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THE EFFECT OF ALLOCENTRISM – IDIOCENTRISM, LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP AND RELATIONSHIP MEANINGFULNESS ON SOCIAL LOAFING: A FIELD-BASED STUDY

by

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Introduction

The fact that individuals are always experiencing membership in groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2000) has opened a wide range of unexplored possibilities for researchers. For example, in the last decades, many companies have experienced the appearance of groups such as project teams¹, focus groups, autonomous work groups, quality circles and multifunction work teams among others, which support their relevance in organizations (Guzzo & Shea, 1992). Moreover, several organizations have relied on groups in an attempt to improve performance indicators, such as productivity or quality (Guzzo, 1995). These organizations are now designed around groups where collaboration among workers is formally evaluated (Moreland, Argote & Krishnan, 1998).

In spite of the potential convenience of organizing work in groups, individuals working in groups do not always function efficiently (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Harkins, Latané & Williams, 1980; Olson, 1965). One of the possible explanations for inefficient group work has been identified by Latané, Williams & Harkins (1979) as “social loafing”. Social loafing is a decline in motivation, it is a reduction of individual effort when working with others on an additive group task (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). Lack of effectiveness, wasted resources, production delays and reduction of motivation and effort of the other members of the group are just some of the negative consequences of social loafing on individuals, groups, organizations and societies. The good news is that social loafing is not inevitable (Heller, 1997). Literature on social loafing has found that it is under certain conditions that group members can demonstrate levels of effort far beyond what would be necessary for group goal achievement. Therefore, appropriate care of these conditions can help to minimize or avoid its negative consequences.

The objective of this document is to propose a dissertation study on social loafing. Specifically, this study intend to test the moderating effect of the relationship meaningfulness, in addition to the previously studied -task meaningfulness- of the members of the group, on social loafing. Additionally, the study attempts to examine the interactions among orientation (i.e. allocentrism, idiocentrism) and potential long-term relationship on the relationship meaningfulness of the group members .

¹ Although in organizational psychology, the concept of team has largely replaced the concept of group (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996) in this study the terms group and team are not distinguished.

Literature Review

Research on social loafing has been conducted across several disciplines. Main disciplines include Psychology, Sociology, Social Psychology, Management and Economics.

Social loafing research began early in the 20th century when Max Ringelmann, conducted the first study to suggest a possible decrement in individual motivation as a result of working in groups. The results of his study showed that as a group size increased, the overall performance of the group was increasingly lower than would be expected from the simple addition of individual performances. This effect is now well known as the Ringelmann effect.

Since the decade of 1970's, many studies on social loafing have been conducted. As a result, the effects of this phenomenon have been generalized to a wide variety of tasks. Most of the studies, during the decades of 1970's and 1980's, were designed as experiments. Typical experimental designs compared subjects working alone to those working collectively toward group performance. It was around the decade of 1990's that in addition to experiments, field-based studies on social loafing using or suggesting the use of questionnaires on individuals of natural groups started to be published. Nevertheless, studies on social loafing of this type still remain to be a few. For example, George (1992); Comer (1995); Murphy, Wayne, Liden, Erdogan (2003); Liden, Wayne, Jaworski, Bennett (2004). According to Karau & Williams (1993) specifying which variables moderate social loafing is critical to understanding motivation and performance of individuals and groups. See table 1 for determinants of social loafing and table 2 for a list of main theoretical frameworks in social loafing literature.

Variables	Relationship with social loafing.
Size.	Relationship seems to vary depending on other conditions such as characteristics of the task and processes (Littlepage, 1991)
Identifiability, accountability.	(-) (Latané, Williams & Harkins, 1979; Petty, Harkins & Williams, 1980; Williams, Harkins & Latané, 1981; Weldon & Gargano, 1985; Weldon & Mustari, 1988).
Task related variables: Difficulty, uniqueness, attractiveness, meaningfulness and visibility.	(-) (Harkins & Petty, 1982; Jackson & Williams, 1985; Zaccaro, 1984; Williams & Karau, 1991; George, 1992).
Evaluation potential.	(-) (Szymanski & Harkins, 1987; Harkins & Szymanski, 1988, 1989; Stevenson, 1989).
Dispensability of effort.	(+) (Kerr, 1983; Kerr & Brunn, 1983).
Self reference variables: Self attention, self efficacy and collective efficacy.	Status may need further consideration in empirically based studies (Miller, 2001). A (-) relationship is believed.
Incentives.	(-) (Albanese and Van Fleet, 1985; Shepperd & Wright, 1989; Zaccaro, 1984;

	Erez & Somech, 1996).
Culture: Collectivism-individualism.	(+) (Gabrenya, Wang & Latané, 1985; Matsui, Kakuyana & Onglatco, 1987; Earley, 1989; Cox, Lobel & McLeod, 1991; Wagner, 1995).
Expectations of co-worker.	(+) (Kerr, 1983). (-) (Jackson & Harkins, 1985).
Allocentrism – Idiocentrism.	(+) (La Greca, 1997).
Perceived social loafing.	(+) (Mulvey & Klein, 1998).
Cohesiveness.	(-) (Karau & Williams, 1997; Karau & Hart, 1998; Liden, Wayne, Jaworski, Bennett, 2004).
Exchange relationships: Leader and team member.	Leader-member (LMX): (-) (Murphy, Wagne, Liden, Erdogan, 2003). Team-member (TMX): No relationship was found (Murphy et al., 2003).
Justice	Distributive: (-) (Liden et al., 2004) & interactional: Through LMX, (-) (Murphy et al., 2003). Procedural: No relationship was found (Liden et al., 2004)

Table 1. Determinants of social loafing.

Social impact theory (Latané et. al., 1979; Latané, 1981).
Arousal reduction theory (Jackson & Williams, 1985).
Social identity theory (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). *
Free-rider theory (Olson, 1965).
Knoke's synthesized motivation model (Knoke, 1990).
Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). *
The collective effort model (CEM; Karau & Williams, 1993). *
Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997).
Justice and Equity theory (Greenberg, 1990; Bies & Moag, 1986; Adams, 1965).
Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). *

Table 2. Main theoretical frameworks (* used by this research)

Research Problem

Previous researchers have already investigated how expectations of co-worker effort & ability may affect individual's effort. However, some of the studies are in disagreement. While Kerr (1983) suggested that loafing would occur with a co-worker who is expected to perform well (i.e. a positive relationship between expectations of co-worker effort & ability and social loafing); Jackson & Harkins (1985) reported the opposite. Williams & Karau (1991) offered an additional explanation, which may conciliate both positions. In

their study, Williams & Karau (1991) highlighted that in order to compensate there is a necessity that the participants view the task as meaningful (see figure 1).

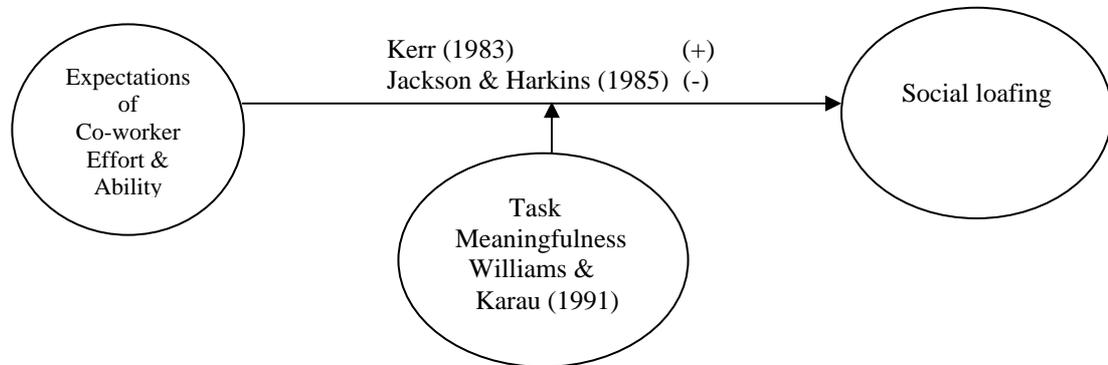


Figure 1. Moderating effect of task meaningfulness.

Looking at figure 1, one might ask if task meaningfulness is the only moderator. Would it be possible that individuals, working in a group, choose their level of effort depending on how meaningful is the relationship with other group members, not just on how meaningful is the task?

According to Murphy et al. (2003), studies examining the role of interpersonal relationships on social loafing, have been rare. Nevertheless, the few existing studies emphasize the influence of interpersonal relationships on the phenomenon. For example, Karau & Williams (1997) and Karau & Hart (1998) identified a negative relation between group cohesiveness and social loafing. Additionally, Murphy et al. (2003) found a negative relationship between leader exchange relationships and social loafing. However, they could not find a significant relationship between team exchange relationships (TMX) and social loafing. Murphy et al. (2003) explained that their only reliance on supervisor ratings may have been partially responsible for the lack of significant relationship between TMX and social loafing. This proposed study intends to rule out this possibility adding co-worker's ratings to the study. In addition, other interactions are suggested (e.g. expectations of co-worker's effort & ability, relationship meaningfulness, orientation, and potential long-term relationships).

Since some of the negative consequences of social loafing can be lack of effectiveness, wasted resources, production delays and reduction of motivation and effort of the other members of the group, it seems relevant to investigate how significant is the impact of the relationship meaningfulness with other members of the group as a moderator variable. Particularly, in the relationship between expectations of co-worker effort & ability with respect to social loafing.

Furthermore, it would be useful to test if relationship meaningfulness varies depending on the orientation of the individual (allocentrism, idiocentrism) and the potential long-term relationship with other members of the group. For example, comparing social loafing between permanent and temporal groups, addressing in this way another limitation of the current literature (Murphy et al., 2003) by studying employees in permanent work groups. Given that there are only a handful of studies examining social loafing in actual work groups and taking into consideration that it is difficult to capture the richness of

interpersonal exchanges in laboratory experiments (Murphy et al, 2003), literature on social loafing will benefit if this research is a field-based study. In this way, the research would attend Miller's (2001) observation that there is a substantial need to assess the potency of co-worker expectation in a field-based study to generate real-world data. After reviewing the literature on social loafing, a gap in the literature has been found. Additionally, since field-based studies on social loafing with permanent groups are scarce in the current literature, there seems to be a need, and at the same time, an opportunity to contribute in this matter.

Research Purposes & Potential Contributions

The main purpose of this research is to test a social loafing model that includes three types of interactions among variables. (1) Between individual's orientation (allocentrism, idiocentrism) and potential long-term relationship on the relationship meaningfulness. (2) Between expectations of co-worker effort & ability and task meaningfulness on social loafing. (3) Between expectations of co-worker effort & ability and relationship meaningfulness on social loafing. Current literature would benefit from this research by exploring social loafing in real-world settings. Particularly, comparing social loafing on temporal and permanent groups.

According to Karau & Williams (1993), the understanding of social loafing is important for devising interventions by which this behavior can be reduced or overcome. Therefore, this research attempts to contribute to practice assisting organizations and managers in the control for conditions (e.g. those related to the formation of the groups and group relationships) that can cause social loafing. In this way, some of its negative consequences on motivation, productivity and effectiveness of the individuals working in groups can be prevented. Furthermore, individuals who work in groups, can benefit from this research by understanding the group processes that allow for variation in the extend to which individual cooperation in groups is motivated, redirecting with this knowledge their actions to achieve productivity in their group work.

Research Model

The new model (see figure 2) includes relationships among six variables: Expectations of co-worker effort & ability, task meaningfulness, orientation, potential long-term relationship, relationship meaningfulness and social loafing. Social loafing is the main dependent variable of the proposed model as a whole. The model includes four hypotheses. The first (H1) hypothesizes a direct effect on relationship meaningfulness. The other three (H2, H3 and H4) hypothesize different moderating effects. See table 3 for definitions of studied variables.

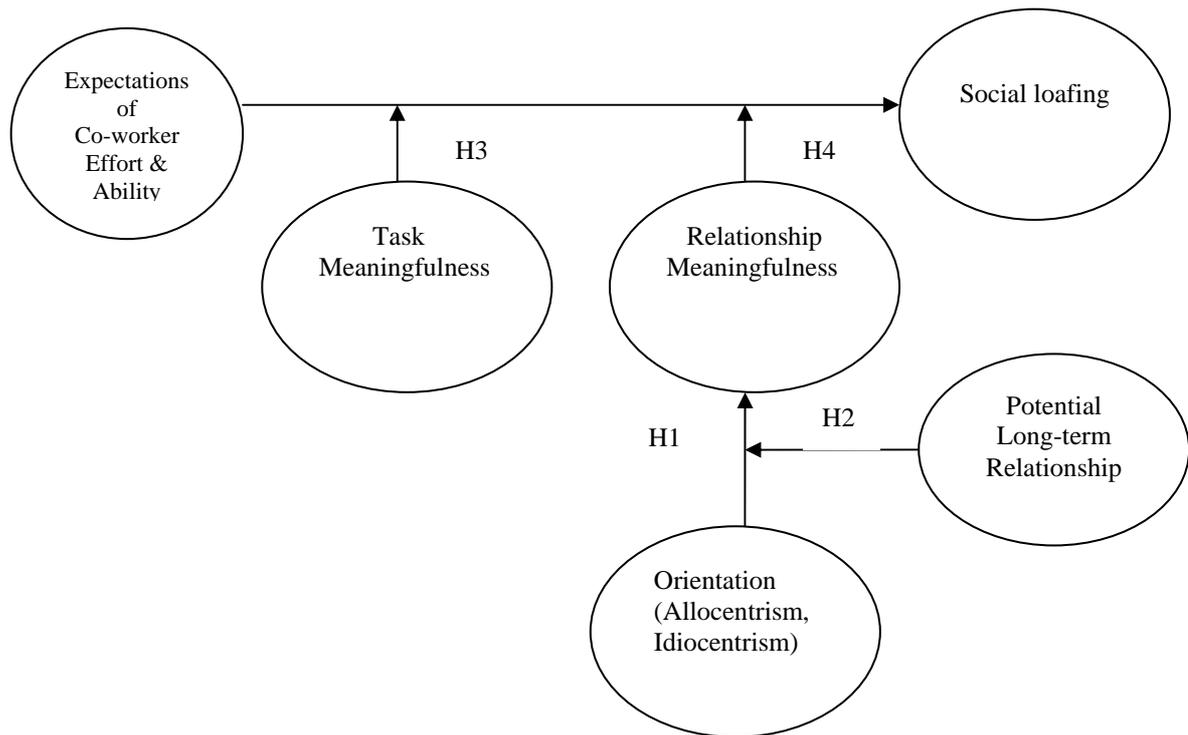


Figure 2. Proposed Model of social loafing.

Variable	Definition
Expectations of co-worker effort & ability	Expectations of co-worker effort & ability is the extent to which an individual, when working in a group, perceives the co-members of his/her group as reliable and competent.
Task meaningfulness	Task meaningfulness is the extent to which an individual, when working in a group, experience his/her task as important, valuable and worthwhile (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999 quoted by Mendoza, 2005).
Orientation (allocentrism, idiocentrism)	Orientation is the extent to which an individual has allocentric or idiocentric preferences and values. The construct of orientation (allocentrism-idiocentrism) corresponds at the individual level to collectivism-individualism at the societal level. Allocentric preferences and values include subordination of personal to ingroup goals, ingroup as extension of self and ingroup as source of identity. On the contrary, idiocentric preferences and values include more concern for one's own goals than the ingroup's goals, self reliance and competition, detachment from ingroups, deciding on one's own rather than asking the views of others, and less general concern for the ingroup.

	(Triandis et al., 1985; Triandis et al., 1988; La Greca, 1997).
Potential long-term relationship	Potential long-term relationship is the extent to which an individual, when working in a group, expects the group to continue to exist permanently.
Relationship meaningfulness	Relationship meaningfulness is the extent to which an individual, when working in a group, experiences his/her relationship with the other members of his/her group as important, valuable and worthwhile.
Social loafing	Social loafing is a decline in motivation. It is a reduction of individual effort when working with others on an additive group task (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979).

Table 3. Definition of studied variables.

According to Triandis et al., (1988) while allocentrics subordinate personal to ingroup goals and consider the ingroup as extension of self and as a source of identity, idiocentrics have more concern for their own goals. In addition, Triandis et al., (1988) argued that idiocentrics are more detached from ingroups and have a less general concern for the ingroup. Following the same line of thought, La Greca (1997) explained that allocentric individuals, working in groups, give a priority to the well being of the group. Therefore, based on previous knowledge about the characteristics of each type of group of individuals (i.e. allocentrics and idiocentrics) , if a low value of orientation means that the individual is allocentric and a high value of orientation means that the individual is idiocentric, one might expect that

H1: Orientation (allocentrism - idiocentrism) is negatively related to relationship meaningfulness.

According to social identity theory, an individual's social identity is determined by the groups to which he or she belongs (Tajfel, 1970). Thus, if the individual expects the group to continue to exist permanently, it is likely that this condition sets in motion social identity processes (Worchel et al., 1998). This may increase a sense of belonging even in idiocentric individuals within the group, causing an increase in the meaningfulness of the relationship. Then, one might expect that

H2: Potential long-term relationship moderates the relationship between orientation (allocentrism-idiocentrism) and relationship meaningfulness such that the negative relationship is weaker when potential long-term relationship exists than when potential long-term relationship does not.

Individuals working in groups compare their effort and abilities with those of their group members. If an individual perceives that others in the group are very competent and perform sufficiently, this individual might sense that it is not necessary for him/her to do the job or might even think there is an opportunity to free-ride. However, if either the task or the relationship with co-workers are important, the individual will feel compelled to make an effort. This can happen because he/she cares about the evaluation of the group product or because he/she is motivated to preserve a good relationship or exchange with co-workers. However, when the individual expects others to do the job well, and there is a low task meaningfulness or a low relationship meaningfulness, one might anticipate that the individual will feel demotivated and his/her effort will drop more easily, resulting in what is known as social loafing.

Therefore, it is expected that

H3: Task meaningfulness moderates the relationship between expectations of co-worker effort & ability and social loafing such that the relationship is stronger when task meaningfulness is low than when task meaningfulness is high.

H4: Relationship meaningfulness moderates the relationship between expectations of co-worker effort & ability and social loafing such that the relationship is stronger when relationship meaningfulness is low than when relationship meaningfulness is high.

Previous hypotheses are consistent with theoretical frameworks such as the Expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964); the Collective effort model (CEM; Karau & Williams, 1993) and the Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964).

Method

This research focuses on a population of adult individuals working in groups. The proposed research sites for the work groups under study are manufacturing or service companies of middle to large sizes. These companies should have work groups managed or monitored by supervisors or facilitators. In the companies to be studied, all individuals within a work group need to report to the same supervisor or facilitator. In addition, individuals within each work group should be located in the same facility and need to interact with each other in order to perform their jobs. No specific task is required at this moment. However, an additive task is preferable (See Steiner, 1972 for the task

taxonomy). There must be two types of groups in the sample: permanent and temporal groups. Classifications of work groups in organizations provided by Cohen & Bailey (1997); Sundstrom, McIntire, Halfill & Richards (2000); Moses & Stahelski (1999); Devine, Clayton, Philips, Dunford, & Melner (1999) all quoted by Mendoza (2005) will be considered to prepare the selection criteria for work groups. Work groups included in the study should be as similar as possible, considering the control (i.e. without significant variability) of the following factors: group size, identifiability, evaluation, accountability, dispensability.

A non probabilistic sample (i.e. convenience sample) is proposed for this study taking into consideration that the researcher might have access to several organizations that could be interested in participating in this project. The proposed sample size should be within a range of a total of 250-300 employees, managed by at least 28-32 supervisors or facilitators.

Data are proposed to be collected through the use of questionnaires distributed to the employees and their direct supervisors (facilitators) during a regularly scheduled work period. Participants will be informed that the study is designed to examine the dynamics of work groups in organizations, assuring respondents of the confidentiality of their responses.

Employees and supervisors (facilitators) would be instructed to indicate their name and demographic data on the questionnaires. Then, employees and supervisors (facilitators) may continue to answer their questionnaires. The employee's questionnaire will have two parts. Part I will include questions related to the employee. This part will be divided in five sections, each of which will measure a separate construct: Expectations of co-worker's effort & ability, task meaningfulness, relationship meaningfulness, potential long-term relationship and orientation. Part II will include questions related to social loafing of their co-members of the group.

When supervisors (facilitators) rate individual subordinates, they will be given a form that lists each subordinate's name. The supervisor's questionnaire will have the same questions than part II of the employees' questionnaire and it will evaluate social loafing of each member of the group that they managed. Two sources will be used to control for common method variance. The unit of analysis will be the individual working in a group.

See table 4 for a summary of the operationalization of studied variables.

Variable	Based on previous work from	Type of Instrument		Respondents		
		To be Adapted	To be Developed	Supervisor or Facilitator	Worker	Co-worker
Expectations of co-worker effort & ability	The reliability and competence dimensions of trust. Rotter (1967); Cook & Wall (1980); Hosmer (1995).		X		X	
Task meaningfulness	Flores (1995); Kirkman & Rosen (1999); Mendoza (2005); George (1992).	X			X	
Orientation	Triandis et al., (1985); Triandis et al., (1988).	X			X	
Potential long-term relationship	0:Temporal groups 1:Permanent groups		X		X	
Relationship meaningfulness	Flores (1999); Kirkman & Rosen (1999); Mendoza (2005).		X		X	
Social loafing	George (1992)	X		X		X

Table 4. Operationalization of studied variables.

Instruments need to be reverse-translated and validated before their application in this research. Procedures of validation include face validity, content validity, construct validity and reliability. Additionally, in the proposed

study, two sources are planned to be used to control for common method variance. Also, peer ratings of social loafing will complement supervisor (facilitator) ratings to assist on ruling out measurement error in social loafing as an alternative explanation for the observed relationships.

Five indexes per respondent will be computed. Each will correspond to a different section of the employees' questionnaire. Index A corresponds to the score of expectations of co-worker effort & ability. Index B corresponds to the score of task meaningfulness. Index C corresponds to the score of orientation. Index D corresponds to the score of potential long-term relationship, and index E corresponds to the score of relationship meaningfulness. Each index will be computed as the average of each section rating.

Social loafing of each employee will be computed as the average score of the questions on social loafing that were answered by the employee's direct supervisor (facilitator). Peer rating will be averaged and used to complement supervisor's evaluation on social loafing.

Before the comparison between groups of individuals, there is a need to place subjects in groups of people depending on their scores on variables such as expectations of co-worker effort & ability, task meaningfulness, orientation, potential long-term relationship and relationship meaningfulness. A subjects placement on high or low expectation of co-worker effort & ability, task meaningfulness and relationship meaningfulness will be determined by an average split on the scale on the total sample scores. Subjects receiving a score of less than or equal to the average score will be assigned to low expectation of co-worker effort & ability, low task meaningfulness and low relationship meaningfulness; and subjects receiving a score of greater than the average score will be assigned to high expectation of co-worker effort & ability, high task meaningfulness and high relationship meaningfulness. A similar procedure will take place with the variable orientation. The orientation placement will be determined by an average split on the scale on the total sample scores. Subjects receiving a score of less than or equal to the average score will be assigned to allocentrism; and subjects receiving a score of greater than the average score will be assigned to idiocentrism. Placement of individuals in groups depending on potential long-term relationship will be determined by the value of the corresponding question and status.

Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations and frequencies (cross-tabulation), for all variables will be calculated. Additionally, correlations for the six study variables (expectations of co-worker effort & ability, task meaningfulness, relationship meaningfulness, orientation, long-term relationship and social loafing) will be examined.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to compared groups of subjects. Moderated multiple regression (MMR) will be used to test hypotheses regarding moderator variables (see Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen & Cohen, 1983; Darlington, 1990; Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990).

Limitations of the study

The first shortcoming of this study is that the proposed non probabilistic sample limits generalization. Nevertheless, the characteristics of this sample will be similar in many aspects to other samples of employees working in groups.

Since a causal link can only be demonstrated through experimental studies, or to some extent through longitudinal field-based studies (Murphy et al., 2003), another limitation of this research is its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to make causal inferences. A third limitation of this study is the possibility of bias because of social desirability.

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