

Abstract

People & purpose: Highlighting communal aspects of science can foster diversity and engagement

How do students form beliefs about potential career paths, and how do classroom experiences and interactions with faculty inform those beliefs? Our research investigates students' beliefs about whether they will be able to fulfill valued goals in different careers. Although much of educational and professional life focuses on *agentic* goals (e.g., achievement, competition, mastery), *communal goals* (e.g., altruism, collaboration) are also essential in role decisions and engagement. The goal congruity model posits that individuals navigate the social structure to meet both agentic and communal goals. Applied to students, we consider how beliefs about future social roles influence educational decisions. We particularly focus on the implications of the goal congruity model for careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). STEM fields are consensually perceived as unlikely to afford communal goals (relative to other fields, such as law, medicine, or education). This perception contributes to a lack of diversity in STEM, because community-oriented or prosocial goals are particularly valued by members of underrepresented groups. This challenge also presents a potential solution: Activities that disrupt these stereotypic expectations – that is, those that highlight how science can afford communal goals – yield motivational benefits to students across group memberships. I will present data examining cognitive and behavioral pathways to fostering communal goal opportunities in STEM, with a particular focus on the implications for psychological science.