

2017

# Spicing Things Up: How Regulatory Focus Affects People's Willingness To Try Novel Activities With A Romantic Partner

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SPICING THINGS UP: HOW REGULATORY FOCUS AFFECTS PEOPLE'S WILLINGNESS  
TO TRY NOVEL ACTIVITIES WITH A ROMANTIC PARTNER

by

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Honours Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, University of Waterloo, 2014

MASTER THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Science

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Arts in Social Psychology

Wilfrid Laurier University

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## Abstract

While spending time together is an important interpersonal goal for most romantic couples, “spicing things up” through participation in novel activities is a route commonly recommended and used in order to enhance relationship quality. However, relationship research has yet to focus on whether some people may have a greater proclivity toward pursuing these types of activities than others. The present research examines whether people’s motivational states – specifically, their regulatory focus orientation – may influence their desire to pursue novel activities with their romantic partners. In Study 1, participants ( $N = 110$ ) indicated their regulatory focus, relationship quality, and willingness to try 32 novel activities with their partners. In Studies 2 and 3, we experimentally manipulated participants’ regulatory focus (Study 2;  $N = 203$ ) and relationship quality (Study 3;  $N = 198$ ) and asked them to indicate their willingness to try 5 highly novel activities with their partners. Results revealed that promotion-focused individuals were more inclined to pursue novel activities with a partner when their relationship quality was high, but not low. These results indicate a meaningful bridge between close relationships and motivation research.

*Keywords:* close relationships, regulatory focus, self-expansion

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In popular culture, the suggestion to “spice things up” in a relationship is pervasive (e.g., Emling, 2014; Jonas-Hain, 2012). Magazines, books, and television shows frequently offer tips for couples to keep the spark alive or to rekindle lost romance – anything to prevent a relationship from becoming stagnant. People in relationships believe that they should seek novel, growth-enhancing activities rather than activities that are familiar as a way of combating relational boredom (Harasymchuk, Cloutier, Peetz, & Lebreton, 2016). However, the literature on close relationships has yet to examine factors that predict the seeking of new and exciting activities with romantic partners. I suggest that individual differences in motivational orientations may be one such factor that shapes intentions to “spice things up”. That is, some people may be more strongly motivated to seek opportunities for growth and advancement, while others may focus more strongly on relationship maintenance and security and therefore may be less inclined to seek out novel and exciting activities. The present thesis explores this possibility in three studies.

### **Self-Expansion Theory**

According to Aron and Aron (1986), one of the basic human motives is to explore and self-improve. Specifically, people seek to expand their potential efficacy in order to facilitate the successful achievement of goals. This motivation drives individuals to seek out novel social and material resources, perspectives, and identities, such as increased wealth, knowledge, social status, or community (Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013). The experience of “self-expansion” through these novel resources is rewarding for individuals.

There are many opportunities for individuals to self-expand: through new experiences, understanding new perspectives, or learning new skills. These opportunities can be experienced in one of two varieties – either through direct experience of (or the anticipation of) acquiring new resources and identities, or through participation in novel and challenging activities. For example, individuals can experience self-expansion through engagement in a physically challenging novel task, or through learning novel and interesting facts (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013). Experiences that include aspects of novelty or challenge tend to particularly cause a rapid expansion of the self (Aron et al., 2013). Rapid self-expansion is also commonly felt when forming romantic relationships with a new partner. When an

individual quickly bonds with a new romantic partner, they are able to experience this other person's resources, perspectives, and identities, and combine them with their own. This rapid expansion of the self is exhilarating, and the feelings of passion and exhilaration they experience due to this swift expansion are attributed to the new partner – and they experience the feeling of “falling in love” (Aron et al., 2013).

It is understandable that the experience of falling in love with a new person would lead to feelings of great self-expansion, given that an individual is experiencing and absorbing all of that person's resources and identities in a very short and intense period of time. But, when the initial stages of a relationship are over and their partner is now familiar, it is less obvious how they could satisfy their drive for self-expansion in the relationship. However, it is possible for longer-term relationships to still produce the experience of self-expansion in many ways; through the partner's support of one's own self-expansion, through the partner's ability to be interesting and expanding due to their own new resources and experiences, or through the partners engaging in self-expanding activities together (Aron et al., 2013). Shared participation with one's partner in self-expanding activities – that is, activities that are novel and challenging – can lead to the excitement and engagement that one typically experiences in periods of rapid self-expansion. Therefore, in the context of a long-term relationship, people can choose to pursue new activities with their partners in order to keep feelings of growth and expansion alive.

Harasymchuk, Cloutier, Peetz, and Lebreton (2016) found that those experiencing relational boredom thought they should combat it by engaging in more growth-enhancing, novel activities rather than familiar activities. Indeed, participating in novel and arousing activities with one's romantic partner does enhance relationship quality (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000), and this effect is mediated by the reduction of relationship boredom. Romantic couples who partake in exciting activities, such as attending concerts or going dancing, experience increases in their relationship satisfaction relative to those who partake in merely pleasant activities together, such as visiting friends (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993). Reducing relational boredom not only increases one's satisfaction with the relationship over shorter periods of time, but may also avoid a long-term reduction in one's relationship satisfaction as well (Tsapelas, Aron, & Orbuch, 2009).



A key factor in the reduction of relational boredom and the subsequent increase in relationship quality is choosing activities that are novel, arousing, and challenging. Consistent with self-expansion theory, in order to revive the initial feelings of exhilaration and self-expansion felt at the beginning of the relationship – when partners were self-expanding by including each other’s resources, identities, and perspectives as their own – one must participate in similarly self-expanding activities with their partner to regenerate these feelings of growth. In Aron et al.’s (2000) study on shared participation in novel and arousing activities, participants were assigned either to a novel/arousing task (where participants were bound together at the wrist and ankle, and instructed to roll a ball from one side of a room to the other in a short amount of time while on their hands and knees) or a mundane/boring task (a similar but less novel and arousing task, where they slowly rolled a ball to the center of the room and back, one partner at a time). Those in the novel/arousing condition experienced a greater increase in relationship quality (as well as a greater positive change in videotaped discussions following the activity) compared to those who completed the mundane activity. Participating in simply a cooperative task with a partner was not enough to give rise to the self-expanding effects; it was specifically the novel, challenging, and exciting activity that led to these results.

While the pursuit of self-expanding activities is a motivation thought to be common for all people (Aron & Aron, 1986), it is possible that individual differences could dictate how motivated and willing a person is to pursue novel and challenging activities with their romantic partner in order to improve their relationship and expand the self.

### **Regulatory Focus Theory**

According to regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997), there are two broad motivational orientations that dictate the types of goals people choose to engage in and the manner in which they pursue them. Promotion-focused individuals are concerned with advancement and growth and are sensitive to the presence and absence of positive outcomes and rewards. That is, they seek to advance from their current state to a more positive one (i.e., moving from “0” to “+1”). On the other hand, prevention-focused individuals are concerned with safety and security, and are sensitive to the presence

and absence of negative outcomes. That is, their goal pursuit is focused on maintaining their current state and avoiding any decline (i.e., moving from “0” to “-1”; Zou, Scholer, & Higgins, 2014). While both of these goal focuses can exist in an individual to some extent, people tend to have a motivational preference for either promotion or prevention focus, and this preference dictates the state in which they are usually present.

Promotion and prevention-oriented individuals differ in their responses to rewards and failures. Given that promotion-focused people are sensitive to positive outcomes, a more strongly promotion-focused individual will more strongly feel positive emotions like cheerfulness when their efforts are successful, and emotions like dejection when they fail to attain a goal (Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 2000). More strongly prevention-focused people on the other hand – who are sensitive to the presence and absence of negative outcomes – will more strongly feel quiescence when their prevention efforts are successful, and will feel stronger agitation when their efforts are failing (Higgins, 1997; Idson et al., 2000). As well, those with a promotion focus experience a greater intensity of pleasure in response to a positive outcome than those with a prevention focus, while those who are more prevention-focused experience a greater intensity of pain in response to a negative outcome than those who are more promotion-focused (Idson et al., 2000). In other words, the state in which one feels more intense emotions in response to outcomes depends on one’s regulatory focus orientation; promotion-focused individuals react more intensely to gains than non-gains, and prevention-focused individuals react more strongly to losses rather than non-losses.

Promotion-focused individuals are persistent and driven to succeed on the path to their goals. They tend to choose goals that are both highly valuable and have a high likelihood for advancement (Shah & Higgins, 1997). Promotion-focused individuals have a greater flexibility than those who are prevention-focused in determining which goals are selected and pursued, and which are abandoned when success appears unlikely or when obstacles are encountered (Liberman, Idson, Camacho, & Higgins, 1999; Shah & Higgins, 1997). Ultimately, promotion-focused people want to maximize their chances of success (e.g., Finkel, Molden, Johnson, & Eastwick, 2009). Promotion-focused individuals consider both

expectancy and value when pursuing goals; the more valuable they consider a goal to be, the more their expectations for success influence their decision whether to pursue it (Shah & Higgins, 1997). Promotion-focused individuals are also willing to take some risks and encounter potentially negative experiences if it is worth it – they would rather have a positive experience that included some negative aspects rather than have an experience that is moderate or average on all dimensions (Zhang & Mittal, 2007). However, they are risk-taking only when the potential for reward is strong; in other words, promotion focus is not associated with risk-taking behaviours if the gain-loss ratio for a reward is less than 1 (Zou & Scholer, 2016). Overall, promotion-focused individuals seek to maximize their advancement toward their desired goal state, and so the context in which they are pursuing their goal will affect the likelihood of success.

### **Regulatory Focus in Relationships**

Interpersonal relationships offer a wide range of opportunities for individuals to set and pursue goals. These goals can be tangible and specific, such as buying a house with a romantic partner, or more general, such as increasing intimacy or spending more time together (e.g., Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996). A person's regulatory focus orientation can affect the types of goals they pursue in their romantic relationship, as well as how they pursue them. On one hand, those who have a promotion focus should strive to improve their relationship, and this goal could be pursued by seeking opportunities for relationship growth and assuring that none of those opportunities are missed. On the other hand, prevention-focused individuals should be focused on securing their relationship, and should seek opportunities for relationship maintenance and aim to protect their connection from threats (Molden & Winterheld, 2013).

Regulatory focus can also shape a person's behaviors in various aspects of their relationships. During relationship conflict, for example, strongly promotion-focused people perceived their partners as more supportive and less distancing, whereas strongly prevention-focused people perceived their partners as more distancing and less supportive. As well, promotion-focused individuals displayed more creative conflict resolution behaviours, whereas prevention-focused individuals instead tended to discuss the details related to the conflict (Winterheld & Simpson, 2011). In long-distance relationships, highly

promotion-focused individuals also hold more idealized perceptions of their partner and report more intimate communication and less behavioural regulation of their partner compared to those who are less promotion-focused. The opposite pattern is seen with highly prevention-focused individuals, who report less frequent communication, less partner-idealized perceptions, and more behavioural regulation than those who are less prevention-focused (Hampton, 2016).

Since promotion-focused individuals tend to seek advancement, it follows that they should seek to improve their relationships from their current state. Promotion-focused individuals should be driven toward relational growth, and capitalizing on opportunities in which they could experience relationship development and reignite the feelings of self-expansion experienced early in the relationship. However, when pursuing a goal within a relationship, feelings toward the relationship itself can influence an individual's perceptions of the likelihood of success or failure in attaining their goals. Since promotion-focused individuals want to maximize the likelihood that they will successfully achieve their goals (e.g., Shah & Higgins, 1997), how a person views their relationship could lead them to persist toward or to abandon their specific goals in that relationship. For a promotion-focused individual, for example, a relationship that they feel positively about would be seen as an opportune place in which to pursue growth and self-expansion, whereas a relationship they feel less positively about could lead them to cease pursuit of that goal, or even to seek outside opportunities for growth and expansion instead.

### **Overview and Hypotheses**

The current studies explored the influence of regulatory focus and relationship quality on individuals' intentions to partake in shared novel activities. Studies 1–3 investigated participants' motivations to try hypothetical novel activities with their partners. I hypothesized that strongly promotion-focused individuals should be willing to try novel activities with their partners and expect the activities to be more enjoyable, as this would “fit” their chronic motivation for growth and advancement. I also expected that, due to the self-expanding nature of the activities, strongly promotion-focused individuals would expect to feel closer to their partner after doing these activities relative to those weaker in promotion strength. However, I predicted that this effect would likely be moderated by one's feelings

about their relationship. Specifically, I predicted that those high in promotion focus would be more motivated to try novel activities with their partners than those low in promotion focus when they feel more positively about their relationship. In contrast, I expect that promotion focus will not predict people's willingness to engage in such activities when they feel less positively about their relationship. In other words, the typical pattern of promotion-focused goal pursuit will be diminished, or even possibly reversed, when the relationship is one in which successful growth and advancement seems unlikely.

### Study 1

Study 1 examined the joint contribution of chronic regulatory focus orientation and relationship quality to people's willingness to engage in self-expanding – that is, novel and arousing – activities with their romantic partners. I predicted that those with a strong chronic promotion focus would be more willing to try novel activities when they felt positively about their relationships, but not when they felt less positively. In contrast, I predicted that feelings toward the relationship would not predict willingness to try new activities among people who were of a weaker promotion focus.<sup>1</sup>

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 110 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk (49 male, 57 female, 4 unreported;  $M_{\text{age}} = 33.43$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.21$ ) who were currently involved in romantic relationships ( $M_{\text{length}} = 7.67$  years,  $SD = 8.75$ ; relationships ranged from 2 months to 52.4 years). Most participants (86.8%) were White. The majority of participants were in married or serious dating relationships: married ( $n = 42$ ), exclusively dating ( $n = 30$ ), cohabiting ( $n = 20$ ), engaged ( $n = 9$ ), casually dating ( $n = 9$ ). Participants were compensated \$0.50 USD.

**Procedure.** Participants who volunteered to participate in an online study were first asked to complete measures of regulatory focus, relationship quality, and inclusion-of-other-in-self, among others. Following this, they were told that the researchers were interested in understanding the activities that they and their partner might do together. Then, they were presented with 32 activities in randomized order, and

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<sup>1</sup> While both regulatory focus orientations are measured in this and the following studies, my predictions attend solely to individuals' levels of promotion focus rather than both promotion and prevention.

for each, they were instructed to imagine that their current partner had suggested that they participate in these activities together (See Appendix C). The activities presented ranged in perceived novelty and type, such as “*start watching a new television series*”, “*work toward a new fitness goal*”, “*try an extreme sport (e.g., rock climbing, scuba diving, surfing)*”, and “*plan a trip abroad to an exotic country*” (See Table 1 for a full list of activities). After being presented with each activity, participants were asked to indicate how novel they perceived that activity to be, how willing they would be to do that activity with their partner, how much they thought they might enjoy that activity, and how much closer they would feel to their partner after doing that activity, on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Finally, participants indicated their gender, age, and ethnic identity before being debriefed.

### **Measures.<sup>2</sup>**

**Regulatory focus.** The 11-item Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ; Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, Ayduk & Taylor, 2001) includes both promotion items (e.g., “*How often have you accomplished things that got you ‘psyched’ to work even harder?*”, “*I feel like I have made progress toward being successful in my life*”) and prevention items (e.g., “*How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?*”, “*Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times (R)*”). Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*never or seldom*) to 7 (*very often*). Items were averaged to create separate promotion and prevention scores. Scales were moderate in reliability;  $\alpha = .73$  and  $.77$  for promotion (6 items) and prevention (5 items) respectively (See Appendix A).

**Relationship quality.** The 18-item Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) measures relationship quality along 6 dimensions: relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love (e.g., “*How happy are you with your relationship?*”, “*How committed are you to your relationship?*”, “*How dependable is your*

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<sup>2</sup> A number of other measures were included for exploratory purposes, including self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), agreeableness (Big Five Inventory; John & Srivastava, 1999), optimism (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) and regulatory mode (Kruglanski et al., 2000); see Appendix A. Given that these measures were not directly related to the hypotheses, they were not used in these analyses and so will not be mentioned in the results or discussion.

partner?"). Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Responses were averaged to create an overall score of relationship quality ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

***Inclusion of the Other in the Self.*** The Inclusion of the Other in the Self (IOS) scale is a single item pictorial measure of relationship closeness (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Participants are presented with 7 sets of increasingly overlapping circles and are asked to indicate which picture best describes their relationship (from not at all overlapping to almost fully overlapped) (See Appendix B).

## Results

I began by first examining whether participants perceived the activities they rated as novel, as I had anticipated. The least novel activity was *start watching a new television series* ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 2.11$ ), whereas the most novel activity was *plan a trip abroad to an exotic country* ( $M = 5.76$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ), and the two were significantly different in rated novelty,  $t(106) = -7.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . Across all 32 activities, the mean rating of novelty was 4.88,  $SD = 1.06$ , which was significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale,  $t(109) = 8.726$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, in general, participants perceived these activities as novel and therefore I averaged across all 32 activities for each of my dependent variables (See Table 1 for individual means).

In order to examine whether the perceived novelty of the activities was predicted by participants' promotion focus, I performed a regression analysis using average novelty rating as the dependent variable. I hypothesized that promotion focus would not predict participants' ratings of novelty for the 32 activities, and indeed, promotion focus did not predict how novel participants found the activities,  $b = -.18$ ,  $t(104) = -1.64$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .105$ , nor did promotion focus interact with relationship quality to predict novelty,  $b = .05$ ,  $t(104) = .54$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .593$ . However, there was a main effect of relationship quality such that those in higher quality relationships found the activities to be more novel than those in lower quality relationships,  $b = .32$ ,  $t(104) = 3.14$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .002$ , and so too did those who scored higher on the IOS, i.e., those who felt their partner was more included in the self found the activities to be more novel than those who felt their partner was less included in the self,  $b = .17$ ,  $t(104) = 2.38$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .019$ .

To test my central hypothesis that regulatory focus would interact with feelings about the relationship to predict individuals' feelings toward novel activities with their partners, I regressed each of the dependent variables onto the main effects of mean-centered promotion focus, prevention focus, and relationship quality scores in the first step and the two-way interactions of promotion focus x relationship quality and prevention focus x relationship quality on the second step of a hierarchical regression analysis<sup>3</sup> (See Table 2 for correlations between the variables). Simple effects were calculated at one standard deviation above and below the means of the continuous variables. While my central predictions involve promotion focus, prevention focus is included as a control variable in all analyses to assess the unique contribution of promotion, a practice that is customary (e.g., Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997; Zou, Scholer, & Higgins, 2014). Promotion focus and prevention focus were weakly positively correlated,  $r(110) = .32, p = .001$ .

For participants' self-reported willingness to try novel activities, there was neither a main effect of promotion nor prevention focus,  $b = .02, t(104) = .24, p = .812$  and  $b = -.09, t(104) = -1.12, p = .265$ , respectively. There was a significant main effect of relationship quality such that those in higher-quality relationships reported greater willingness to try the novel activities than those in lower-quality relationships,  $b = .47, t(104) = 5.06, SE = .09, p < .001$ . This was qualified by the hypothesized promotion focus x relationship quality interaction,  $b = .17, t(104) = 2.11, SE = .08, p = .037$  (See Figure 1). Promotion focus did not predict willingness among those low in relationship quality,  $b = -.17, t(104) = -1.25, SE = .13, p = .212$ . However, promotion focus was positively associated (albeit nonsignificantly) with willingness among those high in relationship quality,  $b = 0.21, t(104) = 1.57, SE = .14, p = .120$ .

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<sup>3</sup> The same analyses were performed using IOS as an indicator of feelings toward the relationship rather than relationship quality, and the obtained results were similar but less robust. Furthermore, when conducting the regression analysis including IOS in the first step as a control, there were no main effects of IOS and the two-way interactions between promotion focus and RQ remained significant. While IOS scores are positively correlated with scores on the PRQC,  $r(110) = .57, p < .01$ , the IOS is more of a measure of current self-expansion with the partner rather than just a measure of closeness in the relationship (Aron et al., 1992), therefore it is unsurprising that it would not have the same impact on participants' expectations for the novel activities as would a measure of relationship quality. We conclude that RQ is a more appropriate moderator of our effects than IOS, therefore moving forward, only the PRQC will be used as a measure of feelings toward the relationship.



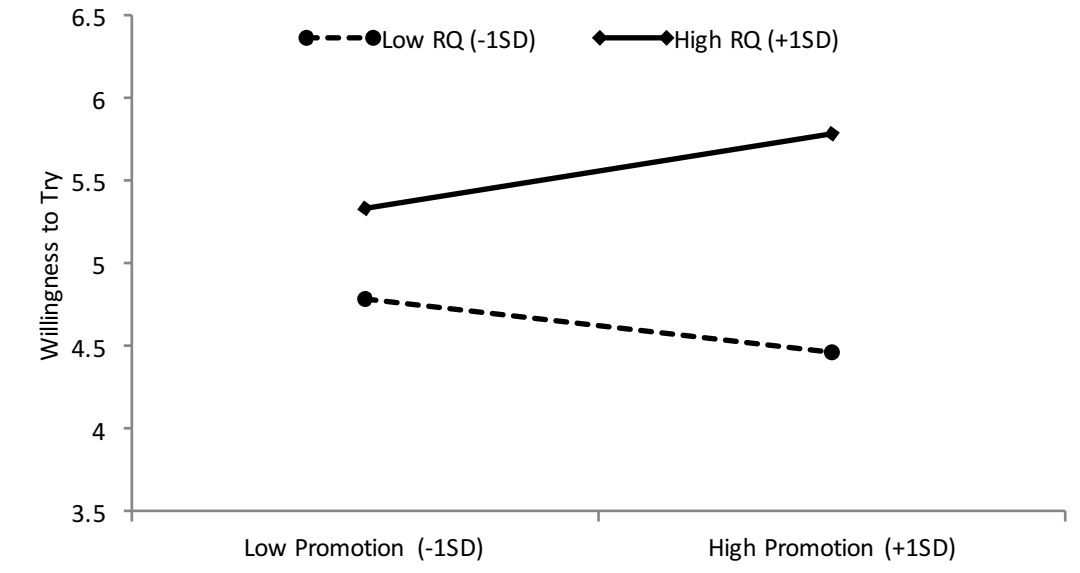


Figure 1. The interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality (RQ) predicting participants' average willingness to try 32 novel relationship activities in Study 1.

Among those with stronger promotion focus, greater relationship quality significantly predicted greater willingness to try new activities,  $b = 0.64$ ,  $t(104) = 4.44$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . This effect was similar, albeit smaller in magnitude, among those with a weaker promotion focus,  $b = 0.30$ ,  $t(104) = 3.07$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = .003$ . Prevention focus and relationship quality did not significantly interact,  $b = .07$ ,  $t(104) = .99$ ,  $p = .326$ .

For expected enjoyment of the activities, there was no main effect of promotion focus,  $b = -.03$ ,  $t(104) = -.26$ ,  $p = .794$ , and a marginal effect of prevention focus,  $b = -.14$ ,  $t(104) = -1.77$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .079$ . There was also a significant main effect of relationship quality such that higher relationship quality predicted greater expected enjoyment of the activities,  $b = .49$ ,  $t(104) = 5.62$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ . The interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality was marginally significant,  $b = .13$ ,  $t(104) = 1.68$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .096$  (See Figure 2). Promotion focus did not predict expected enjoyment among those with higher relationship quality,  $b = .12$ ,  $t(104) = .92$ ,  $p = .360$ , nor among those with lower relationship quality,  $b = -.17$ ,  $t(104) = -1.34$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .183$ . Examination of the simple slopes of relationship

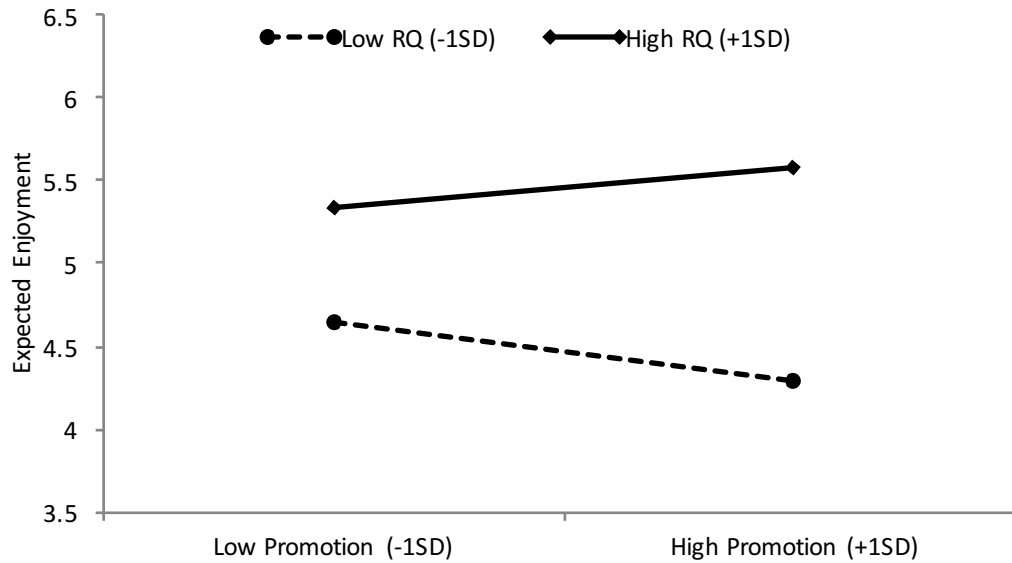


Figure 2. The interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality (RQ) predicting participants' average expected enjoyment of the 32 novel relationship activities in Study 1.

quality, however, revealed a similar pattern seen for participants' ratings of willingness: higher relationship quality predicted greater expected enjoyment of the activities among those with weaker promotion focus,  $b = .37$ ,  $t(104) = 3.96$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ , and this effect was exaggerated among those with stronger promotion focus,  $b = 0.62$ ,  $t(104) = 4.56$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $p < .001$ . Prevention focus x relationship quality was not significant,  $b = .06$ ,  $t(104) = .80$ ,  $p = .428$ .

For anticipated closeness, relationship quality was the only significant predictor,  $b = .49$ ,  $t(104) = 5.08$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ , and revealed that higher relationship quality predicted greater anticipated closeness compared to those with lower relationship quality. Neither promotion focus nor prevention focus were significant predictors,  $b = -.05$ ,  $t(104) = -.47$ ,  $p = .640$  and  $b = -.09$ ,  $t(104) = -1.11$ ,  $p = .269$ , respectively. Neither interaction was significant:  $b = .11$ ,  $t(104) = 1.26$ ,  $p = .210$  for promotion focus x relationship quality, and  $b = .05$ ,  $t(104) = .69$ ,  $p = .491$  for prevention focus x relationship quality.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I tested the same interactions including relationship length as a possible covariate. I again regressed each of the dependent variables onto the main effects of mean-centered promotion focus, prevention focus, relationship quality, and relationship length (in years) in the first step and the two-way interactions of

While the data suggested that participants on average saw most of the 32 activities presented as novel, it was clear that some were perceived as more novel than others. As such, I conducted a more precise test of my hypothesis by repeating the analyses described above with dependent variables that were aggregated across the specific activities that participants rated as being particularly novel.

Examining the novelty ratings, I chose 5 activities among the top 10 most novel (a number of the top items involved similar high-adrenaline activities, therefore only one of these was chosen in order to vary the type and intensity of the selected). From the 10, we chose “*plan a trip abroad to an exotic country*” ( $M = 5.76, SD = 1.58$ ; highest rated in novelty), “*try an adventurous activity (e.g., zip-lining, white-water rafting)*” ( $M = 5.55, SD = 1.70$ ; second highest in novelty), “*do a daring sexual activity (e.g., sex in a public place, skinny dipping)*” ( $M = 5.47, SD = 1.77$ ; third most novel), “*develop a ‘bucket list’ for the next year*” ( $M = 5.41, SD = 1.44$ ; fourth most novel) and “*re-create a memorable past date*” ( $M = 5.20, SD = 1.85$ ; ninth most novel). These five activities were averaged together to create new indices of participants’ willingness, anticipated enjoyment, and anticipated closeness variables. The average novelty of the five activities ( $M = 5.48, SD = 1.11$ ) was significantly higher than the average novelty of the 32 activities overall,  $t(107) = 8.29, p < .001$ .

I again performed three regressions, with the three dependent variables being the averages of willingness, enjoyment, and closeness for the five highly novel activities.<sup>5</sup> For willingness to try the five

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promotion focus x relationship quality and prevention focus x relationship quality on the second step of a hierarchical regression analysis. The results of this analysis remained consistent with the analyses above; for willingness, the interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality remained significant,  $b = .17, t(103) = 2.05, SE = .08, p = .043$ . For enjoyment, the interaction remained marginally significant,  $b = .13, t(103) = 1.70, SE = .08, p = .093$ , and for closeness, the interaction was not significant,  $b = .11, t(103) = 1.26, p = .211$ .

<sup>5</sup> I conducted a repeated-measures general linear model (GLM) in order to examine the effect of novelty as a moderator. I entered novelty (the five highly novel activities versus the five least novel; see Table 1 for the five least novel activities) as a within-subjects factor and mean-centered promotion focus, prevention focus, and relationship quality as simultaneous predictors, two-way interactions between novelty x relationship quality, novelty x promotion focus, and novelty x prevention focus, and the three-way interactions of novelty x relationship quality x promotion focus and novelty x relationship quality x prevention focus. For rated willingness, the three-way interaction of novelty, promotion focus, and relationship quality was marginally significant,  $F(102) = 2.834, p = .095$ . For anticipated enjoyment, the

activities, there was a significant main effect of relationship quality such that higher relationship quality predicted greater willingness to try the novel activities compared to lower relationship quality,  $b = 0.54$ ,  $t(102) = 4.69$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was no main effect of promotion focus,  $b = -0.03$ ,  $t(102) = -.26$ ,  $p = .796$ . There was a significant promotion focus x relationship quality interaction,  $b = 0.28$ ,  $t(102) = 2.77$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = .007$  (See Figure 3). Examining the simple slopes revealed that among those high in relationship quality, there was a marginal increase in willingness as strength of promotion focus increased,  $b = .28$ ,  $t(102) = 1.73$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .087$ . In contrast, there was a significant decrease in willingness to try novel activities as strength of promotion focus increased among those lower in relationship quality,  $b = -.34$ ,  $t(102) = -2.03$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .045$ . For those lower in promotion focus, those with higher relationship quality were significantly more willing to try the novel activities,  $b = .26$ ,  $t(102) = 2.22$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .029$ , and this difference increased at higher promotion focus,  $b = .81$ ,  $t(102) = 4.57$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ .

I observed the same pattern in both expected enjoyment and anticipated closeness to one's partner for the 5 activities. For expected enjoyment, there was no main effect of promotion focus,  $b = -.04$ ,  $t(102) = -.33$ ,  $p = .742$ . However, there was a significant main effect of relationship quality such that those in higher quality relationships felt they would enjoy the activities more than those in lower quality relationships,  $b = .54$ ,  $t(102) = 4.84$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was also a significant interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality,  $b = .24$ ,  $t(102) = 2.48$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .015$ . Similar to the interaction predicting willingness to try the activities, for those with higher relationship quality, the slope of promotion focus was not significant,  $b = .23$ ,  $t(102) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .14$ . At lower relationship quality, there was a marginally significant decline in expected enjoyment as promotion focus increased,  $b = -.31$ ,  $t(102) = -1.89$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .062$ . For those with lower promotion focus, those in a higher quality relationship

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three-way interaction was marginally significant,  $F(102) = 3.913$ ,  $p = .051$ . For anticipated closeness, the three-way interaction was not significant,  $F(102) = 1.339$ ,  $p = .402$ . When examining only the 5 least novel activities in a regression analysis, for willingness, there was no significant interaction of relationship quality x promotion focus,  $b = .08$ ,  $t(103) = .82$ ,  $p = .412$ , nor were there significant interactions for enjoyment,  $b = .01$ ,  $t(103) = .08$ ,  $p = .941$ , or closeness,  $b = .07$ ,  $t(103) = .68$ ,  $p = .495$ .

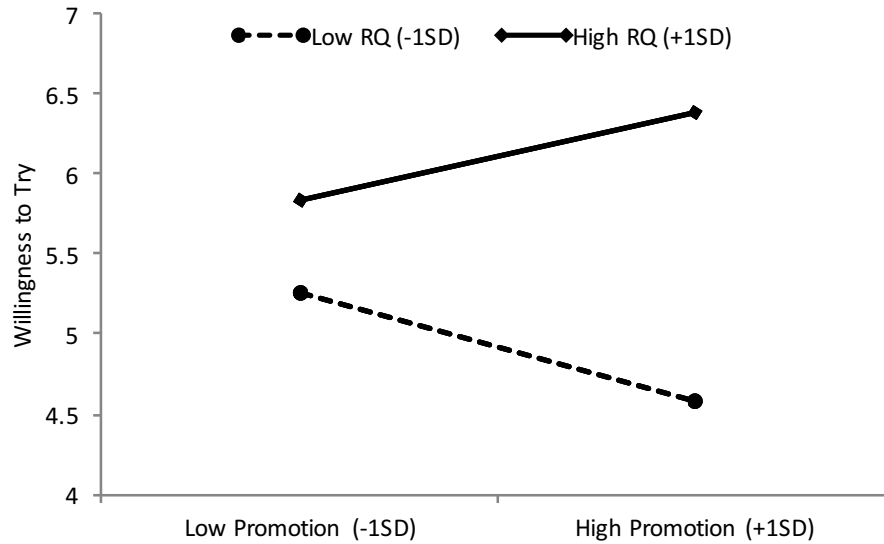


Figure 3. The interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality (RQ) predicting participants' average willingness to try 5 highly novel relationship activities in Study 1.

anticipated greater enjoyment than those in lower quality relationships,  $b = .30$ ,  $t(102) = 2.60$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .011$ . For those with stronger promotion focus, this difference was even greater,  $b = .78$ ,  $t(102) = 4.50$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p < .001$  (See Figure 4).

For anticipated closeness, I again saw no main effect of promotion focus,  $b = -.07$ ,  $t(102) = -.58$ ,  $p = .567$ , and a significant main effect of relationship quality where those in higher quality relationships anticipated feeling closer to their partners after the activities than those in lower quality relationships,  $b = .50$ ,  $t(102) = 4.39$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ . I also found another significant interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality,  $b = .21$ ,  $t(102) = 2.07$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .041$ . At low relationship quality, there was a marginally significant difference in anticipated closeness where those with a stronger promotion focus anticipated feeling less close to their partners than those with a weaker promotion focus,  $b = -.30$ ,  $t(102) = -1.79$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .076$ . At high relationship quality, the slope was not significant,  $b = .16$ ,  $t(102) = 1.01$ ,  $p = .316$ . Similar to willingness and enjoyment, among those with a weaker promotion focus, those with higher relationship quality predicted feeling closer to their partners than those with lower

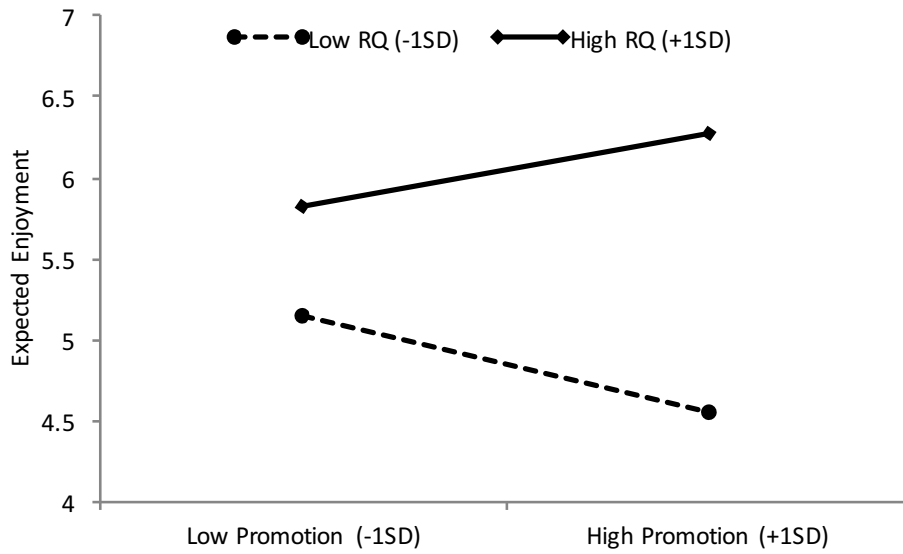


Figure 4. The interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality (RQ) predicting participants' expected enjoyment of 5 highly novel relationship activities in Study 1.

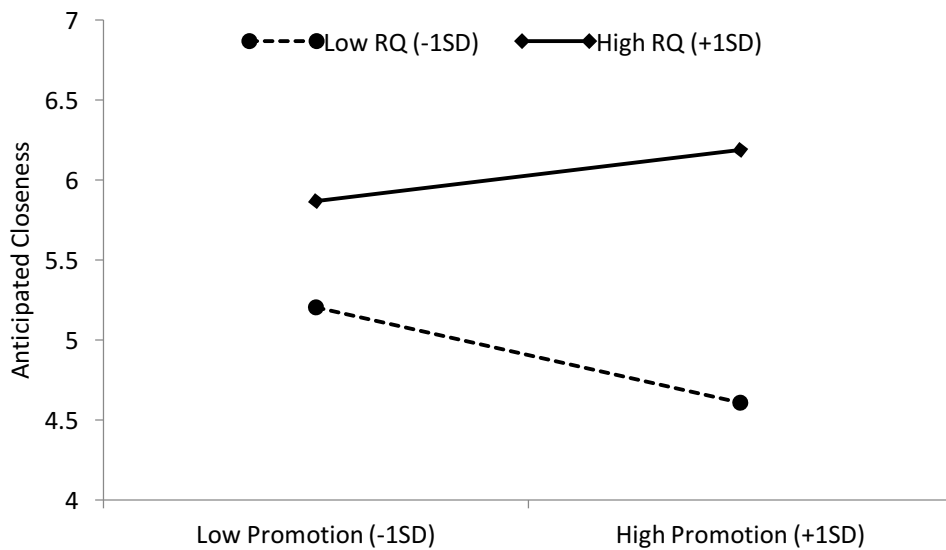


Figure 5. The interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality (RQ) predicting participants' anticipated closeness after completing 5 highly novel relationship activities in Study 1.

relationship quality,  $b = .30$ ,  $t(102) = 2.50$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p = .014$ . This difference was even stronger at higher promotion focus,  $b = .71$ ,  $t(102) = 3.98$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p < .001$  (See Figure 5).<sup>6</sup>

## Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided initial support for my hypothesis that highly promotion-focused people's willingness to engage in novel activities would depend on how they feel about their relationship (i.e., lower versus higher quality). Specifically, this study revealed that those with higher relationship quality were most willing to try novel relationship activities with their partners, regardless of promotion focus strength. However, when participants had lower relationship quality, their willingness to try novel activities was affected by their tendency to be promotion-focused; those who were more highly promotion-focused were *less* willing than those who were less promotion-focused. The same pattern was seen in participants' ratings of expected enjoyment of the highly novel activities and how much closer they believed they would feel to their partners after doing those activities. Participants in higher quality relationships believed they would enjoy the activities more and feel closer to their partners after completing the activities, regardless of promotion focus. For those in low quality relationships, however, stronger promotion focus predicted less expected enjoyment and less anticipated closeness.

This suggests that relationship quality's effect on willingness is so powerful that it can override one's chronic motivational tendencies – trying a new activity is only rewarding for promotion-focused individuals when their feelings about the relationship suggest that activity to be worth the effort. As well, it seems that the activities only appear rewarding (i.e., more enjoyable, increasing closeness) to those who are highly promotion-focused when the context is one in which the activity seems worthwhile. That is to say, it appears that promotion-focused individuals do not always pursue opportunities for growth and self-expansion if the situation suggests that the end goal may not be worth their efforts.

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<sup>6</sup> I again tested the same interactions including relationship length as a possible covariate. The results remained consistent; for willingness, the interaction of promotion focus and relationship quality was still significant,  $b = .30$ ,  $t(101) = 3.02$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .003$ . For enjoyment, the interaction also remained significant,  $b = .27$ ,  $t(101) = 2.85$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $p = .005$ , as well as for closeness,  $b = .22$ ,  $t(101) = 2.26$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .026$ .

One limitation of this study is that the data was entirely correlational. As such, we cannot be sure how much of the effects seen were due to promotion focus and/or relationship quality, or whether an alternative explanation could rule one or both of these out. Given this, I sought to manipulate the predictor variables in subsequent studies. In Study 2, I manipulated individuals' regulatory focus to more rigorously test the causal hypothesis.

## Study 2

Study 2 examined whether manipulated regulatory focus orientation and chronic relationship focus would interact to predict people's willingness to engage in highly novel activities with their romantic partners. I predicted that those in the promotion condition who had higher relationship quality would be more willing to try these activities than those who had lower relationship quality, and this difference would not be seen in the prevention condition.

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 207 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk (allowing for 50 participants per cell, as recommended by Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2013). Two were excluded from the analysis for not completing the study and two were excluded for failing to properly complete the manipulation, leaving a final sample of 203 participants (86 males, 117 females;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34.99$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.88$ ). We recruited individuals who were in relationships ( $M_{\text{length}} = 8.50$  years,  $SD = 9.16$ ; relationships ranged from 1 month to 45 years). Most participants (85.2%) were White. The majority of participants were in committed relationships: married ( $n = 91$ ), exclusively dating ( $n = 47$ ), cohabiting ( $n = 38$ ), casually dating ( $n = 16$ ), engaged ( $n = 11$ ). Participants were compensated \$0.50 USD.

**Procedure.** Participants were first asked to completed measures of relationship quality using the same measure as in Study 1, among others. Following this, participants were randomly assigned to either a *promotion focus* or *prevention focus* condition.<sup>7</sup> Those in the *promotion focus* condition ( $n = 103$ ) received the following instructions (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994):

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<sup>7</sup> While Study 1 focused on high vs. low promotion rather than promotion vs. prevention, the two conditions in Study 2 serve to function in a similar way. The *promotion focus* condition induces a state



*For this task, we would like you to think about how your current hopes and aspirations are different now from what they were when you were growing up. In other words, what accomplishments would you ideally like to meet at this point in your life? What accomplishments did you ideally want to meet when you were a child?*

*In the space below, please write a brief essay describing how your hopes and aspirations have changed from when you were a child to now. You will be given 5 minutes to complete this task. After the 5 minute period is over, you can continue to the next page.*

Those in the *prevention focus* condition ( $n = 100$ ) received the instructions:

*For this task, we would like you to think about how your current duties and obligations are different now from what they were when you were growing up. In other words, what responsibilities do you think you ought to meet at this point in your life? What responsibilities did you think you ought to meet when you were a child?*

*In the space below, please write a brief essay describing how your duties and obligations have changed from when you were a child to now. You will be given 5 minutes to complete this task. After the 5 minute period is over, you can continue to the next page.*

For both conditions, the button that allowed participants to advance to the next page only appeared after 5 minutes, and the page would automatically advance after 10 minutes.

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similar to that of a chronically highly promotion-focused individual, while the *prevention focus* condition does not induce the same state, thereby serving as a control. Though having a strong prevention focus and having a weak promotion focus are not conceptually the exact same, in this situation, we would expect to see the same results for both; neither prevention-focused nor weakly promotion-focused individuals would base their ratings of the novel activities on their relationship quality.

Upon completing this task, participants were told that the researchers were interested in understanding the activities that they and their partner might do together. They were presented with 5 highly novel activities in randomized order and for each, they were instructed to imagine that their current partner had suggested that they participate in these activities together. The 5 activities presented to participants were the activities among the 10 most highly rated in novelty from Study 1, including “*plan a trip abroad to an exotic country*”, “*do a daring sexual activity (e.g., sex in a public place, skinny dipping)*”, “*develop a ‘bucket list’ for the next year*”, and “*re-create a memorable past date*”. The wording of the fifth activity was changed from “*do an adventurous activity (e.g., zip-lining, white-water rafting)*” in Study 1 to “*do an extreme adventure sport (e.g., skydiving, rock climbing, bungee jumping)*” in the current study; in Study 1, three of the top ten most novel activities were similar in wording and type, so the new item of “*extreme adventure sport*” was designed to combine each of these items (the other two being “*do a high-adrenaline activity (e.g. skydiving, bungee jumping)*” and “*try an extreme sport (e.g. rock climbing, scuba diving, surfing)*”).

After each activity, participants indicated how novel it would be if their partner wanted to do that activity with them, how novel it would be for them to do that activity, how willing they would be to do that activity with their partner, how much they thought they would enjoy that activity, and how much closer they would feel to their partner after doing that activity. Each question was rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The novelty question from Study 1 was separated into two questions – one’s own novelty perception of the activity and perception of novelty for the idea of the partner approaching them to do this activity – since we were concerned about the possible ambiguity of the question in Study 1. Finally, participants completed demographic information including gender, age, and ethnic identity, then were debriefed.

## **Results**

I first examined participants’ perceptions of novelty for the 5 activities. For the question “*how novel would it be if your partner wanted to do this activity with you?*”, the average rating was 5.23 ( $SD = 1.18$ ). For “*how novel would it be for you to do this activity?*”, the average rating was 5.15 ( $SD = 1.21$ ).

There was a marginally significant difference between the two means,  $t(202) = -1.92, p = .056$ , where participants rated that it would be more novel for their partners to want to do these activities with them than it would be for them to do the activities. However, the two ratings were highly correlated,  $r(203) = .89, p < .001$ .

In order to test the hypothesis that those in the promotion condition would be more willing to try the activities than those in the prevention condition, and that higher relationship quality would predict greater willingness among those in the promotion condition, I regressed willingness as well as the other dependent variables onto the main effects of mean-centered relationship quality and condition (manipulated promotion or prevention focus) in the first step and the two-way interaction of relationship quality and condition on the second step of a hierarchical regression analysis. For the continuous variable of relationship quality, simple effects were calculated at one standard deviation above and below the mean.

For participants' self-reported willingness to try the 5 novel activities, there was a significant main effect of relationship quality such that those in higher-quality relationships were more willing to try the activities than those in lower quality relationships,  $b = .22, t(199) = 2.08, SE = .11, p = .039$ . There was no main effect of condition;  $b = .08, t(199) = .56, p = .574$ . Contrary to my hypotheses, the interaction of relationship quality and condition was not significant,  $b = .18, t(199) = 1.26, p = .209$ .

For anticipated enjoyment of the activities, there was no effect of condition,  $b = .03, t(199) = .19, p = .847$ , and a marginally significant effect of relationship quality where those with higher-quality relationships anticipated more enjoyment than those with lower quality,  $b = .21, t(199) = 1.91, SE = .11, p = .057$ . The interaction of relationship quality and condition was not significant,  $b = .20, t(199) = 1.38, p = .170$ .

For anticipated closeness after doing the activities, there were no main effects of condition,  $b = -.16, t(199) = -.93, p = .353$ , or relationship quality,  $b = .15, t(199) = 1.22, p = .224$ . There was a significant interaction, however, of relationship quality and condition,  $b = .43, t(199) = 2.62, SE = .17, p = .010$  (See Figure 6). For those high in relationship quality, condition did not predict their anticipated

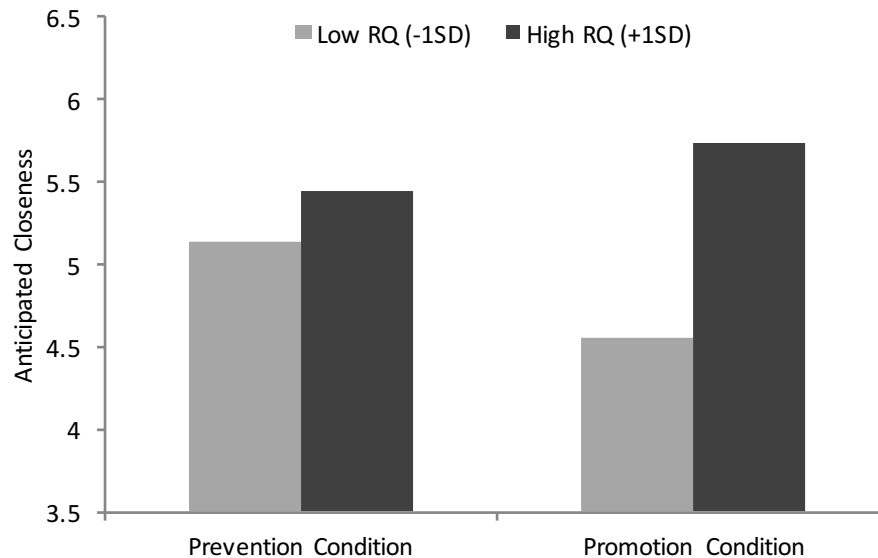
closeness,  $b = .29$ ,  $t(199) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .228$ . For those in low in relationship quality, condition did predict anticipated closeness such that those in the promotion condition anticipated feeling less close to their partners after doing the activities than those in the prevention condition,  $b = -.60$ ,  $t(199) = -2.51$ ,  $SE = .24$ ,  $p = .013$ . In the prevention condition, there was no significant difference in anticipated closeness between those with low or high relationship quality,  $b = -.16$ ,  $t(199) = -.93$ ,  $p = .353$ . In the promotion condition, there was a significant difference between those higher and lower in relationship quality such that those with higher relationship quality anticipated feeling closer to their partners than those with low relationship quality,  $b = .59$ ,  $t(199) = 5.38$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p < .001$ .<sup>8</sup>

### Discussion

In this study, I expected to see that when manipulating regulatory focus, those in the promotion condition would react similarly to those who were highly promotion-focused in Study 1 – that is, those in the promotion condition would be less willing to try the novel activities if they had lower relationship quality, compared to higher relationship quality. However, we found only a main effect of relationship quality where those in higher quality relationship were more willing to try the activities regardless of condition, and there was no main effect of condition, nor an interaction between the two predictors. There were no significant predictors for participants' expected enjoyment of the novel activities, however an interaction was found in participants' anticipated closeness to their partner after doing the activities that followed the expected pattern: in the promotion focus condition, those in higher quality relationships anticipated feeling closer to their partners than those in lower quality relationships. While not all of my predictions were supported by this study, these results were informative to our understanding of the processes underlying participants' anticipations for novel activities. It is possible that people's chronic motivational orientations are stronger than those we could induce via a temporary induction, and so our

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<sup>8</sup> I again tested the same interactions including relationship length as a possible covariate. The results of this analysis remained consistent with the analyses above; for willingness, the interaction of condition and relationship quality was not significant,  $b = .11$ ,  $t(198) = .77$ ,  $p = .441$ , nor was it significant for enjoyment,  $b = .12$ ,  $t(198) = .87$ ,  $p = .387$ , but for closeness, the interaction was significant,  $b = .35$ ,  $t(198) = 2.15$ ,  $SE = .16$ ,  $p = .033$ .



*Figure 6.* The interaction of manipulated regulatory focus (prevention condition and promotion condition) and relationship quality (RQ) predicting participants' anticipated closeness to their partners for the 5 novel relationship activities in Study 2.

regulatory focus manipulation was not powerful enough to overcome the strength of participants' trait motivational tendencies. It could also be possible that while the promotion condition served to induce a high promotion state, the prevention condition was not equivalent to a low promotion state. However, participants' chronic motivational orientations could be examined under temporarily induced states of high or low relationship quality. In Study 3, participants underwent a relationship quality manipulation in order for us to explore its interaction with chronic regulatory focus orientation.

### Study 3

In Study 3, I measured participants' chronic regulatory focus and then experimentally manipulated relationship quality before asking participants to indicate their willingness, expected enjoyment, and anticipated closeness after participating in 5 novel activities. I hypothesized that, based on the previous studies, those in the high relationship quality condition would be more willing overall to

participate in the presented activities. I also predicted that for those in the low relationship quality condition, those with a stronger promotion focus would be less willing to participate in the activities than those with a weaker promotion focus, as we saw in Study 1.

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 211 adults from Amazon Mechanical Turk, in order to achieve 50 participants per cell (Simmons et al., 2013). Seven were excluded from the analysis for not completing the study, five were excluded for failing to properly complete the manipulation, and one was excluded for indicating that they were planning to soon break up with their partner; this left a final sample of 198 participants (81 males, 117 females;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34.79$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.42$ ). We again recruited individuals who were in relationships ( $M_{\text{length}} = 7.84$  years,  $SD = 8.44$ ; relationships ranged from 2 months to 40.5 years). Most participants (79.3%) were White. The majority of participants were in committed relationships: married ( $n = 80$ ), exclusively dating ( $n = 48$ ), cohabiting ( $n = 41$ ), casually dating ( $n = 19$ ), engaged ( $n = 10$ ). Participants were compensated \$0.50 USD.

**Procedure.** Participants began by completing the measure of chronic promotion ( $\alpha = .75$ ) and prevention ( $\alpha = .82$ ) focuses used in Study 1. I then manipulated relationship quality following Hofmann, Finkel, and Fitzsimons (2015). Those assigned to the *high relationship quality* condition ( $n = 97$ ) received the instructions: “*For this task, we would like you to think about your current romantic relationship. There are many things in our romantic relationships that work out well. Using the space below, please think about and list 3 things that are good about your relationship.*” Those in the *low relationship quality* condition ( $n = 101$ ) were told that many things “*do not work out so well*” in relationships, and asked to think about 3 things that “*are not good about your relationship*”. In both conditions, participants were asked to describe each of the 3 things they listed in as much detail as possible for 3 minutes. Participants were not able to move on to the next page of the study until 3 minutes had passed, and the page would auto-advance after 5 minutes.

Participants were then told that the researchers were interested in understanding the activities they and their partner might do together. They were instructed to imagine that their current partner had come to them and suggested they participate in the following activities together, then were presented with the 5 novel activities used in Study 2, in randomized order: “*plan a trip abroad to an exotic country*”, “*do a daring sexual activity (e.g., sex in a public place, skinny dipping)*”, “*develop a ‘bucket list’ for the next year*”, “*re-create a memorable past date*” and “*do an extreme adventure sport (e.g., skydiving, rock climbing, bungee jumping)*”. Then, participants indicated their willingness to try the activities, their expected enjoyment of the activities, and how much closer to their partners they anticipated feeling after doing the activities. Participants also indicated how novel it would be for their partners to come to them wanting to do the activities, and how novel the activities are for them. Participants were then debriefed, and given contact information for mental health services if they experienced any discomfort or negative emotions as a result of the study.

## Results

First, I examined participants’ ratings of novelty for the 5 activities. For the question “*How novel would it be for you to do this activity?*”, the average rating was 5.12 ( $SD = 1.30$ ). For “*How novel would it be if your partner wanted to do this activity with you?*”, the average rating was 5.23 ( $SD = 1.25$ ). There was no significant difference between the two means,  $t(197) = 1.57, p = .118$ . The two ratings were highly positively correlated,  $r(198) = .83, p < .001$ .

I then regressed each of the dependent variables onto the main effects on centered promotion focus, prevention focus (as a control), and condition (manipulated relationship quality, high or low) in the first step and the two-way interaction of regulatory focus and condition on the second step of a hierarchical regression analysis. For the continuous variable of promotion focus, simple effects were calculated at one standard deviation above and below the mean. Promotion focus and prevention focus were weakly positively correlated,  $r(198) = .19, p = .009$ .

For participants’ willingness to try the novel activities, there was no main effect of condition,  $b = -.18, t(192) = -1.19, p = .235$ . There was a significant main effect of promotion focus such that those with

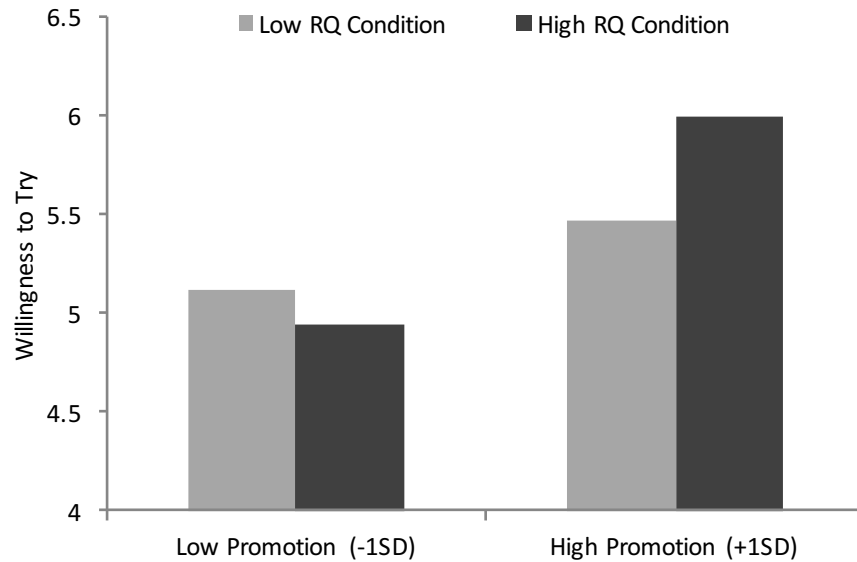
stronger promotion focus were more willing to try the activities than those with weaker promotion focus,  $b = .51$ ,  $t(192) = 4.28$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ . As well, there was a significant interaction of promotion focus and condition,  $b = -.34$ ,  $t(192) = -2.19$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .030$ . Examining the simple effects revealed that for those in the high relationship quality condition, those with stronger promotion focus were significantly more willing to try the activities than those with weaker promotion focus,  $b = .51$ ,  $t(192) = 4.28$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ . For those in the low relationship quality condition, there was a marginally significant effect of promotion focus where those who were more strongly promotion-focused were more willing to try the activities than those with a weaker promotion focus,  $b = .17$ ,  $t(192) = 1.72$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $p = .087$ . Among those with stronger promotion focus, there was a significant difference in willingness between the conditions such that those in the low relationship quality condition were less willing to try the activities than those in the high relationship quality condition,  $b = -.53$ ,  $t(192) = -2.38$ ,  $SE = .22$ ,  $p = .018$ . Among those with a weaker promotion focus, there was no significant difference in willingness between the two conditions,  $b = .17$ ,  $t(192) = .76$ ,  $p = .449$  (See Figure 7).

Examining participants' anticipated enjoyment and closeness for the activities, there were no main effects of condition,  $b = -.06$ ,  $t(192) = -.39$ ,  $p = .700$  and  $b = -.09$ ,  $t(192) = -.53$ ,  $p = .595$ , respectively. There were also no significant interactions of promotion focus and condition for anticipated enjoyment or closeness,  $b = -.23$ ,  $t(192) = -1.48$ ,  $p = .140$  and  $b = -.13$ ,  $t(192) = -.75$ ,  $p = .454$ , respectively. For both of these variables, there were significant main effects of promotion focus such that those with a greater promotion focus predicted greater expected enjoyment of the activities,  $b = .43$ ,  $t(192) = 3.63$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ , and greater anticipated closeness,  $b = .29$ ,  $t(192) = 2.26$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $p = .025$ , compared to those with a weaker promotion focus.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I again tested the same interactions including relationship length as a possible covariate. The results of this analysis remained consistent with the analyses above; for willingness, the interaction of condition and relationship quality was marginally significant,  $b = -.28$ ,  $t(186) = -1.87$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .063$ . For enjoyment, the interaction was not significant,  $b = -.17$ ,  $t(186) = -1.12$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p = .266$ , and for closeness, the interaction was not significant,  $b = -.07$ ,  $t(186) = -.43$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $p = .665$ .





*Figure 7.* The interaction of promotion focus and manipulated relationship quality predicting participants' willingness to try 5 highly novel activities with their romantic partners in Study 3.

## Discussion

As expected, relationship quality and promotion focus had an interaction predicting willingness where those who were highly promotion-focused and in the high relationship quality condition were the most willing to try the activities. For those in the low quality relationship condition, a stronger promotion focus increased willingness compared to those with a weaker promotion focus. This supports the hypothesis that the context of the relationship can impact one's usual regulatory focus tendencies; promotion-focused individuals are less willing than one would expect when the relationship is seen as having less potential to create a rewarding situation. Contrary to my hypothesis, however, those in the low relationship quality condition were not less willing to try the novel activities than those in the high relationship quality condition.

## General Discussion

Regulatory focus orientation dictates the types of goals people tend to pursue in all aspects of their lives. In the present studies, I examined whether promotion focus specifically would predict people's

willingness to pursue novel activities with their relationship partners, and whether their feelings about the relationship would affect this motivation. Study 1 demonstrated that an increase in promotion focus strength meant a marginal increase in willingness to try highly novel activities for those in higher quality relationships, but a significant *decrease* in willingness for those in low quality relationships. In other words, when the context for their goal pursuit was one of less certainty, their usual drive for growth and advancement was reversed and instead they were even less willing to try the activities than those with a weaker promotion focus. This same pattern was seen for their expected enjoyment and anticipated closeness following the activities; those who were highly promotion-focused expected to enjoy the activity less and feel less close to their partner when their relationship quality was lower, compared to higher.

Study 2 found that those in higher quality relationships were more willing to try the activities than those in lower quality relationships, regardless of whether they were induced to feel more prevention-focused or promotion-focused. However, for anticipated closeness, those who were in the promotion-focused condition anticipated feeling less close to their partners when they had lower relationship quality as opposed to higher relationship quality. Study 3 demonstrated that when manipulating relationship quality, those in the high relationship quality condition were overall more willing to try the activities than those in the low relationship quality condition, but that a stronger promotion focus predicted greater willingness to try novel activities only when relationship quality was high.

These studies demonstrated the context-dependency of regulatory focus orientation. While the literature on regulatory focus would suggest that promotion-focused individuals should be more willing overall to pursue opportunities for relational growth (e.g., via self-expanding activities), it appears that this drive is only pursued when their overall feelings toward the relationship suggest that these efforts would be worthwhile. If highly promotion-focused individuals view their relationship as lower quality, their expected levels of willingness are diminished. It appears that relationship quality is a powerful determinant of people's willingness to try the activities; in all three of the studies, relationship quality had an influence either directly on participants' willingness or through an interaction with promotion focus,

suggesting that context cannot be ignored when it comes to considering promotion-focused individuals' goal pursuit efforts. It is possible that promotion-focused individuals only see their relationships as opportunities for self-expansion when they feel positively about the relationship; if the relationship is of lower quality, they may choose to seek opportunities for self-expansion outside the relationship instead. This could be addressed in future studies by providing participants with the option to pursue novel activities both within and outside of their romantic relationship; I would expect that those who are highly promotion-focused would be less willing to try novel activities with their partner when their relationship quality was low compared to high, and would therefore choose to participate in a self-expanding activity that does not involve their partner over one that does.

Another limitation of the above studies is that factors influencing participants' ability to complete the hypothetical tasks were not addressed. We did not inquire about participants' household income, parental status, or physical abilities in the studies, and so we were unable to control for these factors in our analyses. It is possible that some individuals would be financially or physically unable to complete some of the activities that were presented. While the activities were presented as hypothetical, it could be that some participants who have a limited ability to complete the tasks would have taken that into consideration when completing the measures, and therefore some may have expressed this limitation through a reduced willingness to try the activities, or lesser expected enjoyment of the activities.

In future studies, it would be beneficial to examine not only hypothetical novel activities, but to present those in relationships with the opportunity to complete an activity in real life. This would allow us to examine not only the accuracy of participants' predictions for the activity, but to examine how they react to the activity depending on their regulatory focus orientation and relationship quality. Given that people tend to overestimate the intensity of emotion they will experience from a future task (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003), it is possible that those who expected to enjoy the activity greatly and were highly willing to do it would have a less positive experience than expected when they actually complete the activity. The opposite effect could be seen as well – some may have a less negative experience with the activities than they anticipated having in their predictions. It could be that those who are highly promotion-focused will

truly enjoy the activity less if their relationship is of lower quality compared to high, or it could be that it is only in people's predictions that these differences emerge but actual participation in a novel activity is enjoyable and beneficial to everyone. This study, in combination with the aforementioned studies, will create a fuller picture of the processes behind the interaction of regulatory focus and the influence of the context in which goals are pursued.

Table 1

*Participants' novelty ratings for the 32 activities presented in Study 1.*

<b><u>Activity</u></b>	<b><u>Mean</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>
Start watching a new television series	4.09	2.11
Join a public speaking club (e.g. toastmasters club)	4.29	2.26
Go shopping at a flea market or second-hand store	4.48	2.01
Start a gardening/landscaping project	4.50	2.03
Take a language class	4.50	1.94
Join a local sports team	4.56	1.85
Join a reading group/book club	4.58	1.89
Work toward a new fitness goal	4.59	1.94
Join a performance group (e.g. theatre group, improv comedy)	4.60	2.20
Try a new restaurant	4.66	1.98
Start a daily morning or evening walk routine	4.75	1.91
Go sing at a karaoke bar	4.75	2.03
Commit to weekly volunteering at a local charity or organization	4.80	1.86
Start a weekly "double date" night with another couple	4.83	1.74
Go see a concert	4.85	1.96
Start a home renovation project	4.88	1.93
Look at pictures from the beginning of your relationship	4.91	1.86
Go to an amusement park	4.94	1.95
Start a craft hobby (e.g. painting, woodworking)	5.00	1.59
Make a standing reservation at a restaurant for every week	5.01	1.78
Join an exercise class (e.g. dance, yoga)	5.01	1.79
Take an art class (e.g. painting, pottery)	5.04	1.88

Plan a weekend getaway	5.19	1.82
Plan a romantic, sensual date night	5.20	1.73
Re-create a memorable past date	5.20	1.85
Go stargazing at night	5.22	1.78
Do a high-adrenaline activity (e.g. skydiving, bungee jumping)	5.28	2.04
Try an extreme sport (e.g. rock climbing, scuba diving, surfing)	5.37	1.88
Develop a "bucket list" for the next year	5.41	1.44
Do a daring sexual activity (e.g. sex in a public place, skinny dipping)	5.47	1.77
Try an adventurous activity (e.g. zip-lining, white-water rafting)	5.55	1.70
Plan a trip abroad to an exotic country	5.76	1.58

Table 2

*Correlations between the dependent variables of novelty, willingness, and anticipated enjoyment and closeness for all 32 activities (N = 110) and for the 5 highly novel activities (N = 108), and the predictors promotion focus, prevention focus, relationship quality, and IOS in Study 1.*

	Novel (32)	Willing (32)	Enjoy (32)	Closer (32)	Novel (5)	Willing (5)	Enjoy (5)	Closer (5)	Prom- otion	Prev- ention	RQ	IOS
Novel (32)	–											
Willing (32)	.554**	–										
Enjoy (32)	.609**	.934**	–									
Closer (32)	.611**	.882**	.931**	–								
Novel (5)	.790**	.536**	.550**	.543**	–							
Willing (5)	.329**	.819**	.742**	.680**	.534**	–						
Enjoy (5)	.389**	.762**	.791**	.723**	.590**	.927**	–					
Closer (5)	.395**	.743**	.754**	.782**	.591**	.883**	.898**	–				
Prom- otion	-.079	.128	.082	.072	.083	.107	.090	.074	–			
Prev- ention	-.069	-.081	-.153	-.107	-.021	-.013	-.071	-.018	.317**	–		

	Novel (32)	Willing (32)	Enjoy (32)	Closer (32)	Novel (5)	Willing (5)	Enjoy (5)	Closer (5)	Prom- otion	Prev- ention	RQ	IOS
RQ	.244*	.444**	.484**	.454**	.264**	.370**	.389**	.360**	.322**	.003	–	
IOS	.197*	.316**	.359**	.367**	.065	.195*	.177	.202*	.196*	.057	.573**	–

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < .01$



Table 3

*Means and standard deviations for the predictor and dependent variables in Study 1.*

	Novel (32)	Willing (32)	Enjoy (32)	Closer (32)	Novel (5)	Willing (5)	Enjoy (5)	Closer (5)	Prom- otion	Prev- ention	RQ	IOS
<i>M</i>	4.88	5.15	5.01	4.95	5.48	5.63	5.55	5.56	4.91	4.31	5.84	5.07
<i>SD</i>	1.06	1.04	1.02	1.07	1.11	1.18	1.16	1.16	1.00	1.15	1.12	1.55

## Appendix A

## Your Personality

The first section of this survey is about your personality. Please read the instructions for each questionnaire carefully and use the scales provided to respond. There are no right or wrong responses, so please be as honest as you can.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965):

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please respond using the following scale.

- | 1                    | 2 | 3 | 4                                | 5 | 6 | 7                 |
|----------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|---|---|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree |   |   | Neither<br>Agree nor<br>Disagree |   |   | Strongly<br>Agree |
| _____ 1.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 2.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 3.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 4.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 5.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 6.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 7.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 8.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 9.             |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
|                      |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |
| _____ 10.            |   |   |                                  |   |   |                   |

Agreeableness (Big Five Inventory; John & Srivastava, 1999):

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who *likes to spend time with others*? Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

I am someone who...

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Tends to find fault with others
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Is helpful and unselfish with others
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Starts quarrels with others
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Has a forgiving nature
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Is generally trusting
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Can be cold and aloof
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Is sometimes rude to others
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Likes to cooperate with others

Optimism Scale (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994):

Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think "most people" would answer.

1	2	3	4	5	6	5
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
2. It's easy for me to relax.
3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
4. I'm always optimistic about my future.
5. I enjoy my friends a lot.
6. It's important for me to keep busy.
7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
8. I don't get upset too easily.
9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, Ayduk & Taylor, 2001):

This set of questions asks you HOW FREQUENTLY specific events actually occur or have occurred in your life. Please indicate your answer to each question by circling the appropriate number below it

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never or seldom			Sometimes			Very often

1. Compared to most people, are you typically unable to get what you want out of life?
2. Growing up, would you ever “cross the line” by doing things that your parents would not tolerate?
3. How often have you accomplished things that got you “psyched” to work even harder?
4. Did you get on your parents’ nerves often when you were growing up?
5. How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?
6. Growing up, did you ever act in ways that your parents thought were objectionable?
7. Do you often do well at different things that you try?
8. Not being careful enough has gotten me into trouble at times.
9. When it comes to achieving things that are important to me, I find that I do not perform as well as I ideally would like to do.
10. I feel like I have made progress toward being successful in my life.
11. I have found very few hobbies or activities in my life that capture my interest or motivate me to put effort into them

Regulatory Mode Questionnaire (Kruglanski et al., 2000):

Read each of the following statements and decide how much you agree with each according to your beliefs and experiences. Please respond according to the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I don't mind doing things even if they involve extra effort.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I never evaluate my social interactions with others after they occur.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I am a "workaholic."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I feel excited just before I am about to reach a goal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I enjoy actively doing things, more than just watching and observing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I spend a great deal of time taking inventory of my positive and negative characteristics.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I like evaluating other people's plans.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I am a "doer."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I often compare myself with other people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I don't spend much time thinking about ways others could improve themselves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I often critique work done by myself and others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I believe one should never engage in leisure activities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. When I finish one project, I often wait awhile before getting started on a new one.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I have never been late for work or for an appointment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I often feel that I am being evaluated by others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. When I decide to do something, I can't wait to get started.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I always make the right decision.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I never find faults with someone I like.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I am a critical person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I am very self-critical and self-conscious about what I am saying.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. By the time I accomplish a task, I already have the next one in mind.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I often think that other people's choices and decisions are wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I have never hurt another person's feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I am a "low energy" person.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. Most of the time my thoughts are occupied with the task that I wish to accomplish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I feel that there is no such thing as an honest mistake.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I rarely analyze the conversations I have had with others after they occur.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. When I get started on something, I usually persevere until I finish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I am a "go-getter."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. When I meet a new person I usually evaluate how well he/she is doing on various dimensions (e.g., looks, achievements, social status, clothes).

## Appendix B

## Your Romantic Relationship

In this part of the survey, we are interested in learning about your current romantic relationship. Please answer the questions as honestly as you can. As always, your responses are completely confidential.

Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000):

Please answer the following questions about your current romantic relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Extremely

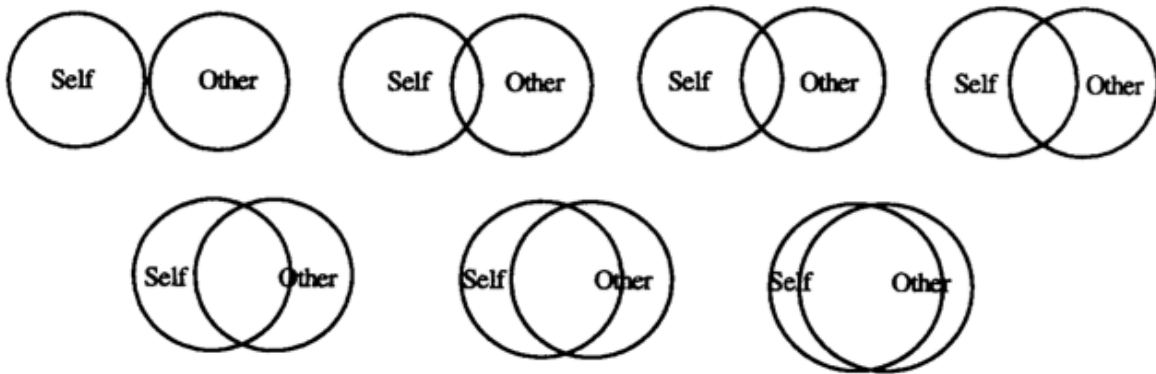
1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?
2. How content are you with your relationship?
3. How happy are you with your relationship?
4. How committed are you to your relationship?
5. How dedicated are you to your relationship?
6. How devoted are you to your relationship?
7. How intimate is your relationship?
8. How close is your relationship?
9. How connected are you to your partner?
10. How much do you trust your partner?
11. How much can you count on your partner?
12. How dependable is your partner?
13. How passionate is your relationship?
14. How lustful is your relationship?



15. How sexually intense is your relationship?
16. How much do you love your partner?
17. How much do you adore your partner?
18. How much do you cherish your partner?

Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992):

Please indicate which of the below pictures best describes your relationship.



## Appendix C

## Relationship Activities

In this section, we are interested in understanding the activities you and your partner might do together.

On the following pages, you will be presented with a number of possible activities. **Imagine that your current partner has come to you and suggested that you participate in these activities together.**

Then, answer the following questions about that activity.

Imagine your partner comes to you and wants to...

*Plan a trip abroad to an exotic country*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			Very Much

How novel would this activity be for you?

How enjoyable would you find doing this activity with your partner?

How willing would you be to do this activity with your partner?

How much closer to your partner would you feel after doing this activity together?

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