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# Relationship Commitment as a Moderator of the Effects of Promotion Focus on the Pursuit of Change and Stability Relationship Goals

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Relationship Commitment as a Moderator of the Effects of Promotion Focus on the Pursuit of  
Change and Stability Relationship Goals

by

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Master Thesis

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## Abstract

According to regulatory focus theory, promotion-focused people should experience stronger engagement toward goals which are framed as leading to advancement. However, because situations can afford or constrain people's regulatory preference, the present research investigates how promotion-focused individuals' preference for change and advancement may be altered by the affordances offered by the broader contextual environment (i.e., their romantic relationship). I hypothesized that among participants in romantic relationships, those with a promotion focus (chronic or induced) would engage less in relationship goals when they reflected on how completing these goals would positively change their romantic relationship from its current state, compared to relationship goals that would maintain their relationship at its current state. However, I expected this to emerge only among participants low in relational commitment, as this context affords less opportunity for change-related goals to ultimately engender positive outcomes. In three experimental studies, participants nominated a relationship goal they were pursuing because it would lead to either relationship change (i.e., growth) or stability (Study 1;  $N = 192$ ) or they nominated an important relationship goal that was later framed as leading to future relationship change or stability (Study 2;  $N = 336$ , and Study 3;  $N = 199$ ), and their willingness to engage in their goal was then measured. Results supported the hypothesis and suggest that when the broader context of goal pursuit does not facilitate one's chronic regulatory aims (i.e., to achieve gains and avoid non-gains), then promotion-focused people downregulate their goal engagement despite the inherent motivational appeal of the goal itself.

Keywords: *close relationships, regulatory focus, self-regulation, goal pursuit, relationship commitment*

## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Relationship Stability and Change	2
Regulatory Focus Theory	4
Regulatory Focus in Romantic Relationships	7
Effect of Context on Goal Pursuit	11
The Influence of Relationship Commitment	13
Overview of Current Research	16
Study 1	16
Method	17
Participants	17
Procedure	18
Materials	19
Results	21
Exploratory Analyses	24
Discussion	35
Study 2	26
Method	27
Participants	27

Procedure	28
Results	29
Discussion	31
Study 3	32
Method	33
Participants	33
Procedure	34
Results	36
Discussion	38
General Discussion	40
Implications	41
Limitations	42
Future Directions	43
Tables and Figures	48
Appendix A	60
Appendix B	65
Appendix C	71
References	77

## List of Tables

Table 1: Correlations of Main Variables (Study 1)	48
Table 2: Correlations of Additional Variables (Study 1)	49
Table 3: Regression Summary Table (Study 1)	50
Table 4: Correlations of Main Variables (Study 2)	51
Table 5: Correlations of Additional Variables (Study 2)	52
Table 6: Regression Summary Table (Study 2)	53
Table 7: Correlations of Main Variables (Study 3)	54
Table 8: Correlations of Additional Variables (Study 3)	55
Table 9: Regression Summary Table (Study 3)	56

## List of Figures

Figure 1a: Chronic Promotion-Focused Participants' Goal Engagement at Low Commitment (Study 1)	57
Figure 1b: Chronic Promotion-Focused Participants' Goal Engagement at High Commitment (Study 1)	57
Figure 2a: Chronic Promotion-Focused Participants' Goal Engagement at Low Commitment (Study 2)	58
Figure 2b: Chronic Promotion-Focused Participants' Goal Engagement at High Commitment (Study 2)	58
Figure 3a: Induced Promotion and Prevention Participants' Goal Engagement at Low Commitment (Study 3)	59
Figure 3b: Induced Promotion and Prevention Participants' Goal Engagement at High Commitment (Study 3)	59

Relationship Commitment as a Moderator of the Effects of Promotion Focus on the Pursuit of  
Change and Stability Relationship Goals

Committed and satisfying interpersonal relationships are vital to psychological and physical well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Further, these relationships – particularly romantic ones – often involve relationship goals, which are aims to attain, maintain, or avoid a specific end state for their partner or the relationship (e.g., to help their partner, maintain closeness, or avoid rejection; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). At a broad level, interpersonal relationships and self-regulation – the process by which the self alters its own responses or inner states in a goal-directed manner (see Baumeister & Vohs, 2007) – reciprocally influence each other (Fitzsimons, Finkel, & vanDellen, 2015; Hofmann, Finkel, & Fitzsimons, 2015). Specifically, people engage in various goal pursuits to establish and maintain good quality relationships, and their relationships shape the way they self-regulate and pursue goals both inside and outside of their relationship (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). Correspondingly, people’s chronic motivational orientations should affect the manner in which people pursue relational goals (Molden & Winterheld, 2013). However, despite the growing literature on self-regulated goal pursuit in romantic relationships (e.g., Fitzsimons et al., 2015; Hofmann et al., 2015), there are very few studies that specifically look at how these individual motivational orientations shape goal pursuit within relationships. The current research examines how relationship commitment and regulatory focus orientations (Higgins, 1997) – specific ways in which people are motivated – influence the allocation of self-regulatory resources to two fundamental, and somewhat conflicting, goals in romantic relationships: the goal to pursue relational security (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and the goal to foster continual relational growth (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000).



### **Relationship Stability and Change**

Relationship stability is critical to maintaining romantic relationships, and some people engage in self-regulatory efforts specifically to maintain this stability (e.g., setting aside more alone time despite busy schedules). Relationship *stability* can be conceptualized by feeling secure in one's relationships with regards to feelings of intimacy, interdependence, and trust. Feeling secure or stable in one's relationship fulfills one's fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which contributes to many positive psychological and physical outcomes. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), forming this sense of security and trust in someone early on in life (i.e., secure attachment bonds) is fundamental and helps to foster successful relationships and personal well-being throughout the lifespan (e.g., Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Feeney, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Furthermore, there are several studies on risk regulation theory which speak to the negative outcomes that can arise from perceived threats to relationship security and stability, particularly among low self-esteem people who are more prone to doubt how their partner regards them (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Taken together, the presence of security and absence of insecurity is critical for maintaining high quality, long-lasting relationships.

However, maintaining stability is not the only means by which people pursue relational well-being. People are often motivated to pursue goals that foster positive changes or advancement in their relationship (e.g., going on a trip somewhere new together). That is, people strive to enhance or grow their relationship by deepening their connection with their partner, or perhaps by generating excitement in their relationship if they perceive that passion has plateaued or waned over time. In the current research, I refer to efforts to pursue positive growth, advancement, or progress within a romantic relationship as "*change*" related goals. In recent

years, a growing body of research has supported how change and growth-related qualities can enhance relationship well-being (e.g., Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Aron et al., 2000, Cortes, Scholer, Kohler, & Cavallo, 2017; Harasymchuk, Cloutier, Peetz, & Lebreton, 2016; MacDonald, Locke, Spielmann, & Joel, 2013; Spielmann, MacDonald, & Tackett, 2012). But, compared to relationship stability, there has historically been much less attention placed on the important role of growth and change on positive relationship outcomes.

One benefit of pursuing or experiencing change is that it fosters positive affect and physiological arousal, akin to that which is experienced when a relationship is new and rapidly developing (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 1998). As a relationship progresses, however, additional growth and novel development is often slowed or nonexistent and this can lead to boredom or a loss of enjoyment in the relationship (Harasymchuk et al., 2016). Thus, many relationships can benefit from pursuing change and growth. If one or both partners are interested in relationship advancement, such as through engaging in collective self-expanding activities (i.e., experiences that develop the self because they are novel, challenging, or arousing), research has shown that this self-expansion, and the positive outcomes attributed to it, will remain associated with the relationship and lead to greater success (Aron et al., 2000).

Lewandowski and Ackerman (2006) investigated how the fulfillment of self-expansion needs, or lack thereof, might predict infidelity in romantic relationships. They asked dating couples to report their current feelings and future predictions of growth and self-expansion within their relationship, their sense of safety and security with their partner, and to complete measures of susceptibility to infidelity. Their results demonstrated that among people who felt their relationship did not sufficiently fulfill their need for self-expansion, there were increased intentions of being unfaithful to their partner in the near future. These results held even when

controlling for feelings of security within the current relationship. This suggests that, with regards to certain relationship outcomes such as infidelity, self-expansion needs are important to relationship longevity above and beyond needs for safety. These findings support the importance of perceptions of advancement in one's relationship both to avoid negative relationship outcomes and also to enhance positive ones.

Although both relationship stability and change are important in fostering positive romantic outcomes, there may be important individual differences in whether people prioritize relationship stability goals, or instead devote their regulatory resources to pursuing goals related to change. In particular, I suggest that regulatory focus orientations (Higgins, 1997) play an important role in shaping people's relative prioritization of change and stability.

### **Regulatory Focus Theory**

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) posits that there are two chronic motivational preferences for how people pursue goals. Promotion-focused individuals, for example, are sensitive to the presence or absence of positive outcomes (i.e., gains or non-gains, respectively; Higgins, 1997; Molden, Lee, & Higgins, 2008), and eagerly pursue advances from their current goal state (Liberman, Idson, Camacho, & Higgins, 1999; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). Promotion-focused people largely aim towards hopes and aspirations and seek to capitalize on opportunities that will bring them closer to the ideals they hope to attain. In contrast, prevention-focused individuals are sensitive to the presence or absence of negative outcomes (i.e., losses or non-losses, respectively; Higgins, 1997; Molden et al., 2008), and vigilantly strive to maintain their current goal state (Liberman et al., 1999). That is, they seek to avoid any decline from the current state and will try to uphold responsibilities and obligations that are necessary to ensure security and stability.

Coinciding with their desire to advance from their current state, promotion-focused individuals have a motivational preference for positive change, compared to stability, and view attaining these states as rewarding (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Liberman et al., 1999). That is, these individuals strategically prefer growth-oriented goals over stability-oriented goals, use change as a way to fulfill their desire to advance, and reap the rewards of doing so. Prevention-focused individuals, on the other hand, have a motivational preference for stability over change, and thus want to maintain the status quo (i.e., stability) and are typically less concerned with such advancement (Crowe & Higgins, 1997)<sup>1</sup>.

In one investigation acutely relevant to the present research, Liberman and colleagues (1999) examined choices between change and stability among people with chronic or induced promotion and prevention focus by looking at task substitution (i.e., choosing between resuming an uninterrupted activity and doing a substitute activity) and endowment (i.e., choosing between a possessed object and an alternative object). In Study 1 and 2, individuals with a promotion focus were more likely than prevention-focused participants to prefer changing to a new task following an interruption, rather than resuming the original task, consistent with their focus on gains, advancement, and change. Participants with a prevention focus, on the other hand, were more inclined to resume an interrupted task rather than to switch to another task, consistent with their felt obligation and preference for maintenance and stability. Similarly, in Studies 3-5, individuals with a promotion focus were more willing to exchange a currently possessed object

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that promotion and prevention refer to the motivational state of an individual, whether the source of that current state is a chronic predisposition or a situation that induces that state. In the present research, I am examining the independent contribution of the two regulatory focus types, so all of the analyses in Study 1 and 2 examine chronic promotion and prevention foci separately, with one controlling for the other. In Study 3, induced promotion and prevention states are compared directly.

for a new one, whereas prevention-focused participants were more reluctant to exchange currently possessed objects (i.e., endowment) or previously possessed objects. Once again, these results supported that a promotion focus was associated with a greater willingness for change whereas prevention focus was associated with a greater interest in stability. Promotion-focused people were seemingly more inclined to consider the relative merits of old and new alternatives during their goal pursuits. By demonstrating the greater willingness to change, these results may suggest that promotion-focused people strategically allocate their regulatory resources towards opportunities they believe offer more advancement opportunity.

Shah and colleagues (1998) demonstrated that participants enhanced their performance when the incentive of a task matched their regulatory focus type, compared to when the incentive did not match. Specifically, promotion-focused participants experienced greater motivation towards and performance on anagram tasks when they were told that they would gain extra money or points (i.e., gains or non-gains). Likewise, there was increased performance among prevention-focused people who were told that they would lose money or points (i.e., losses or non-losses). This did not occur when the incentive did not match the participant's regulatory focus type. Subsequent research has also supported that promotion focus also fosters greater persistence on tasks in which success promises growth (vs. stability) rewards (Brodscholl, Kober, & Higgins, 2007; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003; Liberman et al., 1999; see Molden et al., 2008). These findings contributed to my decision to use goal engagement as my main dependent variable.

However, because promotion focus supports a greater inclination towards change than prevention focus in what goals are adopted and sustained, it is possible that even important goals could be abandoned by promotion-focused people when success appears unlikely or when

setbacks are encountered (Lieberman et al., 1999; Shah & Higgins, 1997). Promotion-focused people ultimately want to optimize the likelihood that they will receive rewards (Finkel, Molden, Johnson, & Eastwick, 2009) which may lead them to look to the context which they are in to gauge the likelihood of success, and its value. In other words, if the reward is less likely or less appealing, promotion-focused people may be less willing to continue pursuing the goal even if it is consistent with their regulatory aims.

### **Regulatory Focus in Romantic Relationships**

Regulatory focus type and individuals' perceptions of their relationship and partner have jointly influenced how individuals behave in various relationship contexts. For example, when deciding to forgive close others for their transgressions, trusting their relationship partner more strongly predicted forgiveness among promotion-focused individuals, whereas commitment to their partner more strongly predicted forgiveness among prevention-focused individuals (Molden & Finkel, 2010). Recent research has also found that a relationship that is viewed as growing and advancing is more satisfying for highly promotion-focused people compared to when their relationship is viewed as stable (Cortes et al., 2017). This supports the idea that promotion-focused individuals are sensitive to the presence or absence of growth and advancement, and prefer to see these outcomes in their romantic relationships compared to prevention-focused individuals.

Consistent with the importance they place on opportunities for advancement, promotion-focused individuals have been shown to attend more closely to romantic alternatives, evaluate them more positively, and pursue them more vigorously than do prevention-focused individuals. Finkel and his colleagues (2009) found this to emerge among not only among promotion-focused individuals who were romantically unattached, but also among those who were romantically

involved with a partner. Although this pattern was similar to that of less committed partners attending more to romantic alternatives (compared to more committed partners; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), Finkel and his colleagues discovered that the typical connection between commitment level and negative evaluations of romantic alternatives was weaker among promotion-focused people compared to prevention-focused people. Therefore, in the case of romantic alternatives, the promotion effect was insensitive to commitment level. Overall, this supports that promotion-focused people want to optimize their likelihood of advancement, and may perceive the romantic alternative as a greater opportunity to do so relative to their current relationship.

Although commitment level did not influence how promotion-focused individuals perceived romantic alternatives, I believe that commitment will impact how much promotion-focused people engage in relationship goal pursuit. That is, the pursuit of, or interest towards, romantic alternatives for the purpose of experiencing growth and advancement requires investing effort that is largely external to the relationship with their current romantic partner, thus making commitment less relevant. In contrast, the pursuit of goals within one's relationship requires a great deal of self-regulation and effort directed towards the partnership; therefore, feelings of commitment to their partner will be more relevant in gauging whether it is a worthwhile use of their resources. For this reason, I believe that commitment will moderate how promotion-focused people pursue their relationship goal pursuits and the rewards that the goal can afford in the current research.

Taken together, promotion and prevention focus orientations influence how individuals operate within romantic relationship contexts and what they attend to when navigating relationship experiences; I believe that romantic goal pursuit should be no exception (e.g.,

Winterheld & Simpson, 2016). For example, both partners may have the same goal of wanting a satisfying relationship, but each person will have their own way of motivating themselves to accomplish this goal based on whether they are promotion- or prevention- focused. Namely, if one partner is promotion-focused, he or she may be motivated to grow and advance the relationship and view this as the best way to be satisfied with their relationship. If the other partner is prevention-focused, though, he or she may be motivated to maintain the emotional security and stability of the relationship and view this as the best way to have a satisfying relationship (Winterheld & Simpson, 2011). The present research expands on this scenario by investigating the moderating role of goal context, which I operationalize as relationship commitment level, on how these regulatory focus orientations affect the pursuit of relationship goals.

Although there is a growing literature on self-regulated goal pursuit in romantic relationships (e.g., Fitzsimons et al., 2015; Hofmann et al., 2015) and on regulatory focus and romantic relationships, there are very few studies that specifically look at how regulatory focus shapes goal pursuit within relationships. In one investigation, Bohns and her colleagues demonstrated that complementarity among partners' regulatory focus types (i.e., the pairing of a relationship partner who is promotion-focused with a partner who is prevention-focused) can be beneficial for joint goal pursuits when there is greater goal congruence (i.e., the two partners mutually agree on goals and conceptualize the goal pursuit as a joint effort). Goal congruence was operationalized by greater self-other overlap (e.g., the degree to which they adopt their partner's interests, traits, and qualities as their own which is depicted by physically overlapping circle diagrams) among romantic partners using the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale (Aron et al., 1992). Under these conditions, when one partner is promotion-focused and the



other is prevention-focused, each person can tackle the same goal in a way that best suits their orientation (i.e., eagerly or vigilantly, respectively) which can lead to more successful joint goal pursuit (Bohns & Higgins, 2011; Bohns et al., 2013).

Correspondingly, to explore how regulatory focus influences discussions about personal goals with one's partner and support-seeking, Winterheld and Simpson (2016) brought couples into the lab and asked each partner to choose one promotion-relevant goal (e.g., an aspiration) and one prevention-relevant goal (e.g., an obligation) that he or she wanted to attain. Following four videotaped discussions of each person's two goals, individuals reported on their partner's approach tendency, responsiveness, the degree to which they felt self-efficacious with regard to the goal, and the extent to which they believed their goal could disrupt the relationship. High chronic promotion-focused people approached their partners more, perceived greater partner responsiveness, and received more support from their partner when discussing goals that were promotion-relevant and perceived as less attainable. When partners' responsiveness to promotion-relevant goals was low, though, highly promotion-focused people reported greater self-efficacy regarding these goals and mobilized their resources. High chronic prevention-focused people perceived more responsiveness when partners were less distancing during discussions of their prevention-relevant goals, and this perception reassured them that these goals are less disruptive to the relationship. The results of this study suggest that highly promotion-focused people in particular view their social environments and their partner as opportunities to be seized upon for goal advancement, especially when the motivational relevance and priority of their personal goals increase.

Although these two studies explore joint relationship goal pursuit through regulatory focus theory, they do not speak to relationship-oriented goals that are being pursued on an

individual level, or what affects the degree to which an individual engages in these important goals. The current research advances and contributes to both the regulatory focus and the romantic goal pursuit literature by demonstrating how goal engagement is not automatically enhanced by framing a goal to be consistent with an individual's regulatory aims, as one might theorize based on previous regulatory focus theory research; rather, I predict that the context in which the goal is pursued will moderate this classic effect because it provides relevant information to allow the individual to strategically regulate their resources to the most rewarding opportunities.

### **Effect of Context on Goal Pursuit**

Although individuals have a general tendency towards one focus-type over the other, everyone possesses both advancement and security needs (Molden et al., 2008). As such, regardless of one's chronic tendencies, a given circumstance or context can activate either promotion- or prevention-focused concerns (e.g., Förster, Grant, Idson, & Higgins, 2001; Shah & Higgins, 1997; Shah et al., 1998). For example, despite prevention-focused people generally being risk-averse, when the risky option offered the sole possibility of returning to the status quo, prevention motivation predicted increased risk seeking. When a more conservative option was available that offered the possibility to return to the status quo, though, prevention motivation predicted risk aversion (Scholer, Zou, Fujita, Stroessner, & Higgins, 2014). Likewise, although promotion-focused people typically make more risky decisions in their goal pursuits framed towards potential gains, if they have just experienced a large gain, promotion-focused individuals will tactically switch to more conservative decisions based on this perceived progress (Zou, Scholer, & Higgins, 2014). These findings demonstrate the ability for people to deviate from

their typical motivational preference based on the broader context to which they are in at the time.

As previously mentioned, when looking at how promotion- and prevention-focused people discussed goal pursuits with their partner, Winterheld and Simpson (2016) interpreted the participants' monitoring and consideration of their partners' reactions and amount of support to suggest that something very important is occurring. That is, they interpreted this to suggest that promotion- and prevention-focused people view their social environments (i.e., their romantic relationship) as opportunities to be seized upon for personal goal advancement, especially when the motivational relevance and priority of their goals increases (i.e., promotion-relevant or prevention-relevant).

Although it does not involve regulatory focused-goal pursuit specifically, research by Hoffmann and colleagues (2015) has shown that the nature of the relationship can influence goal pursuits such that momentary increases in relationship satisfaction can benefit everyday personal goal pursuit. Similarly, if regulatory focus can lead people to be sensitive to context, it is probable that when pursuing goals, an individual would consider the broader context in which the goal is being pursued in order to evaluate, and ideally maximize, the likelihood of successful advancement (or maintenance). That is, the individual will consider contextual factors to assess whether one is likely to make substantial goal progress in the future (see Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2010). When promotion- and prevention-focused people are gauging their likelihood of successful relationship goal pursuit, I suspect that these individuals consider what the goal pursuit is related to (i.e., their romantic relationship). Specifically, when pursuing relationship goals, there are many factors that are considered, such as how the goal affects the relationship, the expected future of the relationship, the degree to which one's partner's effort will be

required, and so on. Thus, it is possible that an individual's feelings towards his or her relationship and partner could influence how personal motivational preferences affect goal engagement. To illustrate, promotion-focused individuals tend to favour change because it is inherently rewarding to them; however, if the broader context of the relationship itself is viewed as unlikely to change and engender "rewards" or gains (e.g., Shah et al., 1998), then change-oriented goals may no longer be viewed as desirable or worthy of pursuing. For the purpose of this research, I have used feelings of relationship commitment to operationalize the context of goal pursuit.

### **The Influence of Relationship Commitment**

Relationship commitment refers to the extent to which individuals are psychologically attached to the relationship, intend for it to persist, and have a long-term orientation toward it (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). This desire or intention to maintain a given relationship is crucial to functioning in romantic relationships. Indeed, commitment is considered one of the primary predictors of relationship stability (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, 1980, 1983).

When someone is highly committed to their relationship, they tend to be psychologically invested in and psychologically dependent upon it (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998) and are more willing to sacrifice for their partner or relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). Generally, as people are more committed to their relationship, they are more relationship-motivated, and demonstrate more pro-relationship behaviour (Rusbult et al., 1994). As well, committed relationship partners tend to develop more positive illusions – excessively favourable evaluations of one's partner or relationship – compared to less committed counterparts (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). Taken together, relationship commitment has a great influence on

how people invest in and view their relationship overall which supports the impact it has on relationship goal pursuit.

Following the traditional predictions of change or stability preferences according to regulatory focus theory, promotion-focused people would experience stronger engagement toward goals which are framed as leading to future change, and prevention-focused people would experience stronger engagement toward goals which are framed as leading to future stability. But, as previously discussed, situations can afford or constrain people's regulatory preferences, and I propose that in relationship goal pursuit domains, commitment level may be one of these constraints among promotion-focused people, but not necessarily prevention-focused people. That is, commitment level is related to someone's intention to continue the relationship; therefore, a prevention-focused person may be motivated to, or even obligated to, first work towards stability to see if the relationship is able to satisfy their needs. Likewise, when high in commitment, prevention-focused people will also prefer stability, as usual, because they want to maintain the relationship and will act in ways that are consistent. Specifically, although people of either promotion or prevention focus type attend to their environment to gauge the likelihood of success, I posit that when someone is less committed to their relationship, the perceived reward of future relationship change will decline, whereas the perceived reward of future relationship stability will remain unaffected.

Although promotion-focused individuals generally prefer their relationships to be continually advancing from their current states (vs. remaining stable), I propose that if they are less committed to the relationship, then they may not want to invest unnecessary effort to pursue advancement. The context of a low commitment relationship is one that may offer less opportunity for change-related goals to ultimately engender the positive advancement outcomes

that promotion-focused people desire. Thus, when less committed to their relationship, I believe that promotion-focused people will strategically downregulate their goal engagement because they do not see their relationship is capable of changing or producing “rewards” or “gains” from their current goal state, despite the inherent motivational appeal of the goal itself. When highly committed, on the other hand, promotion-focused people should be more motivated by relationship change, as traditionally demonstrated, because they can foresee the benefits of this change and their effort paying off. Previous research has demonstrated that promotion-focused people strive to maximize opportunities for gains (e.g., Finkel et al., 2009); I argue that this is not only achieved by investing regulatory resources towards possible growth opportunities, but it also can be achieved by *not* investing these resources where success seems less likely, thereby allowing these resources to be used on other, more promising, goal pursuits.

In the following studies, I investigated how framing existing important relationship goals (as if they would promote future relationship change or stability) would influence individuals’ degree of goal engagement based on their motivational orientation. Although traditional regulatory focus theorizing would suggest a greater degree of engagement towards goals framed in a way that was in-line with their motivational preference (i.e., promotion and change-framed goals, prevention with stability-framed goals; Higgins, 2000), there are good theoretical reasons to suggest that commitment will moderate this typical relationship between regulatory focus type and change and stability. There is a reciprocal link between relationship commitment and the amount to which people invest in their relationship broadly; therefore, relationship commitment is important to consider when examining under what conditions people invest effort towards their relationship goals, and to what degree. For this reason, I wanted to explore whether the degree to which someone is committed to their relationship might alter the typical motivation

preferences (particularly for promotion-focused individuals) and how individuals invest regulatory resources into their meaningful relationship goals.

### **Overview of Current Research**

The present studies tested the hypothesis that, among participants who are lower in relationship commitment, promotion-focused participants would demonstrate weaker engagement towards change-framed goals, compared to their engagement towards stability-framed goals. Among participants who are higher in relationship commitment, on the other hand, I hypothesized that promotion-focused participants would demonstrate greater engagement towards change-framed goals, compared to engagement towards stability-framed goals, which would be in-line with previous regulatory focus research. Therefore, I speculated that the level of relationship commitment (e.g., a factor of the relationship context) may enhance or even reverse self-regulatory preferences among promotion-focused participants. I hypothesized that prevention-focused participants would not differ in their goal engagement as a function of commitment level because I suspect that these participants would retain their preference for stability-framed over change-framed goals at either level of commitment. In short, I predict that commitment level will moderate promotion-focused goal engagement, but it will not influence prevention-focused relationship goal engagement.

### **Study 1**

As an initial test of my main hypothesis, I wanted participants to self-select a goal they were pursuing in their romantic relationships that would lead to future relationship growth or stability to ensure that the goal was meaningful to them. In Study 1, participants in romantic relationships completed measures of regulatory focus and relationship commitment. They were then randomly assigned to identify a goal that they were currently working on that they believed

would foster positive change in the current state of their relationship (*change* condition) or to identify a goal that they believed would engender relationship stability (*stability* condition).

Following this, I measured the degree to which they reported willingness to engage in the pursuit of that goal.

The hypothesis for this study was that chronically promotion-focused participants who were lower in relationship commitment would demonstrate less engagement towards change-oriented relationship goals, compared to engagement in stability-oriented relationship goals. In contrast, chronically promotion-focused participants who were higher in relationship commitment were expected to demonstrate more engagement towards change-oriented goals, compared to engagement towards stability-oriented goals. Among prevention-focused participants, however, I hypothesized that they would engage more in stability-oriented goals than change-oriented goals, regardless of whether they were low or high in relationship commitment.

## **Method**

**Participants.** One hundred and ninety-eight individual participants in romantic relationships (71 male, 122 female, 5 unknown) were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants were compensated \$0.50 USD for their participation. To ensure that participants were involved in meaningful relationships, participants were required to be in their current relationship for at least three months in order to participate. Six participants (3.03%) were excluded because they were single or dating for less than three months. Therefore, the total number of participants used for analyses was 192 (69 male, 119 female, 4 other;  $M_{age} = 32.81$  years,  $SD_{age} = 10.94$ ). The mean length of the relationships was 82.48 months (6.87 years;  $SD_{length} = 89.65$ ; range = 3 – 567 months). Participants also reported their relationship status:



married (40.6%), exclusively dating (29.7%), cohabiting (16.7%), engaged (8.9%) or casually dating (4.7%). The majority of participants were White (82.7%), 5.8% were Black, 5.8% were Hispanic, 4.2% were Asian, and 0.5% were “Other”. The average duration of this online study was 10.62 minutes ( $SD = 8.57$ ).

**Procedure.** The entire study was completed online using Qualtrics Survey Software via MTurk. Participants were first presented with the consent form where they selected whether they accept or decline to participate. Participants who declined to participate were directed to the end of the study. Participants who agreed to participate completed the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ; Higgins et al., 2001)<sup>2</sup>. Following this, participants provided details about their romantic relationship (i.e., length and status) as well as completed the measures of relationship commitment (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of two goal conditions: one where they were asked to take a few moments to think of a long-term or short-term relationship goal (e.g., getting married, having children, working on communication, etc.) that they are working towards that they would like to lead to change in their relationship in some way (i.e., make it different than it is right now; *change* condition) or a goal that will keep their relationship stable in some way (i.e., the same or similar to how it is now; *stability* condition). For the complete instructions, see Appendix A. Then, participants were asked to keep their goal in mind while they completed the three-item goal engagement measure. Finally, participants filled out some

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<sup>2</sup> Participants also completed measures of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), regulatory mode (Kruglanski et al., 2000), relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998), and inclusion of other in the self (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) before the goal manipulation. These were included for exploratory purposes and did not meaningfully influence our results. As a result, they are not discussed further. For the complete measures, see Appendix A.

demographic information (i.e., age, gender, and ethnicity) before being directed to the debriefing form and compensated on their MTurk account shortly afterwards.

**Materials.**

**Regulatory focus.** To measure chronic motivational preferences, participants completed the 11-item Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (RFQ; Higgins et al., 2001), which is a well-validated (Haws, Dholakia, & Bearden, 2010) and widely used (e.g., Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Hui, Molden, & Finkel, 2013; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007) measure that assesses chronic promotion concerns ( $\alpha = .69$ ;  $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ) and prevention concerns ( $\alpha = .82$ ;  $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) by asking participants about their history with various promotion and prevention successes. This measure uses a 5-point scale from 1 (*never or seldom*) to 5 (*very often*), participants answered six promotion focus items (e.g., “I feel like I have made progress toward being successful in my life”), and five prevention focus items

(e.g., “How often did you obey rules and regulations that were established by your parents?”).

For the complete RFQ measure, and the other measures used in Study 1, see Appendix A.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

**Relationship commitment.** This 7-item scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) assessed participants’ commitment to their relationship and their current partner (e.g., “I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from

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<sup>3</sup> Pearson ( $r$ ) correlations were conducted with separate dataset of an undergraduate student sample at Wilfrid Laurier University ( $N = 1484$ ) to test associations between the Promotion and Prevention Focus subscales of the RFQ (Higgins et al., 2001) and other constructs. The analyses revealed significant positive correlations between Promotion Focus and Narcissism (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979;  $r = .21, p < .001$ ); and the five subscales of the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003): Extraversion ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ); Agreeableness ( $r = .16, p < .001$ ); Conscientiousness ( $r = .37, p < .001$ ); Neuroticism ( $r = .35, p < .001$ ); Openness to Experience ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ); and Self-esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965;  $r = .56, p < .001$ ). As well, the analyses revealed significant positive correlations between Prevention Focus and the following subscales of the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling et al., 2003): Agreeableness ( $r = .17, p < .001$ ); Conscientiousness ( $r = .24, p < .001$ ); Neuroticism ( $r = .090, p = .001$ ); and Self-esteem (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965;  $r = .12, p < .001$ ). There was a significant negative correlation between Prevention Focus and Narcissism (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979;  $r = -.16, p < .001$ ); Extraversion ( $r = -.071, p = .009$ ). Prevention was not significantly correlated with Openness to Experience ( $r = -.026, p = .339$ ).

<sup>4</sup> Lanaj, Chang, & Johnson (2012) ran weighted mean correlational analyses between Promotion and Prevention foci and the following measures. These revealed that promotion focus was positively correlated with extraversion ( $\rho = .36$ ) and behavioural activation system ( $\rho = .45$ ). Prevention focus was correlated with neuroticism ( $\rho = .21$ ) and behavioural inhibition system ( $\rho = .39$ ). With regards to personality traits, both promotion ( $\rho = .39$ ) and prevention ( $\rho = .25$ ) were positively correlated with conscientiousness. Promotion focus was positively associated with openness to experiences ( $\rho = .26$ ), agreeableness ( $\rho = .24$ ), and self-esteem ( $\rho = .27$ ). Prevention focus, on the other hand, was negatively related to self-esteem ( $\rho = -.16$ ).

<sup>5</sup> Higgins and colleagues (2001) also found that when controlling for promotion scores, higher prevention scores had a significant positive relation to “cognitive structure” (with items related to avoiding mistakes), whereas higher promotion scores (controlling for prevention scores) had no relation. Higher prevention scores also had a significant negative relation to “impulsivity” (with items related to being careless and reckless), whereas higher RFQ Promotion scores (controlling for Prevention scores) had no relation. Higher promotion scores (controlling for prevention scores), on the other hand, had a significant positive relation to both “Reward Responsiveness” and “Fun Seeking” (with items related to eagerness in pursuing things and willingness to take risks), whereas higher RFQ Prevention scores (controlling for Promotion scores) had a significant negative relation to “fun seeking” and no relation to “reward responsiveness”.

now)”). Participants responded to these items on a 7-point scale (1 = *do not agree at all*, 7 = *agree completely*;  $M = 6.25$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). The internal consistency reliability of this scale was excellent ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Goal engagement.** Three items were used to measure the participants’ feelings towards their relationship goal and their willingness to engage in this goal in the future. These items included “How important do you feel this goal is to you?” (1 = *extremely unimportant* to 7 = *extremely important*), “How motivated are you to achieve this goal?” (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much so*), and “How much time are you willing to invest in accomplishing this goal?” (1 = *none* to 7 = *a lot*). These items were aggregated to create an index of goal engagement ( $\alpha = .84$ ), consistent with prior literature (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998). As expected, participants generally reported strong engagement in the goals they identified ( $M = 6.24$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ).

## Results

Bivariate correlations were conducted among the main variables of interest (i.e., goal engagement, promotion focus, prevention focus, and relationship commitment; see Table 1) as well as the additional measures that were included for exploratory purposes (i.e., relationship length, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and assessment and locomotion modes; see Table 2). Goal engagement was significantly positively correlated with promotion focus ( $r = .15$ ), prevention focus ( $r = .19$ ) and relationship commitment ( $r = .53$ ). Promotion focus and relationship commitment were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .24$ ), as well as prevention focus and commitment ( $r = .19$ ). Promotion and prevention were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .18$ ).

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to see if promotion focus, prevention focus, relationship commitment, and goal condition (change vs stability) influenced self-reported

relationship goal engagement. Step 1 included the main effects (i.e., promotion focus, prevention focus, goal condition ( $0 = stability\ condition$ ,  $1 = change\ condition$ ), and commitment), where promotion focus, prevention focus, and commitment were mean-centred, Step 2 included the two-way interactions (i.e., promotion x goal condition, prevention x goal condition, promotion x commitment, prevention x commitment, goal condition x commitment<sup>6</sup>), and Step 3 included the three-way interactions (i.e., promotion x goal condition x commitment, prevention x goal condition x commitment)<sup>7</sup>. For clarity, regression coefficients are presented in Table 3.

The analyses revealed a significant main effect of commitment level ( $b = .39$ ,  $t(187) = 7.80$ ,  $p < .001$ ) such that the more people felt committed to their relationship, the more they reported being engaged in their relationship goal. This main effect was qualified by the hypothesized three-way promotion x goal condition x commitment interaction ( $b = .40$ ,  $t(180) = 2.39$ ,  $p = .018$ ).

I decomposed this interaction by exploring the two-way interactions between promotion focus and goal condition at low and high levels of commitment (see Figure 1a and 1b). Among those low in commitment, this two-way interaction was marginally significant ( $b = -.53$ ,  $t(180) = -1.90$ ,  $p = .059$ ). Among those high in commitment, the two-way interaction between chronic

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<sup>6</sup> The two-way interaction between promotion and prevention foci was not included in the analyses; rather, the main effects of prevention and promotion focus were controlled throughout. Entering promotion and prevention strength simultaneously into the model is a standard practice (e.g., Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997) that allows one to control for the shared variance due to individual differences. This was consistent across all analyses for Study 2 as well.

<sup>7</sup> For exploratory purposes, this same regression analysis was conducted with the mean-centered variables for relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and relationship length as covariates, to see if relationship commitment was uniquely influencing this effect. Regardless of whether the covariates were added individually or simultaneously, the three-way promotion x goal x commitment interaction remained significant (all  $ps$  between .012 and .021), consistent with when they were not included.

promotion focus and goal condition did not reach significance ( $b = .33, t(180) = 1.52, p = .131$ ). Simple slopes analyses did not reveal any significant differences; however, the pattern of slopes was in the hypothesized direction. Among less committed participants, there was no significant simple effect of goal condition ( $b = .24, t(180) = 1.15, p = .250$ ) among those who were less promotion-focused. On the other hand, strongly promotion-focused participants who were assigned to the change condition reported less goal engagement than those assigned to the stability condition but this difference did not reach significance ( $b = -.46, t(180) = -1.58, p = .116$ ).

Among participants with low relationship commitment who were assigned to the change condition, the simple slope of chronic promotion focus did not reach significance ( $b = -.15, t(180) = -1.34, p = .182$ ), indicating that promotion focus strength did not significantly influence the degree of goal engagement when the goal was associated with future relationship change. Similarly, the simple slope of chronic promotion focus among low-commitment participants assigned to the stability condition was not significant ( $b = .38, t(180) = 1.49, p = .139$ ) although the pattern was in line with my predictions. That is, as participants were more strongly promotion-focused, they reported greater willingness to engage in their goal when it was associated with future relationship stability, compared to participants who were less strongly promotion-focused, albeit not significantly.

The three-way interaction involving prevention-focused individuals was marginally significant ( $b = -.285, t(180) = -1.84, p = .067$ ; not shown). I then decomposed this interaction by exploring the two-way interactions between prevention focus and goal condition at low and high levels of commitment. Among those low in commitment, this two-way interaction did not reach conventional levels of significance ( $b = .38, t(180) = 1.59, p = .114$ ). Furthermore, among

those high in commitment, this two-way interaction was not significant ( $b = -.24$ ,  $t(180) = -1.33$ ,  $p = .185$ ), as I hypothesized. The pattern of the two-way prevention focus x goal condition interaction among those low in commitment suggests that highly prevention-focused participants reported less willingness to engage in stability-oriented goals, compared to change-oriented goals. This interaction pattern was not in-line with my expectations, but suggests that prevention focus preferences of change and stability may too be altered when the individual is lower in relationship commitment. But this interaction did not reach conventional levels of significance and, therefore, the results must be interpreted with caution.

### **Exploratory Analyses**

For exploratory purposes, I tested the three-way interaction with each item of the goal engagement composite – goal importance, goal motivation, and time investment – individually as the dependent variable. I wanted to test if this pattern was being driven by one item more than the others because the simple slopes and effects were not significant when the three items were together as the dependent variable. When goal importance was the dependent variable, the three-way promotion x goal condition x commitment interaction was significant ( $b = .45$ ,  $t(180) = 2.40$ ,  $p = .017$ ) whereas the three-way prevention x goal condition x commitment interaction was not significant ( $b = .06$ ,  $t(180) = .31$ ,  $p = .756$ ). When goal motivation was the dependent variable, the three-way promotion x goal condition x commitment interaction was marginally significant ( $b = .35$ ,  $t(180) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .086$ ) whereas the three-way prevention x goal condition x commitment interaction was significant ( $b = -.49$ ,  $t(180) = -2.54$ ,  $p = .012$ ). When time investment was the dependent variable, the three-way promotion x goal condition x commitment interaction was marginally significant ( $b = .39$ ,  $t(180) = 1.86$ ,  $p = .064$ ) whereas the three-way prevention x goal condition x commitment interaction was significant ( $b = -.43$ ,  $t(180) = -2.19$ ,  $p = .030$ ).

Overall, these exploratory analyses revealed that the promotion x goal condition x commitment three-way interaction drove the effect for goal importance (i.e., stability was perceived as more important), whereas the prevention x goal condition x commitment three-way interaction did not significantly influence goal importance. For motivation and time investment, though, the promotion three-way interaction was marginally significant, but the pattern was consistent such that there was more motivation towards stability goals than change goals. The prevention three-way interaction, on the other hand, depicted significant decreases in motivation towards and time investment in stability goals when lower in relationship commitment.

### **Study 1 Discussion**

Study 1 provided initial support for my hypothesis that relationship commitment moderates how one's chronic regulatory focus orientation influences the degree to which one engages in important romantic goals. There was a significant three-way interaction between chronic promotion focus, goal condition, and commitment level and despite the fact that the simple effects and slopes were weaker, they followed the pattern that I predicted and supported my hypothesis. Specifically, I hypothesized that when less committed to their relationship goals, promotion-focused people would not follow their typical preference for change (i.e., in the form of their relationship goal being categorized as leading to future relationship change), but rather they preferred engaging in their goal when it was categorized as leading to future relationship stability.

The marginal three-way interaction among prevention-focus, goal condition, and commitment level was in the opposite direction that I predicted; that is, among highly prevention-focused people who were less committed to their relationship, they preferred change-oriented goals slightly more than stability-oriented goals. The opposite effect emerged among



highly committed, high prevention-focused participants. However, this three-way interaction was only marginally significant so further exploration is required to determine whether commitment meaningfully influences prevention-focused people's goal engagement.

The reliability for the promotion subscale of the RFQ was on the lower end ( $\alpha = .69$ ). Four of the most cited articles using the regulatory focus questionnaire (Haws et al., 2010; Lalwani, Shrum, & Chiu, 2009; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002; Semin, Higgins, de Montes, Estourget, & Valencia, 2005) yielded promotion subscale alpha levels ranging from .55 to .81 ( $M = .64$ ,  $SD = .09$ ). Given the established validity of the RFQ and its use across many investigations of regulatory focus (e.g., Camacho et al., 2003; Cesario et al., 2004; Haws, et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2013; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007) and the fact that the promotion and prevention subscales were computed as traditionally done, I am confident that the lower reliability in this particular study is not a cause for concern.

Further, the moderately strong, positive correlation between goal engagement and relationship commitment support that commitment is an influential factor. Overall, the reported findings provide support that commitment level plays a unique role in how regulatory focus influences the pursuit of goals in romantic relationship contexts.

## Study 2

Study 1 revealed that relationship commitment level contributes to differences in self-reported engagement towards goals that people believe will lead to relationship change or stability. Study 2 aimed to replicate the three-way promotion focus x commitment x goal-frame condition pattern of data in Study 1 in a design with greater precision. Specifically, this study extends Study 1 by investigating how framing their pre-existing goal differently could influence their engagement in that important goal. Thus, instead of asking participants to select goals that

are *specifically* going to lead to change or stability, participants were asked to just nominate an important relationship goal that they are currently pursuing. I adapted the procedure in this way to increase the likelihood that participants were reflecting on their most important goal, regardless of how it will affect their relationship in terms of change or stability. As well, participants might have brought different goals to mind based on whether they were in the stability or change condition in Study 1 and, thus, the goals may have differed inadvertently between condition on dimensions other than stability vs. change. Study 2 removed this potential confound by having participants nominate their goal prior to the goal-frame manipulation. Following this, the outcome of accomplishing their goal in the future was framed as leading to future relationship change or stability.

The hypothesis for Study 2 was that among participants who are less committed to their relationship, chronically promotion-focused participants would demonstrate less engagement in their important relationship goal when it was framed as leading to future relationship change, compared to when this goal was framed as leading to future relationship stability. In contrast, among participants who are more committed to their relationship, chronically promotion-focused participants should demonstrate more engagement towards their relationship goal when it was change-framed, compared to when it was stability-framed. Further, I predicted that this moderation of commitment would not occur among prevention-focused people; that is, I hypothesized that prevention-focused participants would continue to prefer stability-framed goals over change-framed goals despite how committed they are to their relationship.

## **Method**

**Participants.** Three hundred and fifty-nine individual participants in romantic relationships (138 male, 214 female, 7 unknown) were recruited through MTurk. Participants

had to be in the current relationship for at least three months and were compensated \$0.50 USD for their participation upon completion. Twenty-three participants (6.41%) were excluded because they were single or dating for less than three months. Therefore, the total number of participants used for analyses was 336 (128 male, 206 female, 2 unknown;  $M_{age} = 34.38$  years,  $SD_{age} = 11.95$ ). The mean length of the relationships was 80.7 months (6.73 years;  $SD_{length} = 110.38$ ; range = 3-805 months). Participants also reported their relationship status: married (39.6%), exclusively dating (31.3%), cohabiting (15.5%), engaged (6.8%) or casually dating (6.8%). The majority of participants were White (83.2%), 5.7% were Black, 4.5% were Hispanic, 3.9% were Asian, and 1.2% were “Other”. The average duration of this online study was 12.46 minutes, ( $SD = 7.84$ ).

**Procedure.** The entire study was completed online using Qualtrics Survey Software via MTurk. Participants who consented to participate completed the RFQ (Higgins et al., 2001) to measure promotion ( $\alpha = .73$ ;  $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) and prevention concerns ( $\alpha = .85$ ;  $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), provided details about their romantic relationship (i.e., length and status), as well as completed the same measure of relationship commitment used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .93$ ,  $M = 6.30$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ; Rusbult et al., 1998)<sup>8</sup>.

Next, I asked participants to take a few moments to think about the most important goal they have in their romantic relationship that they are working towards accomplishing, and then write it in the provided space. It is important to note that these goals were personally relevant to the participant and were self-nominated by them, not assigned to them. Thus, for each

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<sup>8</sup> Participants also completed measures of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), regulatory mode (Kruglanski et al., 2000), relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998), and inclusion of other in the self (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) before the goal-frame manipulation. These were included for exploratory purposes and did not meaningfully influence our results. As a result, they are not discussed further. For the complete measures, see Appendix B.

participant, the goal was presumably one that they were already motivated to pursue to some degree as well as personally relevant to their current relationship, which may not have been the case if the goal was the same for every participant. The types of goals that were nominated were generally similar to Study 1, such as: getting married, making each other happy, saving up money, buying a house, having children, complimenting each other more and so on.

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two goal framing conditions. Those assigned to the *change-frame* condition were asked to think about and describe how accomplishing their relationship goal would lead to growth and new opportunities in their relationship or help them avoid missing out on these growth opportunities. Those in the *stability-frame* condition were asked to think about and describe how accomplishing their relationship goal in the future would lead to greater stability in their relationship or help them avoid instability. For the complete instructions, see Appendix B. Following this, participants were asked to keep their goal in mind while they completed the three-item goal engagement measure ( $\alpha = .88$ ,  $M = 6.34$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ). Finally, they filled out some demographic information (i.e., age, gender, and ethnicity). Participants were then directed to the debriefing form and compensated on their MTurk account shortly afterwards.

## Results

Bivariate correlations were conducted among the main variables of interest (i.e., goal engagement, promotion focus, prevention focus, and relationship commitment; see Table 4) as well as the additional variables that were measured for exploratory purposes (i.e., relationship length, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and assessment and locomotion modes; see Table 5). Goal engagement was significantly positively correlated with promotion focus ( $r = .15$ ) and relationship commitment ( $r = .42$ ); however, prevention focus and goal engagement did not

correlate significantly ( $r = .05$ ). Promotion focus and relationship commitment were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .20$ ), as well as prevention focus and commitment ( $r = .12$ ). Promotion and prevention were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .14$ ).

Using the same analytics strategy as Study 1<sup>9</sup>, the analyses revealed a significant main effect of commitment ( $b = .32, t(331) = 7.99, p < .001$ ) which suggests that as people are more committed to their relationship, they are more willing to engage in their relationship goals. Consistent with Study 1, this was qualified by the hypothesized three-way promotion x goal frame x commitment interaction ( $b = .27, t(324) = 2.11, p = .036$ ), which suggests that commitment level moderated the degree of reported goal pursuit among promotion-focused people. The regression coefficients are presented in Table 6.

I then decomposed this interaction by exploring the two-way interactions between promotion focus and goal-frame condition at low and high levels of commitment (see Figure 2a and 2b). Among those low in commitment, this two-way interaction was significant ( $b = -.40, t(324) = -2.08, p = .038$ ). Among participants who were high in commitment, the two-way interaction of chronic promotion focus and goal engagement was not significant ( $b = .17, t(324) = 0.95, p = .341$ ), as expected. Among those low in commitment with a weaker promotion focus, there was no significant simple effect of goal-frame condition ( $b = -.030, t(324) = -0.20, p = .841$ ) such that the way in which their goal was framed (i.e., as leading to future relationship change or future stability) did not influence how those participants engaged in their goal. However, as predicted, there was a significant simple effect of goal-frame condition predicted

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<sup>9</sup> As in Study 1, the mean-centered variables for relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and relationship length were entered as covariates for exploratory analyses. Regardless of whether the covariates were added individually or simultaneously, the three-way promotion x goal frame x commitment interaction remained significant, consistent with when they were not included (all  $ps$  between .030 and .042).

among those lower in relationship commitment with a strong promotion focus ( $b = -.56$ ,  $t(324) = -2.71$ ,  $p = .007$ ) such that these participants were significantly less willing to pursue change-framed goals than stability-framed goals.

Among those lower in commitment in the change condition, there was a trending simple slope of chronic promotion focus ( $b = -.23$ ,  $t(324) = -1.64$ ,  $p = .102$ ). Specifically, as hypothesized, as participants were stronger in promotion focus strength, there was a decrease in willingness to pursue their goal when it was framed as leading to future relationship change, compared to participants who were weaker in promotion focus strength, but this did not reach significance. Among less committed participants who were in the stability condition, the simple slope of chronic promotion focus did not reach significance ( $b = .17$ ,  $t(324) = 1.30$ ,  $p = .195$ ) such that promotion focus strength did not significantly influence the degree of goal engagement when the goal was framed as leading to future relationship stability. As well, the three-way interaction between prevention focus x commitment x goal frame condition did not emerge ( $b = -.034$ ,  $t(324) = -0.37$ ,  $p = 0.711$ ).

### Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 revealed a significant promotion x goal-frame condition x commitment three-way interaction, replicating the general pattern of data observed in Study 1, which provides additional support for my hypothesis that relationship commitment moderates how promotion-focused people pursue their romantic goals, but not necessarily prevention-focused people. Strongly promotion-focused people who are less committed to their relationship were significantly more willing to engage in stability-framed goals than they were for change-framed goals, as demonstrated by the simple effect of goal-frame condition.

Even though the simple slopes of promotion focus within the change condition and the stability condition at low commitment were only trending significance or non-significant, respectively, the direction of the effect was consistent with my prediction of decreased engagement towards change-framed goals. The simple effect of goal condition among highly promotion-focused participants followed the pattern that I predicted; specifically, when less committed to their relationship goals, these people would engage less in their goal when it was framed as leading to future relationship change, compared to when it was framed as leading to future relationship stability. Unlike in Study 1, though, the three-way interaction of prevention focus x commitment x goal frame condition did not emerge, which supported my prediction that prevention-focused goal engagement would not be moderated by commitment in the same way as promotion-focused engagement. Overall, the findings of Study 2 further support that commitment level plays a unique role in how promotion focus influences the pursuit of change and stability goals in romantic relationship contexts.

### **Study 3**

Next, because different regulatory focus types can be temporarily activated by situational demands (e.g., Förster et al., 2001; Shah & Higgins, 1997; Shah et al., 1998), I wanted to test the robustness of my findings and see whether or not commitment still moderated engagement towards change and stability goals when regulatory focus type was induced, rather than chronic. I sought to temporarily induce a promotion state and compare it to a non-promotion state (i.e., a prevention state). I chose prevention because it is the most common comparison condition to promotion. Further, because prevention showed no reliable effects in Study 1 or 2, I was confident that the prevention condition would be relatively neutral with regard to my variables of

interest. Overall, Study 3 used a similar study design to Study 2, except for the inclusion of a regulatory focus induction instead of the chronic measure.

The hypothesis for Study 3 was that among participants who are less committed to their relationship, those who are in the promotion focus condition would demonstrate less engagement in their important relationship goal when it was framed as leading to future relationship change, compared to when this goal was framed as leading to future relationship stability. In contrast, among participants who are more committed to their relationship, those who are in the promotion focus condition should demonstrate more engagement towards their relationship goal when it was change-framed, compared to when it was stability-framed. Among participants who are in the prevention focus condition, I hypothesize that commitment will not moderate their amount of goal engagement, such that participants who are led to feel more prevention-focused will follow the usual preference for stability-framed goals over change-framed goals regardless of whether they are high or low in relationship commitment.

## Method

**Participants.** Two hundred and six individual participants in romantic relationships (78 male, 124 female, 4 unknown) were recruited through MTurk. Participants had to be in the current relationship for at least three months and were compensated \$0.50 USD for their participation. Seven participants (3.40%) were excluded because they were single or dating for less than three months. Therefore, the total number of participants used for analyses was 199 (76 male, 120 female, 3 unknown;  $M_{age} = 34.95$  years,  $SD_{age} = 10.21$ ). The mean length of the relationships was 101.14 months (8.43 years;  $SD_{length} = 96.43$ ; range = 3-496 months). Participants reported their relationship status: 51.8% of participants were married, 19.1% were involved in an exclusive dating relationship, 15.1% were cohabitating, 9.5% were engaged, and



4.5% were casually dating their partner. The majority of participants were White (79.6%), 6.6% were Black, 6.1% were Asian, 4.1% were Hispanic, and 1.5% was “Other”. The average duration of this online study was 22.73 minutes ( $SD = 120.28$ ).

**Procedure.** The entire study was completed online using Qualtrics Survey Software via MTurk. Participants who agreed to participate provided details about their romantic relationship (i.e., length and status) as well as completed the measure of relationship commitment ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $M = 6.30$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ; Rusbult et al., 1998)<sup>10</sup>. Next, I asked participants to take a few moments to think about the most important goal they have in their romantic relationship that they are working towards accomplishing, and then write it in the provided space. Once again, these goals were personally relevant to the participant and were self-nominated by them, not assigned to them. The goals that were nominated were similar to the previous studies, such as: spending more time together, getting married, saving up money, paying off debts, having children, being more trusting.

Subsequently, participants were randomly assigned to either the promotion condition or the prevention condition to manipulate their regulatory focus type. In the promotion induction condition, participants were asked to write brief essays on their current aspirations, hopes, and ideals, and how these have changed over time since childhood. A prevention focus was induced

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<sup>10</sup> Participants also completed measures of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), regulatory mode (Kruglanski et al., 2000), relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998), and inclusion of other in the self (IOS; Aron et al., 1992) before the goal-frame manipulation. These were included for exploratory purposes and did not meaningfully influence our results. To guard against failure of random assignment, I included the RFQ (Higgins et al., 2001) to measure promotion ( $\alpha = .76$ ;  $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) and prevention concerns ( $\alpha = .84$ ;  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). An independent-samples t-test revealed that random assignment was successful because there was no significant difference among chronic scores across regulatory focus condition for both the promotion ( $t(197) = -0.69$ ,  $p = .490$ ) and the prevention foci ( $t(197) = -1.07$ ,  $p = .287$ ). As a result, they are not discussed further. For the complete measures, see Appendix C.

by asking participants in this condition to write brief essays on their current obligation, duties, and responsibilities, and how these have changed over time since childhood. This manipulation has been used in previous work and has been shown to successfully induce promotion and prevention motivational states (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994). It is noteworthy that in Study 3, promotion and prevention were directly compared to one another because they were induced states, which is conceptually different than Study 1 and 2 where promotion and prevention were continuous and thus compared at high and low levels controlling for one another. There unfortunately is not a manipulation of promotion or prevention focus at high and low levels, thus I used the most conventional regulatory focus induction. The participants in the prevention focus condition were not expected to significantly differ on goal engagement.

Following this, participants were once again randomly assigned to either the change condition or the stability condition as in Study 2. However, to test the breadth of my goal-frame manipulation, I asked participants to imagine how accomplishing this goal would influence their relationship *quality* to test if this moderation of relationship commitment still holds. That is, I speculated that their relationship commitment level may relate to the perceived quality of their relationship (i.e., less committed people may have a lower quality relationship, compared to more committed people); for this reason, the manipulation explicitly referenced how their goal will influence their relationship quality instead of just their relationship broadly. I asked participants to think about how accomplishing this relationship goal will foster change within their current relationship and enhance the quality of their relationship from its current state (*change* condition) or think about how fulfilling this relationship goal will foster stability within their current relationship and maintain the current relationship quality that they have (*stability*

condition). Parts of the instructions for this manipulation were adapted from Vasquez and Buehler's (2007) guided imagery procedure to visualize completing tasks successfully (for the complete instructions, see Appendix C). Participants were then asked to keep their goal in mind while they completed the three-item goal engagement measure ( $\alpha = .88$ ,  $M = 6.31$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Finally, they filled out some demographic information (i.e., age, gender, and ethnicity). Participants were then directed to the debriefing form and compensated on their MTurk account shortly afterwards.

## Results

Bivariate correlations were conducted among the main variables of interest (i.e., goal engagement and relationship commitment; see Table 7) as well as the additional variables that were measured for exploratory purposes (i.e., relationship length, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and assessment and locomotion modes; see Table 8)<sup>11</sup>. Goal engagement had a significantly positive correlation with relationship commitment ( $r = .64$ ).

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to see if regulatory focus condition, relationship commitment, and goal framing (i.e., as leading to change or stability) influenced self-reported relationship goal engagement. Step 1 included all of the main effects (i.e., regulatory focus ( $0 = prevention\ condition$ ,  $1 = promotion\ condition$ ), goal frame ( $0 = stability-frame\ condition$ ,  $1 = change-frame\ condition$ ), and commitment (mean-centred)), Step 2 included the two-way interactions (i.e., regulatory focus x goal frame, regulatory focus x

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<sup>11</sup> The correlations involving chronic promotion and prevention focus strength were included for supplemental purposes because they were not used in the main analyses. Goal engagement was significantly positively correlated with chronic promotion focus ( $r = .22$ ), chronic prevention focus ( $r = .17$ ). Chronic promotion focus and relationship commitment were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .38$ ), as well as chronic prevention focus and commitment ( $r = .26$ ). Promotion and prevention were significantly positively correlated ( $r = .18$ ). This was consistent with Study 1 and 2.

commitment, goal frame x commitment), and Step 3 included the three-way interaction (i.e., regulatory focus x goal frame x commitment). Goal engagement was the dependent variable<sup>12</sup>.

Consistent with Study 1 and 2, there was a significant main effect of commitment ( $b = .59, t(195) = 11.49, p < .001$ ) such that, holding all other variables constant, as commitment level increased, so did willingness to engage in relationship goals. This was once again qualified by a significant three-way regulatory focus x goal frame x commitment interaction ( $b = .75, t(191) = 3.58, p < .001$ ), as hypothesized, indicating that commitment moderated the influence of regulatory focus type on reported goal pursuit. The regression coefficients are presented in Table 9.

I then decomposed this interaction by exploring the two-way interactions between regulatory focus condition and goal-frame condition at low and high levels of commitment (see Figure 3a and 3b). Among those low in commitment, this two-way interaction was significant ( $b = -1.44, t(191) = -4.45, p < .001$ ). Among participants who were high in commitment, the regulatory focus condition and goal-frame condition two-way interaction was not significant ( $b = .20, t(191) = 0.64, p = .520$ ). There was a significant simple effect of goal-frame condition among less committed participants who were in the promotion focus condition ( $b = -.83, t(191) = -3.29, p = .001$ ) such that these participants were significantly less willing to engage in change-framed goals, compared to stability-framed goals, as I expected. There was also a significant simple effect of goal-frame condition among less committed participants assigned to the prevention focus condition ( $b = .61, t(191) = 3.01, p = .003$ ) such that, in contrast, these

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<sup>12</sup> As in Study 1 and 2, the mean-centered variables for relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and relationship length were entered as covariates for exploratory analyses. Regardless of whether the covariates were added individually or simultaneously, the three-way regulatory focus condition x goal frame x commitment interaction remained significant, consistent with when they were not included (all  $ps$  between .000 and .001).

participants were significantly more interested in pursuing change-framed goals compared to stability-framed goals.

Among less committed participants in the change condition, the simple effect of regulatory focus condition was significant ( $b = -.97, t(191) = -3.69, p < .001$ ) which revealed that promotion-focused participants were significantly less willing to engage in their goal when it was framed as leading to relationship change, compared to participants in the prevention focus condition. In contrast, there was a significant simple effect of regulatory focus condition among less committed people in the stability condition ( $b = .47, t(191) = 2.48, p = .014$ ) such that participants in the promotion focus condition were more willing to engage in their goal when it was framed as leading to relationship stability, compared to participants who were in the prevention focus condition.

### **Study 3 Discussion**

Consistent with the previous two studies, Study 3 revealed a significant three-way interaction between regulatory focus condition, commitment level, and goal-frame condition and a significant main effect of commitment level. These results provide additional support that relationship commitment moderates how regulatory focus orientation relates to the pursuit of romantic goals. As demonstrated by the simple effect of goal-frame condition among less committed participants who were in the promotion focus condition, these participants were significantly more willing to engage in stability-framed goals than they were for change-framed goals. There was also a significant simple effect of goal frame among participants who were less committed and in the prevention focus condition such that these participants were significantly more interested in pursuing change-framed goals compared to stability-framed goals. Not only was this simple effect pattern not predicted because I expected there to be little to no movement

in the prevention condition, but it was also in the opposite direction of typical prevention-focused preferences. It is possible that these participants are pursuing change-framed goals if it seems like the only way that they can regain stability, as suggested by Scholer and colleagues (2014).

There was a significant simple effect of regulatory focus such that when lower in relationship commitment, and in the promotion-focused condition, participants prefer stability goals more than participants in the prevention-focused condition people do. As well, there was a significant simple effect of regulatory focus such that when lower in relationship commitment, and in the promotion-focused condition, participants were less willing to engage in change-framed goals than were participants in the prevention focus condition. The simple effects of regulatory focus condition for high commitment participants were not significant, which was consistent with highly committed participants in the previous two studies.

Unlike the previous studies, though, there appeared to be a ceiling effect of goal engagement among highly committed participants. This effect could be partially accounted for by the goal engagement measure I created not having enough variability for highly committed people such that the end points (e.g., 1 = not at all, 7 = very much so) were not as extremely worded as they could have been; however, Study 1 and 2 appeared to have some room for variability and significance to emerge using the same measure of goal engagement. Nonetheless, it is still worth piloting the same measure with extended end points of the scale (e.g., from a 1 to 7 scale to a 1 to 9 scale) or with prompts that increase the range (e.g., instead of “a lot”, have the label for the end-point be, “I will spend all of my time working towards this goal”) to see if there is a significant difference as a result of increasing the variance.

People in the prevention focus condition were more willing to pursue change-framed goals, compared to stability-framed goals, which I did not expect. Classic regulatory focus theorizing would support that there should be a preference for change among promotion-focused participants, and a preference for stability for prevention-focused participants, but the opposite finding appears here to a significant degree.

The simple effects and slopes of the three-way interaction that I outlined earlier mostly follow the pattern that I predicted, with the exception of the significant simple effect of goal-frame condition among less-committed prevention focus condition participants. The results support my hypothesis that, when less committed to their relationship, promotion-focused people would engage less in their goal when it was framed as leading to future relationship change, compared to when it was framed as leading to future relationship stability. Overall, the findings of Study 3 further support that commitment level plays a unique role in how regulatory focus influences the pursuit of goals in romantic relationship contexts, even when regulatory focus is induced rather than chronic.

### **General Discussion**

The current research contributes to the emerging theme in relationship research that aims to connect the study of relationships with the study of the psychological processes of motivation, self-regulation, and goal pursuit (Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2010; Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Hoffman et al., 2015), specifically with regards to regulatory focus orientations and romantic goal pursuit. Across these three studies, I have consistently found that when people are highly promotion-focused, but lower in relationship commitment, they are less willing to engage in their relationship goals when framed as leading to positive relationship change. Instead, these participants report being more willing to invest their regulatory resources in their goal when it

was framed as leading to relationship stability in the future. This was true for when they nominated a goal that would lead to either relationship growth or one that would lead to relationship stability (Study 1), when their relationship goal was framed as leading to future growth or stability in their relationship (Study 2 and 3), and whether promotion focus was measured (Study 1 and 2) or manipulated (Study 3). Although Study 1 revealed non-significant simple slopes and effects when the significant three-way interaction was decomposed, it revealed a consistent pattern that was in-line with my hypothesis. Further, Study 2 and 3 revealed significant three-way interactions with more significant simple slopes and effects which supported my hypotheses.

### **Implications**

My research complements previous findings that situations can afford or constrain people's regulatory preferences (e.g., Scholer et al., 2014; Zou et al., 2014), and that promotion-focused people consider contextual factors to maximize their chances of successful goal pursuit (see Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2010; Winterheld & Simpson, 2016). My findings provide a novel contribution by demonstrating that, with regard to romantic relationship goals, promotion-focused people are not simply motivated by goals that are framed consistently with their motivational aim for change and advancement, as regulatory focus theorizing would suggest; instead, relationship commitment influences the degree to which promotion-focused people engage in stability or change relationship goals. I postulate that the context of a less-committed relationship may afford less opportunity for change-related goals to ultimately produce the positive growth outcomes that promotion-focused people desire. When highly committed, on the other hand, promotion-focused people remain motivated by relationship change, as traditionally demonstrated, presumably because they foresee the benefits of this change and the payoff of



their effort. However, the slopes among highly committed participants did not consistently reach levels of significance (see Figures 1b, 2b, and 3b).

Overall, although promotion-focused people strive to maximize opportunities for gains (e.g., Finkel et al., 2009), my findings suggest that this is not only achieved by investing regulatory resources towards these opportunities; rather, it can also be achieved by not investing these resources where growth seems less likely, thereby preserving these resources to be used on other, more promising, goal pursuits.

### **Limitations**

The first potential limitation of this package of studies is that goal engagement is solely measured via self-reported expectancies. The type of measurement that I used was suitable for capturing engagement of a wide variety of relationship goals; however, it did not necessarily capture whether or not what participants reported truly matched their behaviour. Therefore, in the future, it is worthwhile to investigate this commitment moderation with a behavioural measure of relationship goal engagement to explore the generalizability of my observed effect. Designing a behavioural measure that is consistent with these previous studies will be challenging because of the breadth of goals that participants can nominate. In the present studies, participants were able to choose whichever goal was most important to them rather than being assigned to a particular goal; therefore, a general self-report measure of goal engagement was appropriate. In addition to the different types of goals that could be nominated (e.g., financial, emotional, recreational, etc.), some goals are more short or long term than others so the behavioural measure would have to capture that variance. A potential measure could involve assigning participants a relationship goal to engage in but, because every relationship is different, it would be difficult to harness one goal that is of equal or approximate importance to all

participants. As well, not all goals would be able to be accomplished in a single lab session or a 14-day diary study, for example; therefore, a longitudinal design would potentially be required to capture this moderation of commitment on regulatory-focused relationship goal pursuit in a behavioural measure across time.

Across the studies, the group sizes of participants fell in between the suggested sizes for having sufficient power to detect small effects, so it would be worthwhile to increase the sample sizes in future studies. Specifically, in Study 1 and 3, there were 24 and 25 participants per group, which was lower than Study 2 where there were 42 participants per group. In all three studies, though, there were greater than 20 participants per group which is sufficient to detect small effects (see Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011), but they do not include 50 or more participants per group which has recently been suggested (see Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2013). However, because I was able to replicate the same pattern of results and find a significant three-way interaction of promotion focus, goal frame, and commitment level across three studies, I expect that my results would still significantly emerge when the sample size increases.

### **Future Directions**

A question that still remains is why *exactly* highly promotion-focused people prefer stability-framed goals significantly more than change-framed ones when they are less committed to their relationship. That is, what are these people experiencing or thinking when they are asked to imagine how accomplishing their relationship goal will lead to positive change in their relationship, compared to future stability? One prediction is that these people perceive that the relative effort required to pursue their goal when it is framed as leading to stability in their relationship is less than the effort required to pursue their goal when it might lead to positive change in their relationship. In other words, perhaps when less committed, promotion-focused

people are willing to put in sufficient effort to pursue stability-framed goals, but they are not willing to put in extra effort to pursue change-framed goals that may not actually be accomplished or be as rewarding, despite the goal (and therefore the effort required) being the same. This would allow highly promotion-focused people to conserve their regulatory resources for other opportunities for change and advancement rewards. But it is unclear why these people do not simply engage less, or not at all, in their relationship goals because they are less committed to their relationship. It would be worthwhile to include measures of expectancies and likelihood of success in future studies, both with regards to the accomplishment of their relationship goal, and for the perceived longevity of their relationship. As well, in a different study, I have some preliminary findings which suggest that chronically promotion-focused people who demonstrate less willing to invest effort in their important relationship goals when framed as change-oriented, compared to stability-oriented, are also less certain about their relationship. This finding provides some initial support that perceptions of the longevity of their relationship and the likelihood of receiving rewards are contributing to commitment level's influence on promotion-focused goal pursuit. Additional work involving relationship certainty will need to be conducted, though, before I can make any stronger conclusions.

Another possible explanation is that when less committed, highly promotion-focused people do not feel as secure or stable in their relationship and, therefore, they want to achieve stability before they pursue change. In other words, the change from instability to stability would still be a relative advancement from their current state. This explanation is in-line with the previous research that supports the need for stability and felt security in one's relationship (e.g., Bowlby, 1969); however, this is not an extremely likely conclusion because it is not very characteristic of a promotion-focused orientation. Unfortunately, the current research designs

cannot elucidate whether this is how less-committed, highly promotion-focused participants feel. To provide some clarification, future work could involve conducting a correlational study that captures the processes and feelings involved in the relationships of these less-committed, highly promotion-focused individuals. Asking these participants questions about whether they have investments (e.g., kids, debt, etc.) that make them want to pursue stability within their relationship, rather than leaving it, could help to provide some insight.

Another question raised by these findings is whether or not promotion-focused people have less stable romantic relationships than prevention-focused people because of their preference for advancement and change (which can lead them to notice and pursue romantic alternatives more often than prevention-focused people; Finkel et al., 2009). To my knowledge, there is no research that has looked at the stability of relationships among promotion- and prevention-focused people, and therefore that would be a future direction to perhaps help better understand why promotion-focused people may pursue stability more than change when they are less committed to their relationship.

In future work, it may be worthwhile to adapt the RFQ (Higgins et al., 2001) or the regulatory focus induction (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins et al., 1994) to reflect romantic relationship scenarios; that is, to contextually manipulate regulatory focus type in terms of the relationship. The current research, which is consistent with prior work, was focused on the functions of regulatory focus types generally within relationships rather than domain specific regulatory focus types (e.g., whether someone is more promotion-focused in workplace settings and more prevention-focused in their romantic relationships, for example). Thus, adapting these measures was not in the scope of the current research.

My main prediction moving forward is that less-committed, highly promotion-focused people are strategically downregulating, or refraining from engaging in, change-framed goals because these less-committed people may perceive their relationship as affording insufficient opportunity to fulfill promotion-focused aims (e.g., advancement). Promotion-focused individuals may minimize effort in pursuing growth within their current relationship to pursue more fruitful opportunities for growth outside their relationship (e.g., other goals, other potential relationship partners, etc.) This would coincide with previous literature supporting that promotion-focused people want to optimize the likelihood that they will receive rewards (Finkel et al., 2009), and that they persist more on tasks in which success promises rewards (see Molden et al., 2008). Further, promotion focus supports a greater flexibility in what goals are adopted and sustained, so even important goals could be abandoned when success appears unlikely or when setbacks are encountered (Lieberman et al., 1999; Shah & Higgins, 1997), which I believe is being captured in my work.

In conclusion, the present work supports the powerful influence of feelings of relationship commitment on the degree to which highly promotion-focused people engage in their relationship goals. Specifically, rather than highly promotion-focused people investing regulatory resources to their relationship simply because the goal is framed in a way that is consistent with their regulatory aims, the present research consistently supported that they attend to the context of their relationship (i.e., their relationship commitment level) to inform their goal engagement. This resulted in less-committed, highly promotion-focused participants reporting greater willingness to pursue their relationship goal when it was framed as leading to future relationship stability compared to when it was framed as leading to future change. I posit that when low in relationship commitment, promotion-focused participants downregulate their

relationship goal engagement despite the inherent motivational appeal of the goal itself when the broader context of goal pursuit does not facilitate one's chronic regulatory aims (i.e., to achieve gains and avoid non-gains). This area of research has implications for relationship quality and longevity because goal pursuit is a natural part of romantic relationships. It important to gain a better understanding of why people choose to engage, or not to engage, in their goals, even if the outcome and impact of their goal on their relationship is desirable and motivating.

## Tables and Figures

Table 1

*Correlations between goal engagement scale, chronic promotion and prevention foci subscales, and relationship commitment scale*

*(Study 1) N = 192*

	1	2	3	4	Mean (SD)
1. Goal Engagement	–				6.24 (0.87)
2. Promotion Focus (Chronic)	.15*	–			3.44 (0.65)
3. Prevention Focus (Chronic)	.19**	.18*	–		3.26 (0.84)
4. Relationship Commitment	.53**	.24**	.19**	–	6.25 (1.09)

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 2

*Correlations between goal engagement scale, chronic promotion and prevention foci subscales, relationship commitment, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and assessment and locomotion modes (Study 1) N = 192*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean (SD)
1. Goal Engagement	–									6.24 (0.87)
2. Promotion Focus (Chronic)	.15*	–								3.44 (0.65)
3. Prevention Focus (Chronic)	.19**	.18*	–							3.26 (0.84)
4. Relationship Commitment	.53**	.24**	.19**	–						6.25 (1.09)
5. Relationship Length	.22**	.15*	.10	.13	–					82.48 (89.64)
6. Relationship Satisfaction	.38**	.19**	.05	.61**	-.01	–				4.72 (1.15)
7. Self-Esteem	.20**	.70**	.18*	.22**	.19**	.26**	–			5.06 (1.19)
8. Assessment Mode	.25**	.65**	.13	.24**	.17*	.21**	.62**	–		4.90 (0.86)
9. Locomotion Mode	.06	-.10	.02	.19**	-.20**	.04	.24**	.01	–	4.51 (0.90)

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$



Table 3

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Relationship Goal Engagement (Study 1; N = 192)*

	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Promotion <sup>a</sup>	.020	0.083	0.235	.815
Prevention <sup>a</sup>	.088	0.063	1.391	.166
Commitment <sup>a</sup>	.388	0.050	7.795	< .001
Goal Condition <sup>a</sup>	-.002	0.104	-0.016	.987
Promotion × Goal Condition <sup>b</sup>	-.020	0.172	-0.115	.908
Prevention × Goal Condition <sup>b</sup>	.016	0.126	0.127	.899
Promotion × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.149	0.052	2.868	.005
Prevention × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.112	0.068	1.655	.100
Goal Condition × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.018	0.105	0.168	.866
Promotion × Goal Condition × Commitment <sup>c</sup>	.395	0.165	2.394	.018
Prevention × Goal Condition × Commitment <sup>c</sup>	-.285	0.155	-1.844	.067

*Note:* Promotion, Prevention, and Commitment were centered at their means. Goal Condition was dummy-coded (0 = stability condition; 1 = change condition).

<sup>a</sup> Error terms are based on 187 degrees of freedom. <sup>b</sup> Error terms are based on 182 degrees of freedom. <sup>c</sup> Error terms are based on 180 degrees of freedom.

Table 4

*Correlations between goal engagement scale, chronic promotion and prevention foci subscales, and relationship commitment scale*

*(Study 2) N = 336*

	1	2	3	4	Mean (SD)
1. Goal Engagement	–				6.34 (0.83)
2. Promotion Focus (Chronic)	.15*	–			3.56 (0.67)
3. Prevention Focus (Chronic)	.05	.14*	–		3.32 (0.92)
4. Relationship Commitment	.42**	.20**	.12*	–	6.30 (1.05)

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 5

*Correlations between goal engagement scale, chronic promotion and prevention foci subscales, relationship commitment, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and assessment and locomotion modes (Study 2) N = 336*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean (SD)
1. Goal Engagement	–									6.34 (0.83)
2. Promotion Focus (Chronic)	.16*	–								3.56 (0.67)
3. Prevention Focus (Chronic)	.05	.14*	–							3.32 (0.92)
4. Relationship Commitment	.42**	.20**	.12*	–						6.30 (1.05)
5. Relationship Length	.15**	.13*	.06	.26**	–					80.73 (110.38)
6. Relationship Satisfaction	.38**	.28**	.07	.64**	.16**	–				4.88 (1.14)
7. Self-Esteem	.21**	.70**	.18**	.18**	.14*	.32**	–			5.34 (1.27)
8. Assessment Mode	.34**	.59**	.00	.23**	.16**	.27**	.54**	–		4.97 (0.88)
9. Locomotion Mode	.04	-.21**	-.05	.041	-.13*	-.051	-.29**	.01	–	4.50 (0.96)

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 6

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Relationship Goal Engagement (Study 2; N = 336)*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Promotion <sup>a</sup>	.105	0.063	1.656	.099
Prevention <sup>a</sup>	.001	0.046	0.012	.991
Commitment <sup>a</sup>	.322	0.040	7.992	< .001
Goal-Frame (GF) Condition <sup>a</sup>	-.101	0.083	-1.221	.223
Promotion × GF Condition <sup>b</sup>	.104	0.064	1.620	.106
Prevention × GF Condition <sup>b</sup>	-.096	0.126	-0.762	.447
Promotion × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	-.082	0.046	-1.772	.077
Prevention × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.139	0.092	1.516	.131
GF Condition × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.104	0.081	1.286	.199
Promotion × GF Condition × Commitment <sup>c</sup>	.270	0.128	2.109	.036
Prevention × GF Condition × Commitment <sup>c</sup>	-.034	0.093	-0.371	.711

*Note:* Promotion, Prevention, and Commitment were centered at their means. Goal-Frame Condition was dummy-coded (0 = stability-frame condition; 1 = change-frame condition).

<sup>a</sup> Error terms are based on 331 degrees of freedom. <sup>b</sup> Error terms are based on 326 degrees of freedom. <sup>c</sup> Error terms are based on 324 degrees of freedom.

Table 7

*Correlations between goal engagement scale, chronic promotion and prevention foci subscales, and relationship commitment scale*

*(Study 3) N = 199*

	1	2	3	4	Mean (SD)
1. Goal Engagement	–				6.31 (1.00)
2. Promotion Focus (Chronic)	.22**	–			3.57 (0.69)
3. Prevention Focus (Chronic)	.17*	.18*	–		3.25 (0.87)
4. Relationship Commitment	.64**	.38**	.26**	–	6.30 (1.08)

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 8

*Correlations between goal engagement scale, chronic promotion and prevention foci subscales, relationship commitment, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, self-esteem, and assessment and locomotion modes (Study 3) N = 199*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean (SD)
1. Goal Engagement	–									6.31 (1.00)
2. Promotion Focus (Chronic)	.22**	–								3.57 (0.69)
3. Prevention Focus (Chronic)	.17*	.18*	–							3.25 (0.87)
4. Relationship Commitment	.64**	.38**	.26**	–						6.30 (1.08)
5. Relationship Length	.21**	.16*	.13	.18*	–					101.14 (96.43)
6. Relationship Satisfaction	.35**	.31**	.17*	.65**	.02	–				4.80 (1.16)
7. Self-Esteem	.24**	.72**	.20**	.34**	.18*	.40**	–			5.53 (1.15)
8. Assessment Mode	.30**	.60**	.01	.25**	.12	.21**	.52**	–		5.03 (0.88)
9. Locomotion Mode	-.01	-.16*	-.20**	.00	-.22*	-.02	-.28**	.03	–	4.36 (0.98)

\* $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$

Table 9

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Relationship Goal Engagement (Study 3; N = 199)*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Regulatory Focus (RF) Condition <sup>a</sup>	-.05	0.110	-0.451	.653
Commitment <sup>a</sup>	.591	0.051	11.487	< .001
Goal-Frame (GF) Condition <sup>a</sup>	.010	0.111	0.091	.928
RF Condition × GF Condition <sup>b</sup>	-.574	0.222	-2.583	.011
RF Condition × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.013	0.104	0.129	.897
GF Condition × Commitment <sup>b</sup>	.000	0.107	-0.003	.998
RF Condition × GF Condition × Commitment <sup>c</sup>	.754	0.211	3.582	< .001

*Note:* Commitment was centered at the mean. Regulatory Focus Condition was dummy-coded (0 = prevention condition; 1 = promotion condition). Goal-Frame Condition was dummy-coded (0 = stability-frame condition; 1 = change-frame condition).

<sup>a</sup> Error terms are based on 195 degrees of freedom. <sup>b</sup> Error terms are based on 192 degrees of freedom. <sup>c</sup> Error terms are based on 191 degrees of freedom.

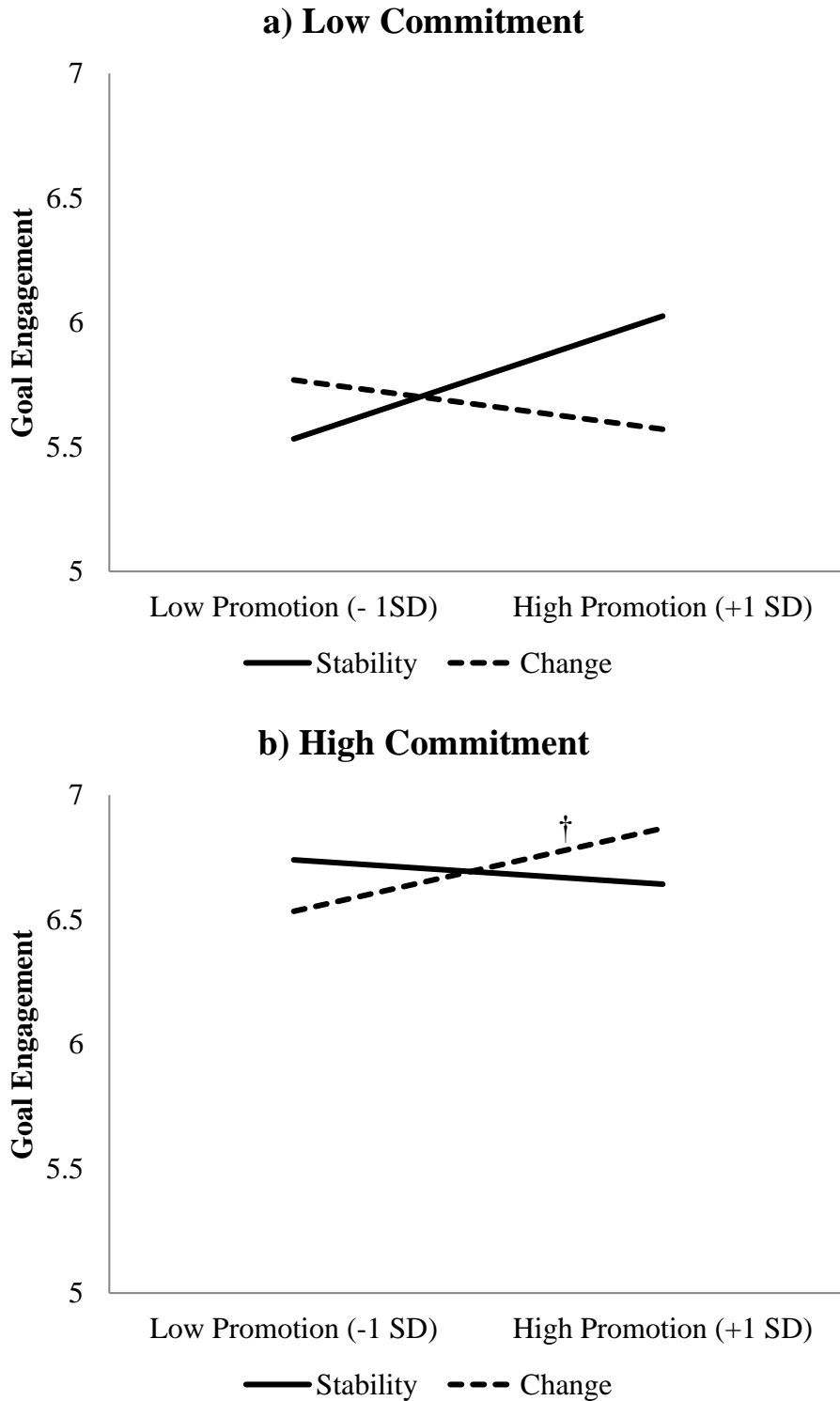


Figure 1. Goal engagement as a function of chronic promotion focus and level of relationship commitment for Study 1. Results are shown separately for (a) low commitment and (b) high commitment. The values for individuals' promotion focus level and relationship commitment level were calculated at 1 standard deviation above (high) and below (low) the means of these variables. †  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$



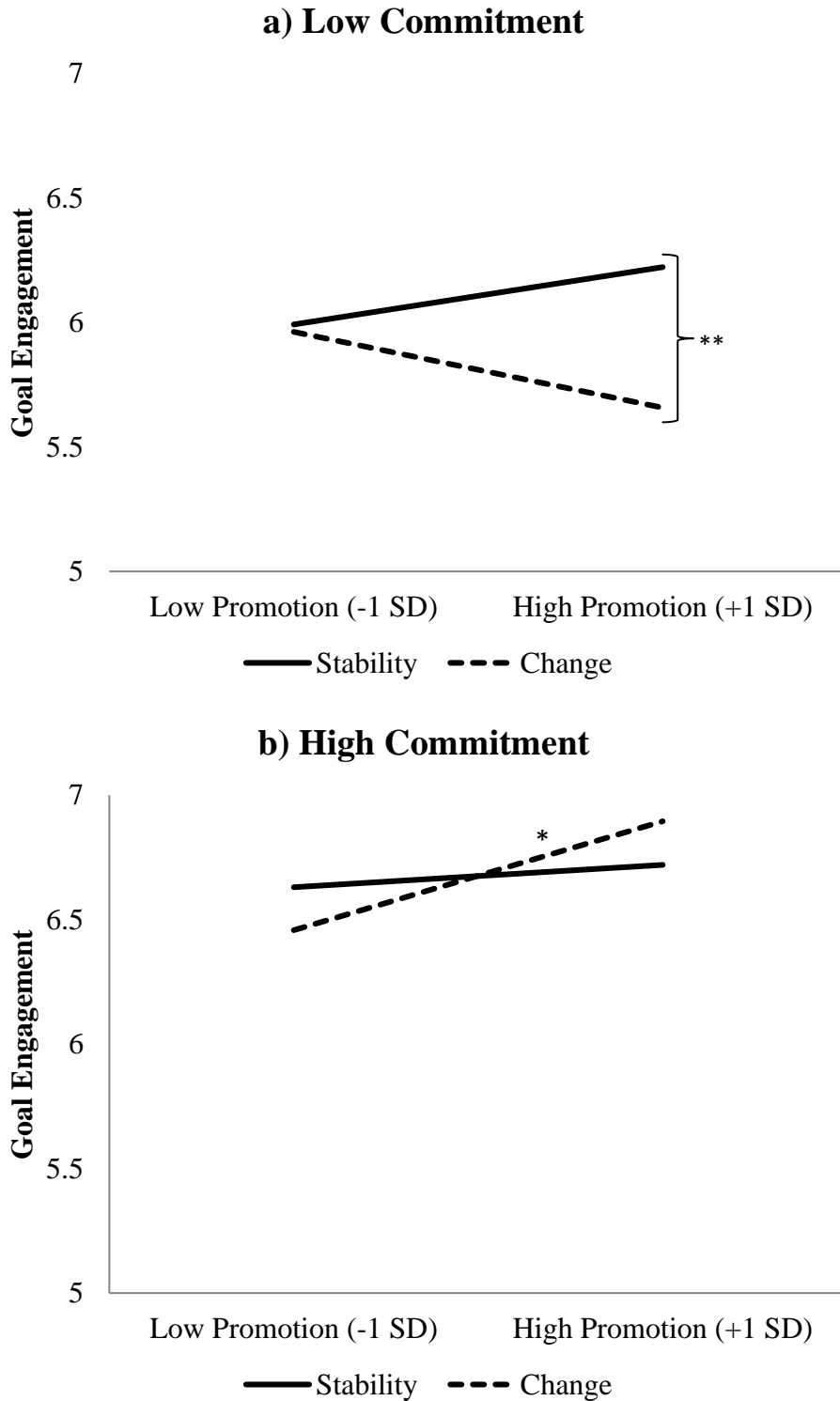


Figure 2. Goal engagement as a function of chronic promotion focus and level of relationship commitment for Study 2. Results are shown separately for (a) low commitment and (b) high commitment. The values for individuals' promotion focus level and relationship commitment level were calculated at 1 standard deviation above (high) and below (low) the means of these variables. †  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

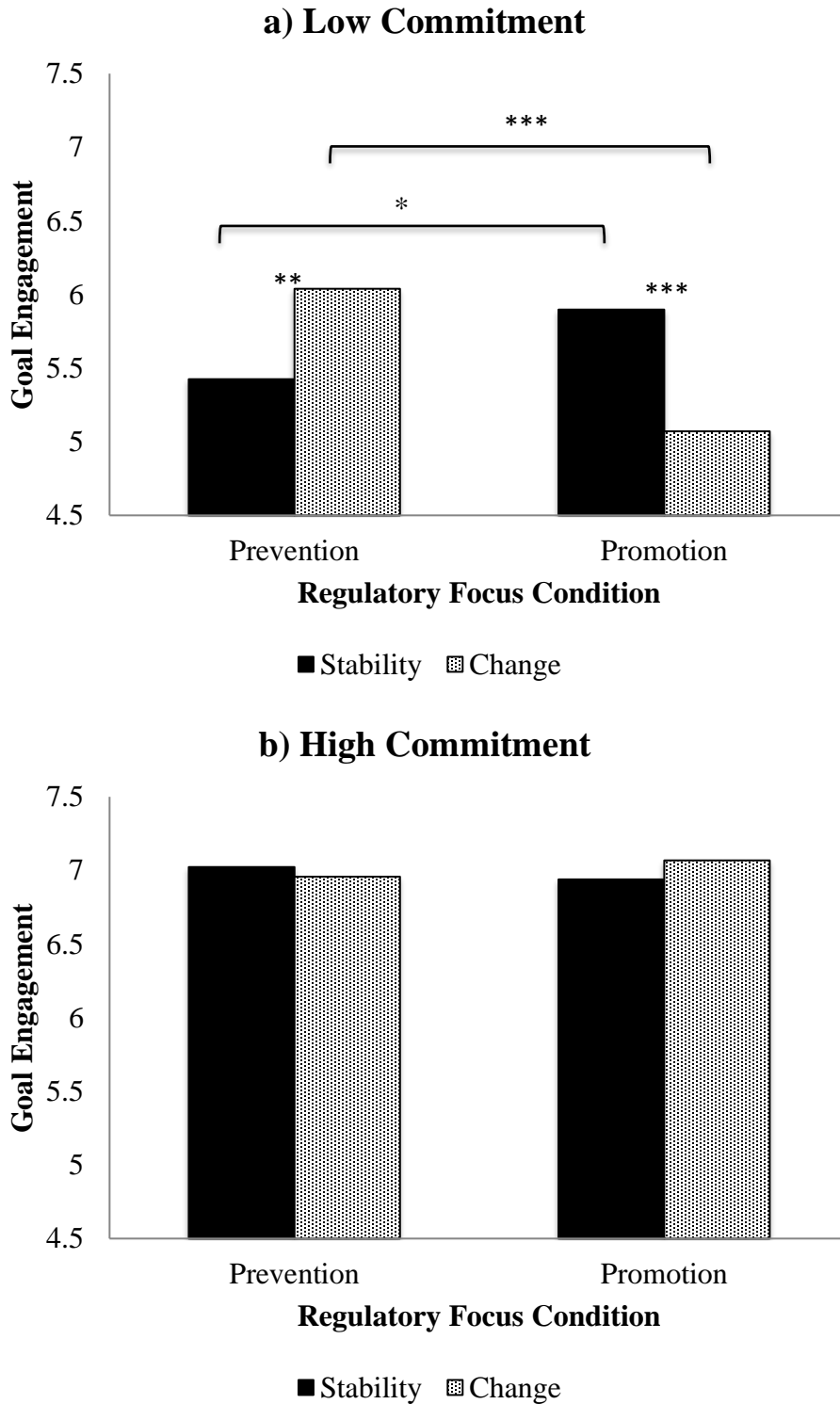


Figure 3. Goal engagement as a function of induced regulatory focus type (promotion vs. prevention) and level of relationship commitment for Study 3. Results are shown separately for (a) low commitment and (b) high commitment. The values for individuals' relationship commitment level were calculated at 1 standard deviation above (high) and below (low) the means of these variables. †  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## Appendix A

**Study 1****Self-Esteem- Rosenberg (1965)**

Please clearly indicate the answer that best represents how you feel right now. Using the 7-point scale provided below enter the appropriate number beside the question.

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

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. \*At times I think I am no good at all
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people
5. \*I feel that I do not have much to be proud of
6. \*I certainly feel useless at times
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others
8. \*I wish I could have more respect for myself
9. \*All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded.

**Chronic Regulatory Focus (Regulatory Focus Questionnaire; RFQ)- Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, Ayduk, and 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 (never or seldom) to 5 (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.

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded. Promotion focus items include: 1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11; Prevention focus items include: 2, 4, 5, 6, 8

**Regulatory Mode Questionnaire (RMQ) - Kruglanski, Thompson, Higgins, Atash, Pierro, Shah, & Spiegel, 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 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (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 or she is doing on various dimensions (e.g., looks, achievements, social status, clothes).

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded. Assessment items include: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 13, 16, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29; Locomotion items include: 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 19, 20, 22, 27, 30; There are 6 filler items: 12, 14, 17, 18, 23, 26

**Relationship Demographic Questions**

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.

Please write the initials of your romantic partner: \_\_\_\_\_  
 How long have you been in a relationship with this person? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Number of months \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- Casually dating
- Exclusively dating
- Engaged
- Cohabiting
- Married
- Single

**Commitment- Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998).**

Please use the scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Do not agree at all						Agree completely

1. I want our relationship to last a very long time.
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
3. I would feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.
4. \* It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.
5. I feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner.
6. I want our relationship to last forever.
7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded.

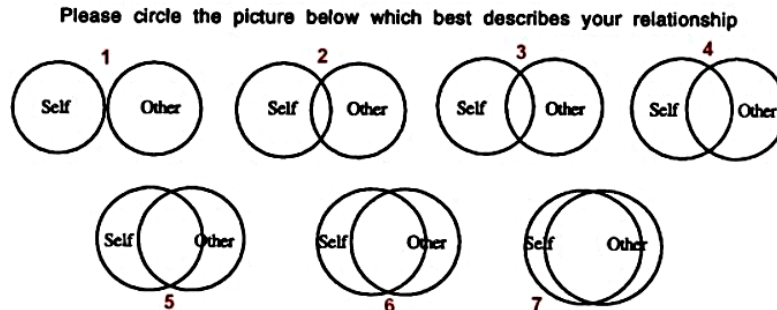
**Satisfaction- Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998)**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

1. I feel satisfied with our relationship.
2. My relationship is much better than others' relationships.

3. My relationship is close to ideal.
4. Our relationship makes me very happy.
5. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.

**Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS)- Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992)**



Please consider the images above and use the following scale to identify which picture best describes your relationship. (1 to 7)

**Goal Identification Manipulation – Change vs. Stability**

**Stability Condition**

People commonly have goals for their romantic relationships that they pursue with their partners, or by themselves.

We would like you to take a few moments to think of a long-term or short-term relationship goal you are working towards that you would like to keep your relationship stable in some way. That is, you might have a goal that you are working on that will keep your relationship the same or similar to how it is right now.

Please describe the goal below and briefly indicate how accomplishing this goal will keep your relationship stable in its current state.

**Change Condition**

People commonly have goals for their romantic relationships that they pursue with their partners, or by themselves.

We would like you to take a few moments to think of a long-term or short-term relationship goal you are working towards that you would like to change your relationship in some way. That is, you might have a goal that you are working on that will make your relationship with your current partner different than it is right now.

Please describe the goal below and briefly indicate how accomplishing this goal will change your relationship from its current state.

**Goal Engagement Measure (Dependent Variable)**

When answering the following questions, please keep in mind the following relationship goal that you previously mentioned:

How important do you feel this goal is to you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Unimportant			Somewhat Important			Extremely Important

How motivated are you to achieve this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very much so

How much time are you willing to invest in accomplishing this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
None			A Moderate Amount			A lot

### **Demographics**

Sometimes people's responses can be influenced by their age, gender and ethnicity. In order to investigate the effects that these factors might have, please answer the following items. You may decline to answer any of the following questions. All of these responses are totally confidential and will not be linked to you in any way.

Gender:

Male                       Female                       Other

Age (in years): \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnic identity? If more than one category applies, please select the one with which you most strongly identify.

- Aboriginal/Native
- Asian
- Black
- East Indian
- Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- White
- Other

## Appendix B

**Study 2****Self-Esteem- Rosenberg (1965)**

Please clearly indicate the answer that best represents how you feel right now. Using the 7-point scale provided below enter the appropriate number beside the question.

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

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. \*At times I think I am no good at all
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people
5. \*I feel that I do not have much to be proud of
6. \*I certainly feel useless at times
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others
8. \*I wish I could have more respect for myself
9. \*All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded.

**Chronic Regulatory Focus (Regulatory Focus Questionnaire; RFQ)- Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, Ayduk, and 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 (never or seldom) to 5 (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.

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded. Promotion focus items include: 1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11; Prevention focus items include: 2, 4, 5, 6, 8

**Regulatory Mode Questionnaire (RMQ) - Kruglanski, Thompson, Higgins, Atash, Pierro, Shah, & Spiegel, 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 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (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 or she is doing on various dimensions (e.g., looks, achievements, social status, clothes).

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded. Assessment items include: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 13, 16, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29; Locomotion items include: 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 19, 20, 22, 27, 30; There are 6 filler items: 12, 14, 17, 18, 23, 26

### **Relationship Demographic Questions**

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.

Please write the initials of your romantic partner: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in a relationship with this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of months \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- Casually dating
- Exclusively dating
- Engaged
- Cohabiting
- Married
- Single

### **Commitment- Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998).**

Please use the scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Do not agree at all						Agree completely

1. I want our relationship to last a very long time.
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
3. I would feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.
4. \* It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.
5. I feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner.
6. I want our relationship to last forever.
7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

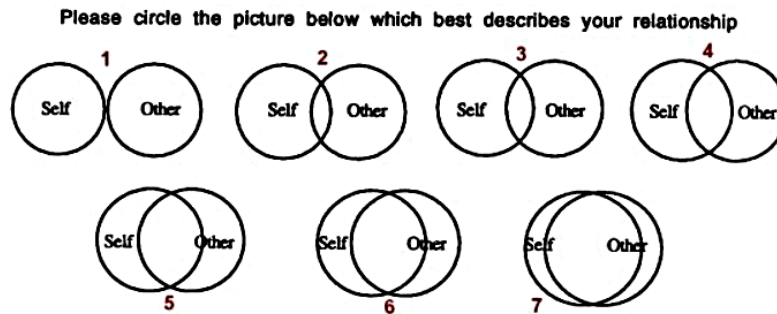
Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded.

### **Satisfaction- Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998)**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

1. I feel satisfied with our relationship.
2. My relationship is much better than others' relationships.
3. My relationship is close to ideal.
4. Our relationship makes me very happy.
5. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.

**Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS)- Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992)**



Please consider the images above and use the following scale to identify which picture best describes your relationship. (1 to 7)

**Relationship Goal Identification**

Goals are common aspects of life and romantic relationships. Please take a few moments to think about the most important goal that you have for your romantic relationship. That is, what is a personal goal that have that you are working toward for your relationship. For example, you may be trying to save money to take a vacation with your partner, you may be trying to lose weight to be more attractive for your partner, or you may be trying to do more of the household chores. Think of the most important relationship goal you have and state it in the space provided below.

**Goal Framing Manipulation – Change vs. Stability**

**Stability Condition**

Please try to picture yourself working towards, and eventually accomplishing, your relationship goal (*piped in goal identified before*) in the future. For example, you could picture the steps you are taking to accomplish the goal successfully from beginning to end.

Next, think about the consequences that achieving this goal will have on the future of your relationship with your partner. In particular, think about how accomplishing this goal will influence what your current relationship will be like 1 year after you have fulfilled this goal (relative to how your relationship is now).

Specifically, we would like you to describe one way in which achieving this goal will lead to greater stability in your relationship (e.g., maintaining your connection with your partner, ensuring your relationship continues, etc.) or how it will help you avoid instability in your relationship. Please provide a brief description in the space below.

**Change Condition**

Please try to picture yourself working towards, and eventually accomplishing, your relationship goal (*piped in goal identified before*) in the future. For example, you could picture the steps you are taking to accomplish the goal successfully from beginning to end.

Next, think about the consequences that achieving this goal will have on the future of your relationship with your partner. In particular, think about how accomplishing this goal will influence what your current relationship will be like 1 year after you have fulfilled this goal (relative to how your relationship is now).

Specifically, we would like you to describe one way in which achieving this goal may lead to new opportunities for growth or advancement in your relationship (e.g., experiencing new activities together, reaching a new milestone with your partner, etc.) or how it will help you avoid missing out on these opportunities in your relationship. Please provide a brief description in the space below.

**Goal Engagement Measure (Dependent Variable)**

When answering the following questions, please keep in mind the following relationship goal that you previously mentioned:

How important do you feel this goal is to you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Unimportant			Somewhat Important			Extremely Important

How motivated are you to achieve this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very much so

How much time are you willing to invest in accomplishing this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
None			A Moderate Amount			A lot

**Demographics**

Sometimes people's responses can be influenced by their age, gender and ethnicity. In order to investigate the effects that these factors might have, please answer the following items. You may decline to answer any of the following questions. All of these responses are totally confidential and will not be linked to you in any way.

Gender:

Male

Female

Other

Age (in years): \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnic identity? If more than one category applies, please select the one with which you most strongly identify.

- Aboriginal/Native
- Asian
- Black
- East Indian
- Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- White
- Other

## Appendix C

**Study 3****Self-Esteem- Rosenberg (1965)**

Please clearly indicate the answer that best represents how you feel right now. Using the 7-point scale provided below enter the appropriate number beside the question.

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

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. \*At times I think I am no good at all
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people
5. \*I feel that I do not have much to be proud of
6. \*I certainly feel useless at times
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others
8. \*I wish I could have more respect for myself
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Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded.

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1. \*Compared to most people, are you typically unable to get what you want out of life?
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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.

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded. Promotion focus items include: 1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11; Prevention focus items include: 2, 4, 5, 6, 8

**Regulatory Mode Questionnaire (RMQ) - Kruglanski, Thompson, Higgins, Atash, Pierro, Shah, & Spiegel, 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 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

1. I don't mind doing things even if they involve extra effort.
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9. I often compare myself with other people.
10. I don't spend much time thinking about ways others could improve themselves.
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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 or she is doing on various dimensions (e.g., looks, achievements, social status, clothes).

Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded. Assessment items include: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 13, 16, 21, 24, 25, 28, 29; Locomotion items include: 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 19, 20, 22, 27, 30; There are 6 filler items: 12, 14, 17, 18, 23, 26

### **Relationship Demographic Questions**

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.

Please write the initials of your romantic partner: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been in a relationship with this person? \_\_\_\_\_

Number of months \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

- Casually dating
- Exclusively dating
- Engaged
- Cohabiting
- Married
- Single

### **Relationship Goal Identification**

Goals are common aspects of life and romantic relationships. Please take a few moments to think about the most important goal that you have for your romantic relationship. That is, what is a personal goal that have that you are working toward for your relationship. For example, you may be trying to save money to take a vacation with your partner, you may be trying to lose weight to be more attractive for your partner, or you may be trying to do more of the household chores. Think of the most important relationship goal you have and state it in the space provided below.

### **Commitment- Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998).**

Please use the scale provided to indicate your agreement with the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Do not agree at all						Agree completely

1. I want our relationship to last a very long time.
2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.
3. I would feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.
4. \* It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.
5. I feel very attached to our relationship – very strongly linked to my partner.
6. I want our relationship to last forever.



7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).

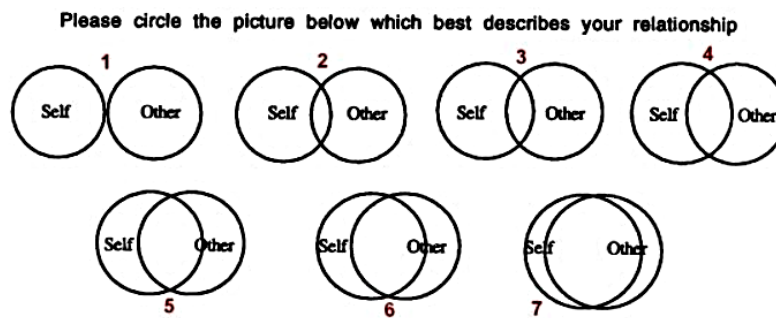
Note: \* indicates the item is reverse coded.

**Satisfaction- Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998)**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree

1. I feel satisfied with our relationship.
2. My relationship is much better than others' relationships.
3. My relationship is close to ideal.
4. Our relationship makes me very happy.
5. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.

**Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS)- Aron, Aron, & Smollan (1992)**



Please consider the images above and use the following scale to identify which picture best describes your relationship. (1 to 7)

**Regulatory Focus Induction (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994) (Study 3)**

In this part of the survey, we are interested in how people recall events that happened in their lives. Please read and follow the instructions for the task on the next page.

**Prevention Condition**

For this next 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.

Something may not come to you right away, so please take a few minutes to think of a situation if necessary. Please describe in detail exactly how you felt at this time. Write down the thoughts

and feelings you had at the moment and any physical feelings that you might have had during this time.

Please write your reflection in the space below:

### **Promotion Condition**

For this next 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.

Something may not come to you right away, so please take a few minutes to think of a situation if necessary. Please describe in detail exactly how you felt at this time. Write down the thoughts and feelings you had at the moment and any physical feelings that you might have had during this time.

Please write your reflection in the space below:

### **Goal Framing Manipulation – Change vs. Stability**

#### **Stability Condition**

Please try to picture yourself working towards, and eventually accomplishing, your relationship goal (*piped in goal identified before*) in the future. For example, you could picture the steps you are taking to carry out the task effectively, the positive feedback that you receive, other people's reactions to you, etc. Try to visualize the entire task unfolding successfully from beginning to end.

Next, think about how fulfilling this relationship goal will promote stability within your current relationship. That is, think about how this goal will maintain the current relationship quality that you have.

#### **Change Condition**

Please try to picture yourself working towards, and eventually accomplishing, your relationship goal (*piped in goal identified before*) in the future. For example, you could picture the steps you are taking to carry out the task effectively, the positive feedback that you receive, other people's reactions to you, etc. Try to visualize the entire task unfolding successfully from beginning to end.

Next, think about how fulfilling this relationship goal will promote change within your current relationship. That is, think about how this goal will enhance the quality of your relationship from its current state.

### **Goal Engagement Measure (Dependent Variable)**

When answering the following questions, please keep in mind the following relationship goal that you previously mentioned:

How important do you feel this goal is to you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Unimportant			Somewhat Important			Extremely Important

How motivated are you to achieve this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Very much so

How much time are you willing to invest in accomplishing this goal?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
None			A Moderate Amount			A lot

### **Demographics**

Sometimes people's responses can be influenced by their age, gender and ethnicity. In order to investigate the effects that these factors might have, please answer the following items. You may decline to answer any of the following questions. All of these responses are totally confidential and will not be linked to you in any way.

Gender:

- Male                       Female                       Other

Age (in years): \_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnic identity? If more than one category applies, please select the one with which you most strongly identify.

- Aboriginal/Native
- Asian
- Black
- East Indian
- Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- White
- Other

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