

Goal Adjustment in Intractable Life Circumstances: Benefits for Mental Health and Well-Being

Jaron X.Y. Tan, Jeremy M. Hamm, & Katherine A. Duggan
North Dakota State University

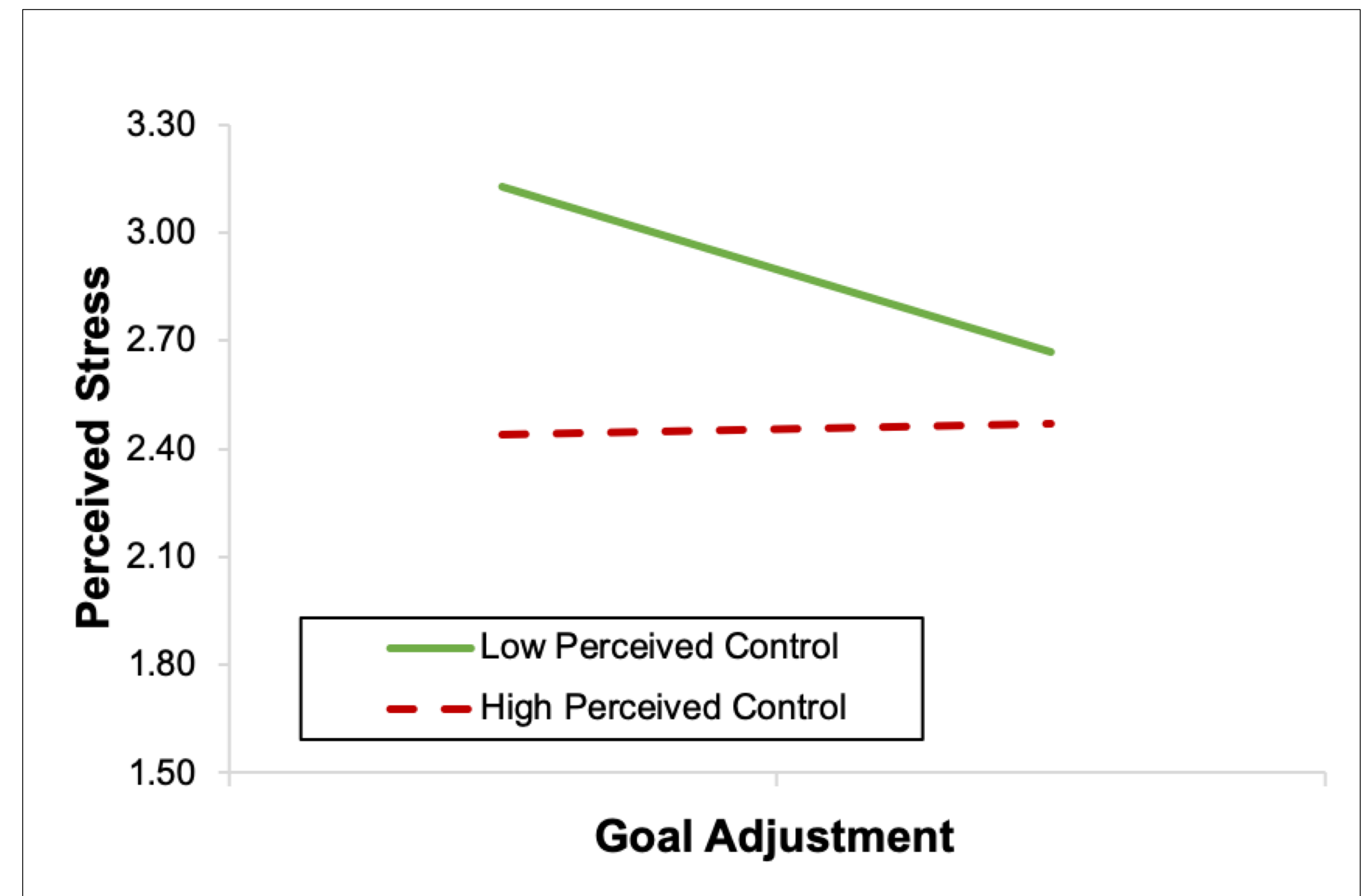
Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a major life stressor that can undermine the controllability of important life goals and elicit psychological distress.²
- Theories of personality and lifespan development have identified goal adjustment capacities as a core self-regulatory resource that buffers against declines in mental health and well-being for individuals experiencing such uncontrollable life circumstances.⁴
- The present study examined the influence of goal adjustment capacities on psychological well-being for individuals who differed in perceived control during the first peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was hypothesized that the protective influence of goal adjustment on perceived stress, depressive symptoms, life satisfaction and meaning in life would be pronounced for individuals who experienced pandemic induced declines in control over their goals.

Results

- We observed significant Goal Adjustment x Perceived Control interactions for perceived stress ($b = .17, p = .009$), depressive symptoms ($b = .12, p = .009$) and meaning in life ($b = -.24, p = .002$), and a marginal interaction for life satisfaction ($b = -.23, p = .088$).
- Simple slope analyses indicated that, **for those who experienced pandemic-induced declines in control over their goals, goal adjustment predicted lower levels of perceived stress** ($b = -.35, p < .001$) and **depressive symptoms** ($b = -.26, p < .001$), and **higher levels of life satisfaction** ($b = .81, p < .001$) and **meaning in life** ($b = .54, p < .001$).
- The main pattern of results was replicated in the Goal Reengagement x Perceived Control models but not in the Goal Disengagement x Perceived Control models.

Results cont.



Discussion

Our results support recent research that indicated significant associations between goal adjustment capacities and outcome measures of psychological well-being.^{1&3} Our findings also extend past studies by demonstrating a conditional association between goal adjustment and indicators of psychological well-being, specifically for individuals who experienced declines in control. The similar pattern of results found with goal reengagement suggest that the benefits of goal adjustment for

those with low control over their goals were largely driven by goal reengagement capacities. These low control individuals with high goal adjustment report similar levels of well-being as those with high control. Thus, the protective effect of goal adjustment capacities on individuals who experience declines in control inform future interventions to promote coping strategies that assist individuals in adjusting their goals and specifically reengaging with new meaningful goals.

References:

- ¹Barlow, M. A., Wrosch, C., & McGrath, J. J. (2020). Goal adjustment capacities and quality of life: A meta-analytic review. *J Pers.*, 88(2), 307-323.
- ²Hagger, M. S., Keech, J. J., & Hamilton, K. (2020). Managing stress during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic and beyond: Reappraisal and mindset approaches. *Stress and Health: Journal of the International Society for the Investigation of Stress*, 36(3), 396-401.
- ³Wrosch, C., & Miller, G. E. (2009). Depressive symptoms can be useful: Self-regulatory and emotional benefits of dysphoric mood in adolescence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 1181-1190.
- ⁴Wrosch, C., Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Schulz, R. (2003). The importance of goal disengagement in adaptive self-regulation: When giving up is beneficial. *Self and Identity*, 2, 1-20.