own drive to continue working on the goal, or does it enhance one's motivation in the pursuit? In addition, are there any boundary situations, such that people remain friendly to others who share a diverse set of similarities with them (e.g., a classmate who is taking the same class and pursuing the same dieting goal) but choose to compete against and sabotage others who share only one dimension of goal-related similarity with them (e.g., a Weight Watchers member who is pursuing the same dieting goal)? Future research should address these important questions.

Implications for Marketing Practitioners

The present research has important implications for marketers who aim to enhance consumer involvement in shared goal pursuit processes to facilitate the attainment of a challenging goal, such as Weight Watchers, AA, and smoking cessation programs. Our findings suggest that as consumers make more progress in their own goal pursuit, they may find the relationship with shared-pursuit peers inhibitive rather than facilitative and may be intimidated by the pressure of needing to compete against other program members. The pressure of competition may lead to withdrawal from the program and even to eventual failure in one's goal attainment. Therefore, it will be instrumental for shared goal-pursuit programs to reinforce the uncertainty of attaining the goal until a person actually succeeds, such that consumers would remain in the group for a longer period of time and continue interacting with other members in a positive manner to seek support. On the other hand, it is also beneficial for shared goal-pursuit programs to implement procedures to alleviate members' zero-sum belief and inner competitiveness, to "flip the switch" from friends to foes. For instance, shared goal-pursuit programs could leverage group identity as a way to unite members and minimize internal competition. Furthermore, by emphasizing individual differences in the unique struggles that each member encounters and in the unique benefits that each member receives when attaining the goal as well as providing progress feedback based on different measures/scales accordingly, marketers can effectively reduce the comparison and competition among members and help them remain friendly with one another throughout the program.

Finally, the present research also sheds important light on how marketers can better motivate consumers to share goal-related information with one another, such as good shopping deals (for a savings goal) or nutrition information (for a fitness goal). It is not news that word of

mouth serves as a free and powerful advertisement for marketers; for instance, Phelps, Lewis, and Mobilio (2004) have found that among all emails that are forwarded, 45.5% consist of information and helpful tips, and as many as 20% of the emails discuss companies or products in positive ways. Therefore, by strategically managing how consumers perceive their status in goal pursuit, marketers can effectively facilitate positive interaction among customers working on the same goal, such as encouraging voluntary sharing of goal-related information (e.g., new dieting products and exercise programs).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMANT PROFILE TABLE (STUDY 5)

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	Weight Watchers Status
Abby	58	Married	High School	Day care operator	Regular member
Amy	36	Single	Bachelors	Graduate student	Regular member
Angela	25	Married	Masters	Graduate student	Regular member
Anna	53	Married	Some college	Secretary	Regular member
Ava	64	Married	High School	Bookkeeper	Regular member
Barbara	35	Married	Bachelors	Nurse	Regular member
Betty	53	Married	Doctorate	Psychotherapist	Regular member
Brenda	44	Married	Bachelors	Volunteer coordinator	Regular member
Carol	51	Single	Bachelors	Entrepreneur	Regular member
Claudia	30	Married	Masters	High school teacher	Regular member
Cynthia	40	Divorced	Bachelors	Consultant	Regular member
Debra	53	Single	Some college	Technician	Regular member
Donna	32	Married	Some college	Banker	Regular member
Doris	44	Married	Bachelors	Nurse	Regular member
Elizabeth	23	Single	Some college	Training specialist	Regular member
Ethel	54	Married	Bachelors	Girl Scouts coordinator	Regular member
Helen	47	Divorced	Masters	Research tech	Regular member
Irene	25	Single	Bachelors	Cafeteria manager	Regular member
Jane	52	Married	Bachelors	Office manager	Regular member
Janet	28	Single	Bachelors	State investigator	Regular member
Jennifer	45	Single	Bachelors	Administrative assistant	Regular member
Jessica	60	Married	High School	State employee	Regular member
Joyce	38	Engaged	Masters	Recruitment director	Regular member
Judith	30	Single	Masters	Graduate student	Regular member
Julie	46	Married	Some college	Sales associate	Regular member
Karen	26	Partnership	Masters	Research assistant	Regular member
Kathleen	56	Single	Masters	Executive director	Regular member
Kelly	50	Married	Some college	Store manager	Regular member
Kimberly	46	Married	Masters	High school teacher	Lifetime member
Leslie	60	Divorced	Masters	Secretary	Lifetime member
Linda	50	Married	Bachelors	Secretary	Lifetime member
Lorraine	49	Married	Bachelors	High school teacher	Lifetime member
Mary	50	Married	Bachelors	Coordinator	Lifetime member
Melanie	37	Married	Bachelors	Paraeducator	Lifetime member
Michelle	53	Married	Bachelors	Social worker	Lifetime member

Nancy	50	Married	Bachelors	Nurse	Lifetime member
Natalie	33	Married	Bachelors	Administrative support	Lifetime member
Patricia	44	Married	Bachelors	Archeologist	Lifetime member
Rebecca	50	Married	Bachelors	State employee	Lifetime member
Ruby	33	Married	Doctorate	Assistant professor	Lifetime member
Ruth	24	Single	Masters	Graduate student	Lifetime member
Samantah	59	Widowed	Some college	Social worker	Lifetime member
Sandra	52	Married	Masters	Publicist	Lifetime member
Sara	46	Married	Some college	Unemployed	Lifetime member
Sharon	31	Single	Masters	Research chemist	Lifetime member
Shirley	59	Married	Some college	Secretary	Lifetime member
Susan	30	Single	Masters	High school teacher	Lifetime member

APPENDIX B: DATA SUMMARY SCHEME (STUDY 5)

Theme	Description
Indicators of Companionship:	
• Community of like-minded others	Perception that Weight Watchers members are similar to one another, united by the commonality of weight loss challenges and experiences.
• Goal pursuit as a shared project	Perception that individual weight loss goals are subsumed into a shared goal pursuit.
• Increased perception of goal attainability	Perception that the presence of the group ensures attainability of individual weight loss goals.
• Companionship seeking	Frequency of contact with fellow Weight Watchers and group leaders by regular attendance at group meetings on a weekly or more than a weekly basis.
• Motivation to contribute to a shared goal pursuit	Desire to score a weekly weight loss to avoid disappointing the group.
• Reliance on the group for emotional support	Mutual seeking and sharing of verbal encouragement and supportive communications from fellow Weight Watchers, especially in times of dietary challenges/setbacks.
• Reliance on the group for informational support	Mutual seeking and sharing of tips, advice, and diet-related information with fellow Weight Watchers at the group meetings.
Indicators of Comparison and Competition:	
• Increased sense of individual distinction	Perception that after having lost weight, an individual member is now different from other Weight Watchers.
• Goal pursuit as an individual project	Desire to lose weight independently, with limited or no participation in Weight Watchers group meetings.
• Absence of doubt in goal attainability	Perception that an individual member can attain the weight loss goal without reliance on the group.
• Companionship aversion	Reducing contact with fellow Weight Watchers by infrequently attending or skipping group meetings.
• Distancing from a shared goal pursuit	Perception that everyone must pursue their own weight loss goals.
• Limited/no need for emotional support	Tendency not to disclose temporary setbacks and limited or no seeking/sharing of verbal encouragement and supportive communications.
• Information withholding/limited sharing	Tendency not to seek or share diet-related information with fellow Weight Watchers.

REFERENCES

Aarts, Henk, Peter M. Gollwitzer, and Ran r. Hassin (2004), "Goal contagion: perceiving is for pursuing," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(1), 23-37.

Ackerman, Joshua M., Noah J. Goldstein, Jenessa R. Shapiro, and John A. Bargh (2009), "You wear me out: the vicarious depletion of self-control," *Psychological Science*, 20(3), 326-32.

Atkinson, John W. (1957), "Motivational determinants of risk-taking behavior," *Psychological Review*, 64(6), 359-72.

Bandura, Albert (1997), *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, New York, NY: W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co.

Berscheid, Ellen, Mark Snyder, and Allen M. Omoto (1989), "The relationship closeness inventory: Assessing the closeness of interpersonal relation- ships," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(5), 792–807.

Blanton, Hart (2001), "Evaluating the self in the context of another: The three-selves model of social comparison assimilation and contrast." in *Cognitive social psychology: The Princeton symposium on the legacy and future of social cognition*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 75–87.

Brehm, Jack W. and Elizabeth A. Self (1989), "The intensity of motivation," *Annual Review of Psychology*. 40, 109.

Brunstein, Joachim C. and Peter M. Gollwitzer (1996), "Effects of failure on subsequent performance: The importance of self-defining goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(2), 395–407.

Burawoy, Michael (1998). "The extended case method," *Sociological Theory*, 16(March), 4–33.

Buunk, Abraham P. and Frederick X. Gibbons (2007). "Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 102(1), 3-21.

Buunk, Bram P., Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Jan F. Ybema (1994), "Burnout, uncertainty, and the desire for social comparison among nurses," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 24(19), 1701–18.

Byrne, Donn and Don Nelson (1964), "Attraction as a function of attitude similarity–dissimilarity: The effect of topic importance," *Psychonomic Science*, 1(10), 93–4.

Carver, Charles S. and Michael F. Scheier (1998), *On the self-regulation of behavior*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, Bernard P. and Xueguang Zhou (1991), "Status processes in enduring work groups," *American Sociological Review*, 56(2), 179-88.

Crocker, Jennifer and Amy Canevello (2008), "Creating and undermining social support in communal relationships: The role of compassionate and self-image goals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(3), 555–75.

Dik, Giel and Henk Aarts (2007), "Behavioral cues to others' motivation and goal pursuits: The perception of effort facilitates goal inference and contagion," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(5), 727-37.

Festinger, Leon (1954). "A theory of social comparison processes," *Human Relations*, 7(2) 117-40.

Fishbach, Ayelet, Ying Zhang, and Minjing Koo (2009). "The dynamics of self-regulation," *European Review of Social Psychology*, 20(1), 315-44.

Fitzsimons, Gráinne M. and John A. Bargh (2003), "Thinking of you: Nonconscious pursuit of interpersonal goals associated with relationship partners," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(1), 148-64.

Fitzsimons, Gráinne M. and Eli J. Finkel (2010), "Interpersonal Influences on Self-Regulation."

Current Directions in Psychological Science, 19(2), 101-05.

Fitzsimons, Gráinne M. and Ayelet Fishbach (2010). "Shifting closeness: Interpersonal effects of personal goal progress," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(4), 535-49.

Fitzsimons, Gráinne M. and James Y. Shah (2009). "How goal instrumentality shapes relationship evaluations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(2), 319-37.

Gerard, Harold B. and Jacob M. Rabbie (1961), "Fear and social comparison," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62(3) 586–92.

Goethals, George R. and John M. Darley (1977), "Social comparison theory: An attributional Approach," in *Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical perspectives*, ed. Jerry M. Suls and Richard L. Miller, Washington, DC: Hemisphere, 259-78.

Golightly, Carole, Devereaux M. Huffman, and Donn Byrne (1972), "Liking and loaning," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 56(6), 523-25.

Guéguen, Nicolas, Nathalie Pichot, and Gwenaelle Le Dreff (2005), "Similarity and helping behavior on the web: The impact of the convergence of surnames between a solicitor and a subject in a request made by e-mail," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 35(2), 423–29.

Heyes, Cressida J. (2006), "Foucault goes to Weight Watchers," *Hypatia*, 21(Spring), 126–49.

Higgins, E. Tory (1987), "Self-discrepancy: A theory relating self and affect," *Psychological Review*, 94(3), 319-40.

Huang, Szu-Chi and Ying Zhang (2011), "Motivational consequences of perceived velocity in consumer goal pursuit," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 48(6), 1045-56.

Huang, Szu-Chi, Ying Zhang, and Susan M. Broniarczyk (2012), "So near and yet so far: The mental representation of goal progress," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(2), 225-41.

Irwin, Julie R and Gary H. Mcclelland (2003), "Negative consequences of dichotomizing continuous predictor variables," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 40 (August), 366–71.

Knowles, Megan L., Eli J.Finkel, and Williams, K. (2007). Bolstering self-regulation through social lubrication. Unpublished manuscript, Northwestern University.

Koo, Minjing and Ayelet Fishbach (2008), "Dynamics of self-regulation: How (un)accomplished goal actions affect motivation," *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 94(2), 183-95.

Kulik, James A. and Heike I. M. Mahler (2000), "Social comparison, affiliation, and emotional contagion under threat," in *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research*, ed. Jerry M. Suls & Ladd Wheeler, Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer, 295-320.

Lewin, Kurt (1951), "Intention, will and need," in *Organization and pathology of thought: Selected sources*, ed. David Rappaport, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 95-153.

Liberman, Nira and Jens Förster (2008), "Expectancy, value and psychological distance: A new look at goal gradients," *Social Cognition*, 26(5), 515-33.

Liu, Yong (2006), "Word of mouth for movies : Its dynamics and impact on box office." *Journal of Marketing*, 70(3), 74-89.

Locke, Edwin A. and Gary P. Latham (1990), *A theory of goal setting & task performance*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Locke, Edwin A. and Gary P. Latham (2002), "Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey," *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 705-17.

Louro, Maria J., Rik Pieters, and Marcel Zeelenberg (2007),"Dynamics of multiple-goal pursuit," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(2), 174-93.

Makela, Kristiina, Hanna K. Kalla, and Rebecca Piekkari (2007), "Interpersonal similarity as a driver of knowledge sharing within multinational corporations," *International Business Review*, 16(1), 1-22.

McCulloch, Kathleen C., Gráinne M. Fitzsimons, Sook N. Chua, and Dolores Albarracín (2011), "Vicarious goal satiation," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47(3), 685-88.

Moisio, Risto and Mariam Beruchashvili (2010), "Questing for well-being at Weight Watchers: The role of the spiritual-therapeutic model in a support group," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(5), 857–75.

Monge, Peter R. and Noshir S. Contractor (2003), *Theories of communication networks*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Nadler, Arie (1987), "Determinants of help seeking behaviour: The effects of helper's similarity, task centrality and recipient's self esteem," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 17(1), 57–67.

Pemberton, Michael and Constantine Sedikides (2001), "When do individuals help close others improve? The role of information diagnosticity," *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 81(2), 234-46.

Phelps, Joseph E., et al (2004), "Viral marketing or electronic word-of-mouth advertising: Examining consumer responses and motivations to pass along email," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 44(4), 333-48.

Rachlin, Howard and Bryan A. Jones (2008), "Altruism among relatives and non-relatives," *Behavioural Processes*, 79(2), 120-3.

Righetti, Francesca, Catrin Finkenauer, and Caryl Rusbult (2011), "The benefits of interpersonal regulatory fit for individual goal pursuit," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(4), 720-36.

Ruef, Martin, Howard E. Aldrich, and Nancy M. Carter (2003), "The structure of founding teams: Homophily, strong ties, and isolation among U.S. entrepreneurs," *American Sociological Review*, 68(2), 195-222.

Schachter, Stanley (1959), *The psychology of affiliation*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Schmitt, Michael T., Paul J, Silvia, and Nyla R. (2000), "The intersection of self-evaluation maintenance and social identity theories: Intragroup judgment in interpersonal and intergroup contexts," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*(12), 1598-1606.

Shah, James (2003), "The motivational looking glass: How significant others implicitly affect goal appraisals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(3), 424-39.

Singh, Ramadhar and Lynn Tan (1992), "Attitudes and attraction: A test of the similarity–attraction and dissimilarity–repulsion hypotheses," *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 31(3), 227–38.

Spiggle, Susan (1994), "Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(December), 491–503.

Stinson, Kandi M. (2001), *Women and dieting culture: Inside a commercial weight loss group,* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Tesser, Abraham (1988), "Toward a self-evaluation maintenance model of social behavior," *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 2, 181–227.

Uchino, Bert N. (2006),"Social support and health: A review of physiological processes potentially underlying links to disease outcomes," *Journal of behavioral medicine*, 29(4), 377-87.

Wheeler, Ladd and Milton Zuckerman (1977), "Commentary," in *Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical perspectives* ed. Jerry M. Suls and Richard L. Miller, Washington, DC: Hemisphere, 335-57.

Williams, Katherine Y. and Charles A. O'Reilly (1998), "Demography and diversity in organizations: A review of 40 years of research," *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 20, 77-140.

Wright, Rex A. and Leslie D. Kirby (2001), "Effort determination of cardiovascular response," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 33, 255-307.

FIGURE 1: PERCEIVED CLOSENESS AS A FUNCTION OF THE STAGE IN THE PURSUIT AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (STUDY 1)

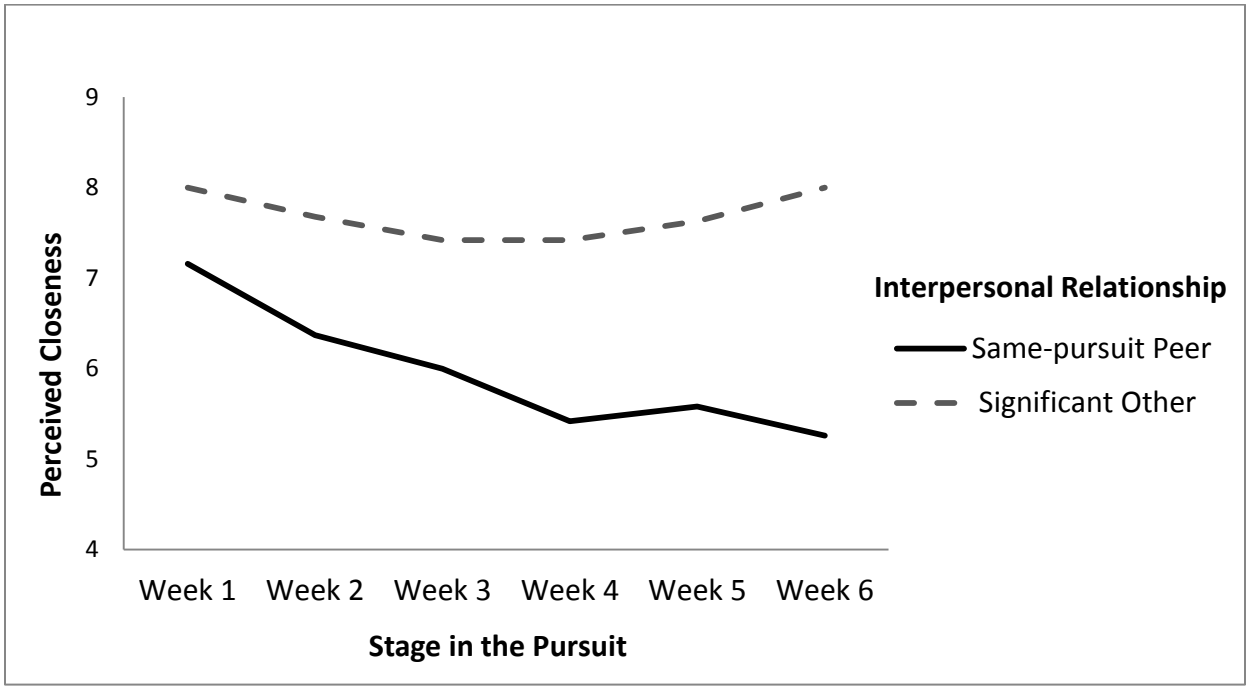

FIGURE 2a: PERCEIVED CLOSENESS DIFFERENCE SCORE AS A FUNCTION OF THE STAGE IN THE PURSUIT AND FRIEND'S PURSUIT (STUDY 2)

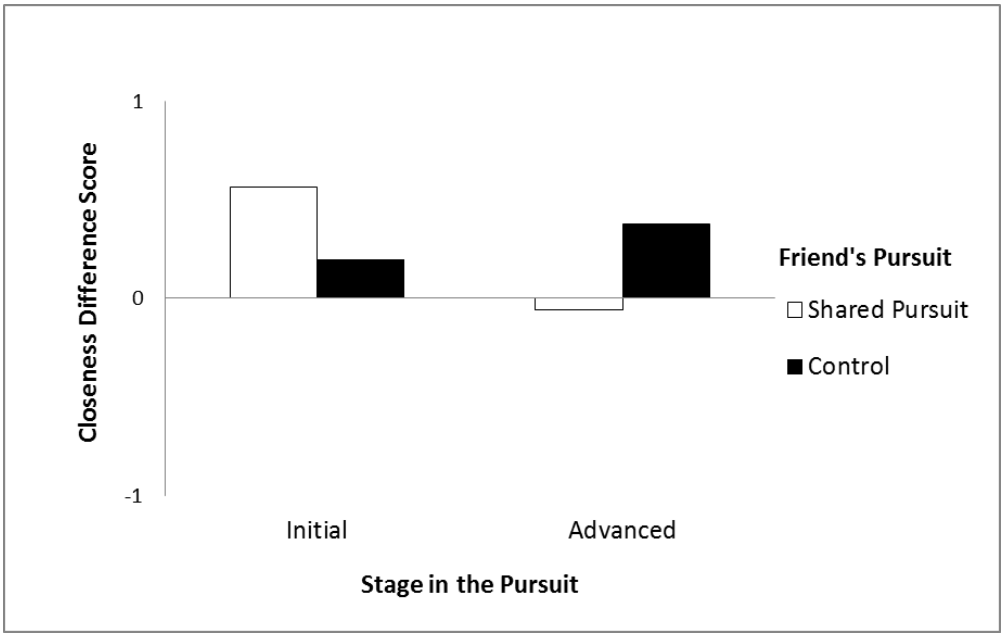

FIGURE 2b: TIME SPENT SHARING TIPS AS A FUNCTION OF THE STAGE IN THE PURSUIT AND FRIEND'S PURSUIT (STUDY 2)

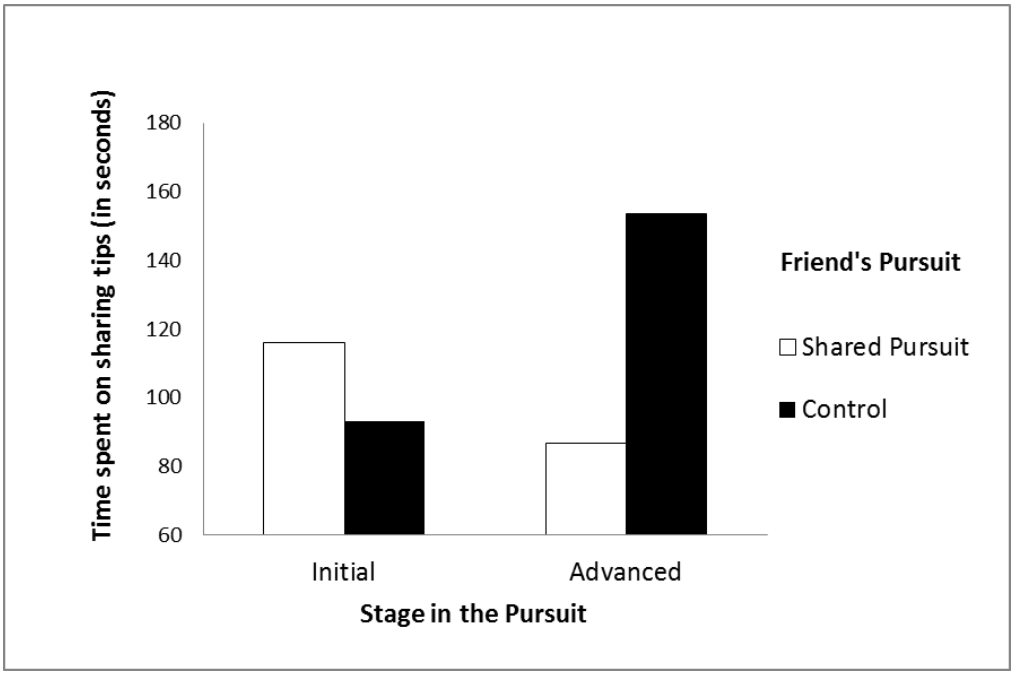

FIGURE 2c: LENGTH OF TIPS AS A FUNCTION OF THE STAGE IN THE PURSUIT AND FRIEND'S PURSUIT (STUDY 2)

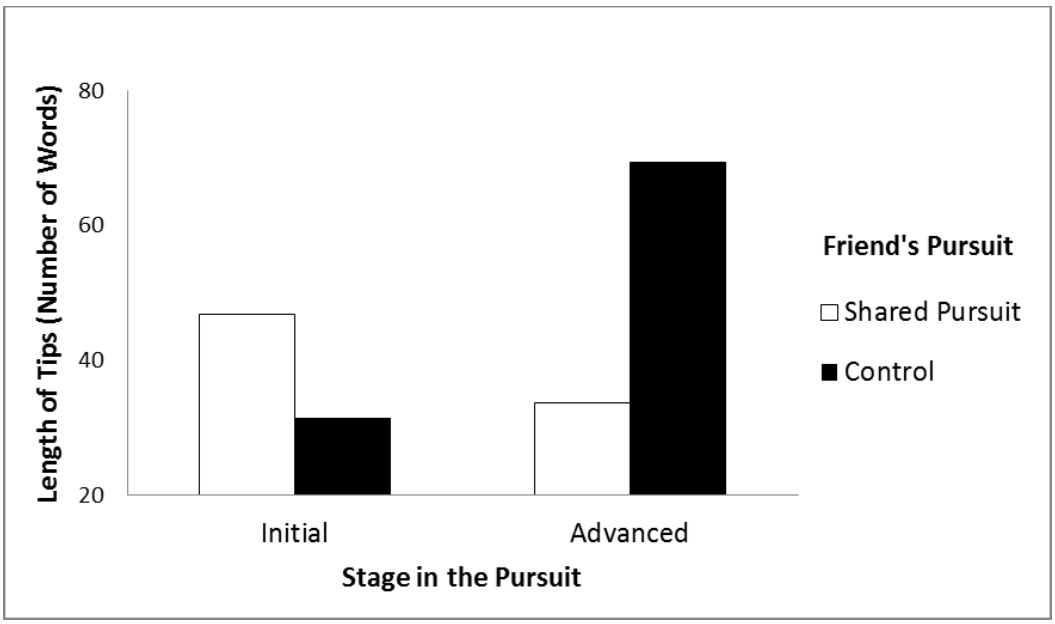

FIGURE 3: PERCEIVED CLOSENESS DIFFERENCE SCORE AS A FUNCTION OF THE STAGE IN THE PURSUIT AND ZERO-SUM BELIEF (STUDY 3)

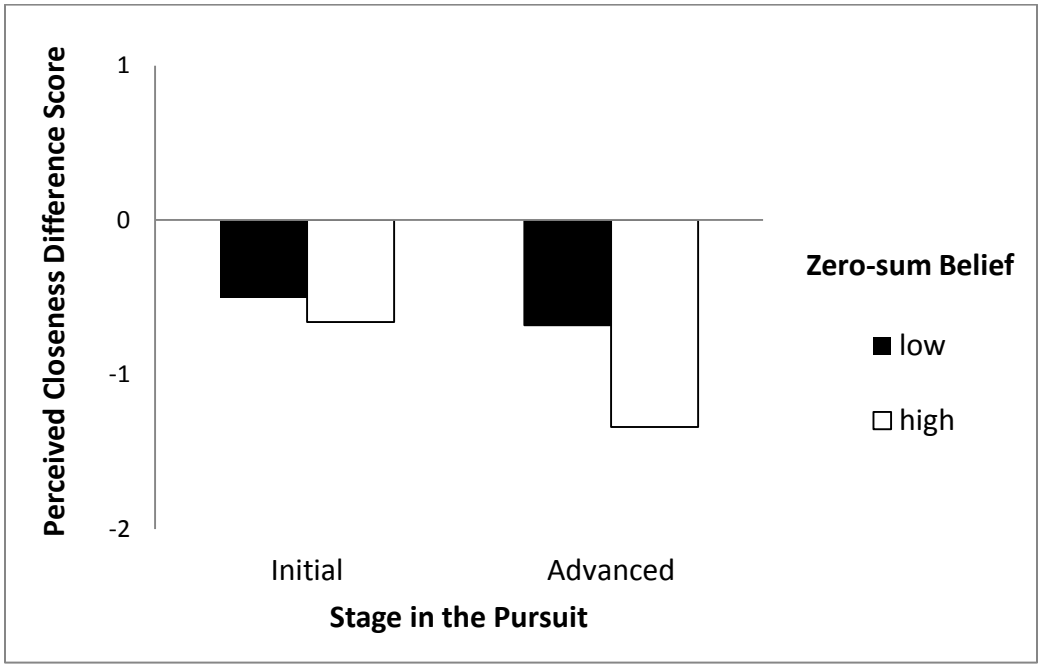

FIGURE 4: TIP QUALITY (ERROR RATE) AS A FUNCTION OF THE STAGE IN THE PURSUIT AND ZERO-SUM BELIEF (STUDY 4)