

Regulatory Fit in Self-Enhancement and Self-Protection: Implications for Life Satisfaction in the West and the East

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Abstract This online study examined whether regulatory focus and culture moderate the links between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction. The study assessed promotion and prevention foci, manipulated self-enhancement or self-protection, and measured self-reported life satisfaction in both Western participants (127 English-speaking individuals; 73 female, 50 male, 4 unspecified; $M_{\text{age}} = 29.01$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.26$) and Chinese participants (141 Zhanjiang Normal University members; 88 females, 53 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.18$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.14$). Promotion-focused individuals experienced higher life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement strivings, whereas prevention-focused individuals experienced equal levels of life satisfaction when engaging in self-protection strivings, in both Western and Chinese participants. Furthermore, Western participants manifested higher levels of life satisfaction when employing self-enhancement strivings independently of regulatory focus. On the other hand, Chinese participants experienced equivalent levels of life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement and self-protection strivings. The findings establish regulatory focus and culture as independent moderators of the association between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction.

Keywords Regulatory focus · Culture · Self-enhancement · Self-protection · Life satisfaction

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1 Introduction

People are motivated to think well of themselves. For example, they rate themselves as above average on a range of traits and abilities (Alicke and Govorun 2005) and evaluate themselves more positively than objective standards warrant (John and Robins 1994). More generally, people are motivated to seek self-positivity (self-enhance) and avoid self-negativity (self-protect) (Alicke and Sedikides 2011; Sedikides and Strube 1997).

There are distinctions to be made between self-enhancement and self-protection. The former is directed toward attaining, maintaining, or strengthening positive self-views, whereas the latter is directed toward shunning, minimizing, or repairing negative self-views. Thus, self-enhancement operates to promote positive self-views, whereas self-protection operates to avert negative self-views (Alicke and Sedikides 2009; Sedikides and Alicke 2012). Regardless, the pursuit of self-positivity and the evasion of self-negativity are potent and often prioritized over important goals or drives such as academic achievement (Crocker and Park 2003), friendship (Paulhus 1998) and sex (Bushman et al. 2011). Moreover, self-enhancement and self-protection serve multiple functions (Sedikides 2012; Sedikides and Gregg 2008). For example, self-enhancement is positively associated, and self-protection is negatively associated, with psychological resilience to setbacks (Bonanno et al. 2005; Sedikides 2012) and with psychological health (Gregg and Sedikides 2014; Taylor et al. 2003). Crucially for the purposes of this article, they are also positively associated with life satisfaction in both Western and East-Asian cultures (Brown 2010; Dufner et al. 2012; Gaertner et al. 2008; Gregg et al. 2011) and indeed evoke life satisfaction in both Western and East-Asian cultures (O'Mara et al. 2012).

2 Regulatory Fit

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997, 1998; Shah and Higgins 2001) posits two distinct regulatory foci, promotion and prevention. Promotion focus is a tendency toward positive aspirations and potential successes, whereas prevention focus is a tendency away from feared outcomes and potential failures. In other words, Promotion-focused individuals are inclined to approach positive end-states, and hence eager to attain gains; prevention-focused individuals are inclined to avoid negative end-states, and hence eager to avert losses. Although individuals are chronically inclined to a certain regulatory focus in their daily activities, they can also momentarily adopt one or another such focus depending on contextual cues (Higgins 1997; Liberman et al. 1999).

The construct of regulatory fit (Higgins 2000) is relevant to our research. Individuals experience regulatory fit when their regulatory focus is concordant with their manner of engagement in a goal, task, or striving (e.g., self-enhancement or self-protection). Put otherwise, when one's regulatory focus is attuned with the regulatory orientation of a goal or a situation, the resulting motivational outcomes will be amplified (Higgins et al. 1997; Shah et al. 1998). Indeed, regulatory fit should prompt individuals to engage more strongly with (Förster et al. 1998; Shah et al. 1998) and attribute greater value to (Higgins 2005) the corresponding strivings. Furthermore, task performance improves when one's chronic regulatory focus matches the task's regulatory focus (Bianco et al. 2003; Shah et al. 1998). Overall, regulatory fit increases one's motivation and performance.

3 The Present Research

Although a great deal of research has addressed the nature and function of self-enhancement and self-protection, few studies have examined factors likely to moderate their outcomes. Not all persons would be expected to benefit equally from self-enhancement and self-protection, and, critically, individual differences may moderate the associations between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction (Bosson et al. 2003; Sedikides et al. 2007).

Individuals may be motivated to think well of themselves, but they may apply different strivings in doing so. For example, some may maximize the positive aspects of the self; self-enhancement strivings entail a promotion focus. Others may minimize the negative aspects of the self; self-protection strivings entail a prevention focus. Effective self-enhancement or self-protection strivings will likely yield life satisfaction benefits regardless of the underlying regulatory focus. However, regulatory fit will make an additional contribution. When individuals apply either self-enhancement or self-protection strivings and such approach fits their chronic regulatory focus, the resultant benefits (e.g., life satisfaction) will be intensified. Indeed, regulatory fit will contribute to stronger engagement with the corresponding strivings (Förster et al. 1998; Higgins 2005; Shah et al. 1998)—be it self-enhancement or self-protection. It follows that individuals would gain the larger life satisfaction benefits from the corresponding strivings.

An objective of the present research was thus to examine whether regulatory focus moderates the associations between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction. We hypothesized that promotion-focused individuals would experience higher levels of life satisfaction when employing self-enhancement strivings, whereas prevention-focused individuals would experience higher life satisfaction when employing self-protection strivings.

Past research in Western (Hepper et al. 2010; Molden and Higgins 2008) and East-Asian (Hepper et al. 2013) cultures established that promotion and prevention focus are positively related to self-enhancement and self-protection strivings, respectively. In particular, Hepper et al. (2010, 2013) demonstrated that self-enhancement strivings were implicated predominantly by promotion-focused individuals, whereas self-protection strivings were implicated predominantly by prevention-focused individuals. Molden and Higgins (2008) showed that self-serving attributions for failure (i.e., self-protection strivings) were predicted by prevention focus. Nevertheless, no study, to our knowledge, has investigated the regulatory fit principle in self-enhancement and self-protection strivings, especially as the principle applies to life satisfaction and across cultures.

3.1 Cultural Considerations

Another objective of our research, then, was to test for the cross-culturality of the abovementioned hypotheses. Scholars have been debating whether self-enhancement/self-protection are equally potent across cultures (Heine et al. 1999; Sedikides et al. 2003). One line of research indicates that participants in East-Asian (vs. Western) cultures report lower levels of self-esteem (Heine et al. 1999) and diminished self-enhancement/self-protection strivings (Heine and Hamamura 2007; Maddux et al. 2010; Hepper et al. 2013). Another line of research indicates that self-enhancement/self-protection are equally strong across Western (i.e., individualistic) and East-Asian (i.e., collectivistic) cultures, but manifest

differently according to cultural norms and values (Brown 2010; Cai et al. 2011; Chiu et al. 2011; Lee et al. 2010; Sedikides et al. 2005).

Although the debate is ongoing, results are at least consistent with the notion that self-enhancement and self-protection strivings have similar structure, correlates, and consequences across cultures. For example, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale manifests invariant factor structure across cultures (Rosenberg 1965; Schmitt and Allik 2005). Also, the nomological network (in terms of narcissism, self-esteem, and regulatory focus) of self-enhancement and self-protection is similar in Western and East-Asian cultures (Hepper et al. 2013). Finally, higher levels of self-esteem are associated with better-than-average self-views (Kobayashi and Brown 2003), greater self-serving attributions (Brown et al. 2009), and lower depression and anxiety (Cai et al. 2009), as well as higher satisfaction with life (Cai et al. 2009), in both Western and East-Asian cultures.

Regulatory fit theory (Higgins 2000) has been fruitfully applied both between and within cultures. The evidence points to the cross-culturality of the regulatory fit principle (Uskul et al. 2009; Zhao and Narmasivayam 2012). Members of Western (vs. East-Asian) cultures orient themselves toward the positive outcomes they hope to achieve rather than the negative outcomes they hope to avoid, favoring a promotion over prevention focus at the cultural level (Elliot et al. 2001; Lee et al. 2000; Lockwood et al. 2005). Accordingly, researchers have successfully used regulatory fit to examine cultural differences in several domains, such as information processing (Kurman and Hui 2012; Zhang and Mittal 2007), persuasion (Uskul and Oyserman 2010), and life satisfaction (Fulmer et al. 2011). For example, Kurman and Hui (2012) showed that a gain-framed incentive is more effective in Western cultures, whereas a loss-framed incentive is more effective in East-Asian cultures. Therefore, we formulated the hypotheses that members of Western cultures would benefit more from self-enhancement strivings, whereas members of East-Asian cultures would benefit more from prevention strivings above and beyond prevention and promotion foci.

Another portion of the literature, however, has shown that individuals experience regulatory fit when their regulatory focus is aligned with their goal pursuits independently of their cultural background (Uskul et al. 2009; Zhao and Narmasivayam 2012; see also Elliot et al. 2012). For instance, Uskul et al. (2009) examined the persuasive effects of matching message frame to individuals' motivational orientations and found that, despite cultural differences in promotion and prevention focus, regulatory fit operates (at the individual level) similarly across cultures. Hence, capitalizing on this literature, we formulated the hypotheses that the regulatory fit between regulatory focus and self-enhancement/self-protection strivings would be generalized cross-culturally.

Taken together, in line with regulatory fit theory (Higgins 2000), we hypothesized that promotion-focused persons would experience greater life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement strivings, whereas prevention-focused persons would experience greater life satisfaction when engaging in self-protection strivings, in both Western and East-Asian cultures. Moreover, we hypothesized that, in parallel with regulatory fit at the individual level, Western cultures would benefit more from self-enhancement strivings, whereas East-Asian cultures would benefit more from prevention strivings. Stated otherwise, we expected regulatory fit independently at both the cultural level (i.e., between Western and East-Asian cultures, and self-enhancement and self-protection strivings) and the individual level (i.e., between promotion and prevention-focused individuals, and self-enhancement and self-protection strivings).

We tested our hypotheses in an experiment in which we assessed promotion/prevention foci and manipulated self-enhancement/self-protection strivings in both Western and Chinese participants. The design was mixed, consisting of measured variables (regulatory

focus: promotion, prevention; culture: Western, East-Asian) and a manipulated variable (condition: self-enhancement, control).

4 Method

4.1 Participants

A total of 268 individuals participated in the study. We recruited 127 Western individuals (73 females, 50 males, 4 unspecified; $M_{\text{age}} = 29.01$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.26$) via Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk online survey program. Most participants (65 %) were students, and the remaining were either employed (26 %) or unemployed/retired (9 %). Also, all were from English-speaking Western countries (i.e., Australia, Canada, UK, and USA) and had English as mother tongue. In addition, we recruited 141 Zhanjiang Normal University members (88 females, 53 males; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.18$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.14$) via the Zhanjiang Normal University's listserv system. Most participants (82 %) were undergraduate and graduate students, and the remaining were university employees. We checked IP addresses to detect potential duplicate responders but found none.

4.2 Procedure and Measures

We measured regulatory focus with the Regulatory Focus Scale (Lockwood et al. 2002; 1 = *not at all true of me*, 7 = *very true of me*). It consists of two 9-item subscales assessing promotion focus (Sample item: "I frequently imagine how I will achieve my hopes and aspirations"; $\alpha = .85$) and prevention focus (Sample item: "In general, I am focused on preventing negative events in my life"; $\alpha = .75$).

We manipulated self-enhancement and self-protection by relying on a procedure validated by O'Mara et al. (2012). First, we asked participants to think of and list a positive (*self-enhancement condition*; $N = 136$) or negative (*self-protection condition*; $N = 132$) quality or trait that is important to them. We randomly assigned participants to the two experimental conditions. Next, we asked participants to describe the ways in which the things that they had done and experienced over the past 7 days demonstrated how the listed quality or trait was more (*self-enhancement condition*) or less (*self-protection condition*) characteristic of them than of other individuals of the same gender, age, and educational background.

Finally, participants responded to the dependent measure, state life satisfaction. They completed the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985; 1 = *not agree at all*, 7 = *very strongly agree*; $M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.32$). A sample item is: "Right now, I am satisfied with my life" ($\alpha = .85$).

5 Results

5.1 Preliminary Analyses

We conducted all statistical analyses, with IBM SPSS Statistics 20. There were no missing values. Inspection of the skewness and kurtosis indices for all variables proved to be normal (values ranged from -0.66 to -0.01 for skewness and from -1.91 to 1.31 for

Table 1 Associations among all variables

	2	3	4
Culture (1) ^a	.10	.11 [†]	-.41*
Condition (2) ^b		.06	.24*
Regulatory focus (3) ^c			.28*
Life satisfaction (4)			

Cramer's V coefficients were estimated to measure associations among dichotomous variables and point-biserial correlation coefficients were estimated to measure the associations among life satisfaction and dichotomous variables

[†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$

^a 0 = Western; 1 = East-Asian

^b 0 = self-protection condition; 1 = self-enhancement condition

^c 0 = prevention-focused; 1 = promotion-focused

kurtosis). Data screening revealed no value higher than three standard deviations (SDs) from the mean. Additionally, in order to screen for multivariate outliers, we computed Mahalanobis distance values for all participants. No participant exceeded the critical Chi square value at the $p = .001$ level. It should be noted that the Chinese sample was younger than the Western sample and comprised proportionally more students, $ps < .05$. However, results from a MANOVA demonstrated no significant main effects of gender, age, and occupation (i.e., student vs. employed) and no significant interaction effects on all variables. Thus, we did not include gender, age, or occupation in the following analyses. We display associations among all measures in Table 1.

Additionally, we divided participants according to their score on the promotion and prevention subscales. First, we standardized both subscales. Next, we classified participants in the group corresponding to their highest standardized score on the two subscales (see Mageau et al. 2009, for a similar procedure). The final classification included 116 promotion-focused and 152 prevention-focused individuals.

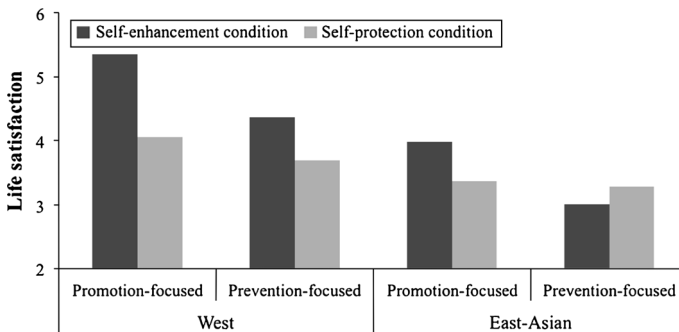
5.2 Main Analyses

We conducted an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the main and interactive effects of culture, condition, and regulatory focus on life satisfaction¹ (Table 2). We display levels of life satisfaction across these three factors in Fig. 1. The culture main effect was significant, $F(1, 260) = 46.84$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .16$. Western participants ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.25$) reported higher levels of life satisfaction than Chinese participants ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.18$). The condition main effect was also significant, $F(1, 260) = 17.06$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Participants in the self-enhancement condition

¹ We replicated the present results using promotion and prevention subscales directly. We conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses to examine the main and interactive effects of regulatory focus, condition (1 = self-enhancement, 0 = self-protection), and culture (1 = Chinese sample, 0 = Western sample) on life satisfaction. We entered regulatory focus, condition, and culture in the first step, double interactions (i.e., Promotion Focus \times Condition, Prevention Focus \times Condition, Promotion Focus \times Culture, Prevention Focus \times Culture, and Condition \times Culture) in the second step, and, finally, triple interactions (i.e., Promotion Focus \times Condition \times Culture, and Prevention Focus \times Condition \times Culture) in the third step. All the effects that we reported in the ANOVA remained significant.

Table 2 Analysis of variance for culture, condition, and regulatory focus on life satisfaction

	<i>df</i> (<i>df</i> _{error})	F	<i>p</i> value	<i>n</i> ²
Culture	1 (260)	46.84	.000	.16
Condition	1 (260)	17.06	.000	.06
Regulatory focus	1 (260)	18.46	.000	.07
Culture × condition	1 (260)	8.67	.000	.03
Culture × regulatory focus	1 (260)	0.29	.592	.00
Condition × regulatory focus	1 (260)	7.19	.008	.03
Culture × condition × regulatory focus	1 (260)	0.26	.613	.00

**Fig. 1** Life satisfaction of participants across culture, condition, and regulatory focus

($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.33$) reported higher levels of life satisfaction than participants in the self-protection condition ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.24$). The regulatory focus main effect was significant as well, $F(1, 260) = 18.46$, $p = .000$, $n^2 = .07$. Promotion-focused participants ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.38$) reported higher levels of life satisfaction than prevention-focused participants ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.23$).

These main effects were qualified by interactions. To begin, the Culture × Condition interaction was significant, $F(1, 260) = 8.67$, $p = .004$, $n^2 = .03$. Simple contrasts revealed that Western participants manifested higher levels of life satisfaction in the self-enhancement ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.00$) than in the self-protection ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.30$) condition, $p = .001$. However, Chinese participants evinced equivalent levels of life satisfaction in the self-enhancement ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.22$) and self-protection ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.15$) conditions, $p = .690$. The Culture × Regulatory Focus interaction was not significant, $F(1, 260) = 0.29$, $p = .592$, $n^2 = .00$, suggesting that culture did not moderate the role of regulatory focus in life satisfaction. Alternatively, regulatory focus did not moderate the role of culture in life satisfaction. In addition, the Condition × Regulatory Focus interaction was significant, $F(1, 260) = 7.19$, $p = .008$, $n^2 = .03$. Promotion-focused participants manifested higher levels of life satisfaction in the self-enhancement ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.27$) than in the self-protection ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.29$) condition, $p = .001$. However, prevention-focused manifested equivalent levels of life satisfaction in the self-enhancement ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.15$) and self-protection ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.20$) conditions, $p = .308$.

Finally and most importantly, the three-way interaction was not significant, $F(1, 260) = 0.26$, $p = .613$, $\eta^2 = .00$. Culture did not moderate the regulatory fit between condition and regulatory focus on life satisfaction. Alternatively, regulatory focus did not moderate the regulatory fit between condition and culture on life satisfaction.

Overall, results revealed that Western (vs. Chinese) participants reported higher levels of life satisfaction. Furthermore, participants in the self-enhancement condition manifested higher levels of life satisfaction than participants in the self-protection condition. In addition, promotion-focused (vs. prevention-focused) individuals reported higher levels of life satisfaction independently of cultural background. More central to the present investigation, self-enhancement (vs. self-protection) strivings predicted greater life satisfaction only in Western participants, whereas Chinese participants gained equally from self-enhancement and self-protection strivings. Critically, this effect was not moderated by regulatory focus. Furthermore, promotion-focused participants reported increased life satisfaction in the case of self-enhancement strivings, while prevention-focused participants reported equivalent levels of life satisfaction in the self-enhancement and self-protection condition. Crucially, this effect was not moderated by culture and thus is equally relevant to Western and Chinese participants.

6 Discussion

This research examined whether regulatory focus moderates the links between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction. We hypothesized that promotion-focused individuals would experience higher levels of life satisfaction when employing self-enhancement strivings, prevention-focused individuals when employing self-protection strivings. This is so because, on account of the principle of regulatory fit, individuals would attribute higher value to the corresponding strivings (Higgins 2005) as well as engage more strongly with them (Förster et al. 1998; Shah et al. 1998), thus being liable to reap greater psychological benefits.

Additionally, we hypothesized that the regulatory fit between regulatory focus and self-enhancement/self-protection on life satisfaction would be cross-culturally generalizable. This is on account of evidence that regulatory fit operates similarly across cultures (Uskul et al. 2009; Zhao and Narmasivayam 2012), and on account of self-enhancement and self-protection having similar structure, correlates, and consequences across cultures (Brown et al. 2009; Cai et al. 2009; Hepper et al. 2013; Kobayashi and Brown 2003).

We further hypothesized that Western individuals would benefit more from self-enhancement strivings and Chinese individuals would benefit more from prevention strivings, above and beyond regulatory focus. This is so because Western (vs. East-Asian) cultures are more oriented toward the positive outcomes that they hope to achieve rather than the negative outcomes that they hope to avoid (Elliot et al. 2001; Lee et al. 2000; Lockwood et al. 2005). The results were generally consistent with these hypotheses, revealing regulatory fit at both the cultural and individual levels.

The findings were consistent with regulatory fit theory (Higgins 2000) and demonstrated the cross-culturality of the regulatory fit principle. Importantly, the findings represent the first application of regulatory fit principle toward understanding the benefits of self-enhancement and self-protection.

Indeed, our research indicated that regulatory focus matters for the associations between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction. Promotion-focused individuals

experienced stronger life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement strivings. However, somehow differing from our initial hypothesis, prevention-focused individuals experienced similar levels of life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement or self-protection strivings. Nonetheless, whether individuals will benefit equally from self-enhancement and self-protection is contingent upon their chronic regulatory focus. These findings extend the burgeoning literature on moderators of the consequences of self-enhancement and self-protection strivings for life satisfaction (Lafrenière et al. 2013). It is a task of future investigations to assess other individual difference variables (e.g., neuroticism, self-clarity, self-compassion) that are likely to serve as such moderators.

The findings contribute to the literature on the role of culture in self-enhancement and self-protection. Our research successfully applied regulatory fit theory at the cultural level to self-enhancement and self-protection. Western participants evinced higher levels of life satisfaction when employing self-enhancement strivings. However, and slightly different from our initial hypothesis, Chinese participants experienced equivalent levels of life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement and self-protection strivings. Still, these findings extend past research that used regulatory fit to examine cultural differences in several domains, such as information processing (Kurman and Hui 2012; Zhang and Mittal 2007), persuasion (Uskul and Oyserman 2010), and life satisfaction (Fulmer et al. 2011). Nonetheless, our findings would need to be replicated in other Western (non-English speaking) and East-Asian (e.g., Japanese, Korean) cultures and in other (i.e., non East-Asian) cultures.

To our knowledge, this research is the first to examine simultaneously regulatory fit at both the cultural level (i.e., between Western and Chinese individuals, and self-enhancement and self-protection strivings) and the individual level (i.e., between promotion and prevention-focused individuals, and self-enhancement and self-protection strivings independently of cultural background). We hope this represents a promising line of inquiry to be pursued in future investigations.

The result patterns in regards to regulatory focus and life satisfaction merit further attention. Promotion-focused individuals experienced greater life satisfaction across cultures. These findings are in line with those of Fulmer et al. (2011), who found promotion focus to be linked positively to life satisfaction in several cultures, but more so in promotion-focused cultures. However, their results with respect to the relation between prevention focus and life satisfaction were inconsistent across studies. In Western cultures, this relation tended to be negative, whereas in East-Asian cultures it was not significant. The same inconsistency regarding prevention focus and life satisfaction characterizes other studies that examined regulatory focus at the cultural level (Fulmer et al. 2011; Uskul and Oyserman 2010; Zhang and Mittal 2007), perhaps because East-Asian cultures are more prevention-focused than Western cultures (Elliot et al. 2001, 2012; Lee et al. 2000; Lockwood et al. 2005).

6.1 Limitations

Our findings can be enriched in several ways. First, we manipulated these strivings by asking participants to directly compare themselves to others. Consequently, we implicated a specific form of self-enhancement/self-protection that is forthright or socially comparative (Alicke and Sedikides 2009; however, see O'Mara et al. 2012). Future research would need to use multiple operationalizations of self-enhancement/self-protection, such as overoptimism (Weinstein and Klein 1996), self-serving bias (Mezulis et al. 2004), and overclaiming (Paulhus et al. 2003). Second, we were concerned explicitly with life

satisfaction. Measures involving not only life satisfaction (i.e., hedonic well-being) but also eudaimonic well-being (e.g., vitality; Ryan and Deci 2001; Ryan and Frederick 1997) would expand the agenda of this literature. Also, the assessment of life satisfaction (and eudaimonic well-being) would profit from informant (e.g., spouse, friend, family) reports and expert evaluations (Vazire 2010). Moreover, in accordance with investigations on contextual judgments of life satisfaction (Oishi et al. 2003; Schwarz et al. 1987) and on the transfer of value from regulatory fit (Higgins et al. 2003), longitudinal studies could determine if the interplay between regulatory focus and self-enhancement/self-protection represents contextual or long-lasting influences upon one's life satisfaction (and eudaimonia). Third, Oishi (2006) revealed that four out of the five items of the Satisfaction with Life Scale had differential item functioning between American and Chinese students. Consequently, direct comparisons of life satisfaction levels between Western and Chinese participants should be considered with cautious. Fourth, a recent critique of the Regulatory Focus Scale (Haws et al. 2010) has claimed that the scale neglects some of the subtleties of regulatory focus theory by omitting avoidance of non-gains (promotion) or approach of non-losses (prevention). Stated otherwise, a drawback of the scale is that promotion and prevention items focus solely on achievement and failure, respectively. Future research would thus do well to replicate the current findings using other measures such as the Regulatory Focus Questionnaire (Higgins et al. 2001) or the BIS/BAS Scale (Carver and White 1994).² Finally, given that both samples consisted of relatively young persons and mostly students, the generalizability of the findings to other populations (e.g., older, community adults) would need to be examined.

7 Conclusion

The present findings suggest that regulatory focus matters with respect to the relations between self-enhancement/self-protection and life satisfaction. Promotion-focused (but not prevention-focused) and Western (but not Chinese) individuals reported greater life satisfaction when engaging in self-enhancement strivings. Whether self-enhancing or self-protecting individuals will reap life satisfaction benefits is contingent upon their chronic regulatory focus and cultural background.

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² We aimed to replicate the present results using the Composite Regulatory Focus Scale suggested by Haws et al. (2010) with a distinct sample ($N = 247$). However, the promotion ($\alpha = .61$) and prevention ($\alpha = .53$) subscales had low reliability coefficients, and item deletion could not bring the subscales to acceptable internal consistency levels.

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