

(No) Pain, No Gain? Implicit Theories of Body Weight, Effort, and Healthy Lifestyle Changes

Julia Storch

University of Groningen

Koert van Ittersum

University of Groningen

Jenny van Doorn

University of Groningen

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Abstract

Past research on implicit theories of body weight suggests that people perceiving their body weight as unchangeable (“entity theorists”) generally engage less in health behaviors than people perceiving their body weight as malleable (“incremental theorists”). We draw on the effort paradox and suggest that the perceived amount of effort involved in a given health behavior can be leveraged to increase engagement in health behavior among both entity and even incremental theorists. Across three studies, we find that entity theorists intended to engage more in physical exercise when the exercises were framed as requiring only little as opposed to high effort. This effect was robust to different types of physical exercise and not affected by past exercise engagement. However, incremental theorists mostly did not appear to be sensitive to effort framings. Self-efficacy perceptions mediated the interaction effect between implicit theories and effort framings on exercise engagement intentions. Using low-effort framings might thus be a viable tool to promote healthy lifestyle changes specifically among entity theorists.

Keywords: *effort; implicit theories ; exercise*

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