



Might Relational Self be Regulated by Promotion Focus? The Mediating Role of Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the roles of regulatory focus and authenticity in the emotional responses to frustration of relational and independent self-aspects in Turkey, where both relational and independent self-aspects are becoming equally important among the educated-urbanized population. The suggested model that proposes authenticity mediates the relationship between promotion focus and emotional responses to independent self-frustration, and between prevention focus and emotional responses to relational self-frustration is tested on self-reported data collected from university students (N = 317). The results showed that promotion focus predicted directly emotional responses to frustration of independent self-aspect, while prevention focus directly predicted emotional responses to frustration of relational self-aspect. Surprisingly, authenticity was found to mediate the relationship between promotion focus and emotional responses to frustration of relational self-aspect. These results suggest that relational goals such as safeguarding the interests of significant others may be regulated not only by prevention strategies, but also by such promotion strategies, through perceived authenticity.

Keywords: Self-Frustration, Emotions, Prevention focus, Promotion focus, Authenticity

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INTRODUCTION

The function of the self in emotional experiences has generally been considered in two different ways in studies addressing the connection between the self and emotions. On the one hand, emotions have been regarded as consequences of self-related experiences (Chentsova-Dutton & Tsai, 2010). For example, research shows that experiences related to one's significant others produce more intense emotions for individuals who define themselves in terms of their significant relationships, while experiences related to being independent elicit more intense emotions for those who define themselves in terms of their uniqueness and distinctiveness (Chentsova-Dutton & Tsai, 2010; Kitayama & Markus, 2000). On the other hand, the self has been

conceived as an executive director that regulates the emotional experiences (Higgins, 1997). Regulatory focus theory claims that individuals can be defined under two different self-regulation strategies, being so-called promotion focus and prevention focus (Higgins, 1997), each of which produces different emotions and behaviors. The present study examines the regulative roles of prevention and promotion foci and the role of authenticity in emotional responses to the self-related experiences. Specifically, through an analysis of Turkish university students, the current study investigates whether emotional responses to situations that make individuals feel frustrated in experiencing their relational and independent self-aspects would be predicted differentially by the two self-regulation foci through feelings of authenticity. Based on (Hofstede, 1984) classification of culture as

individualistic and collectivistic, two types of self-construal have been identified by the researchers. A particular form of self referred to as idiosyncratic (Triandis, 1989), separate (Kağıtçibasi, 1996) or independent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) is described as self-contained, individuated, separated, independent, and distinguishable from others by clear boundaries, and is more likely to develop in individualistic cultures. The other form of self has been referred to as allocentric (Triandis, 1989), relational (Kağıtçibasi, 1996) or interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) has been defined as dependent on significant others with fluid boundaries, and is particular to collectivistic cultures. Research has also indicated that self-construal can show considerable variation within the same culture.

Self-related feelings would appear to be dependent on how a person defines her/his own self in relation to others (Mesquita & Albert, 2007). Markus and Kitayama (1991) claimed that emotional activity depends on the nature of the self-system, and emotional experience varies systematically with the construal of the self. Furthermore, Kitayama and Markus (2000) assert that individuals with relational self-construal feel “good” when they perpetuate harmonious relationships with significant others. On the other hand, people with independent self-construal feel “good” when they view themselves as being unique and distinctive in positive direction from others. Chentsova-Dutton and Tsai (2010) showed that self-focused attention intensified both positive and negative emotional reactivity only when the experiences that elicit emotions match the individuals’ own self-construal. While emotional responses would seem to be dependent on how the experiences of the individual match their own self-construal types, previous research has revealed that emotional experiences are regulated by two different self-regulation strategies, being so-called promotion focus and prevention focus, each of which orients the self-system towards the achievement of qualitatively different goals (Higgins, 1997). While promotion focus is controlled by the need for nurturing, which inspires individuals to ensure accomplishment and development, prevention focus is controlled by the need for security, which motivates individuals to guarantee their safety and to fulfill their responsibilities (Higgins & Spiegel, 2004).

These two qualitatively different sets of goals can also be seen as the differential characteristics of particular self-construal types. According to Higgins (1997), being distinct from others is a result of personal growth and accomplishment, while maintaining group harmony is a consequence of the fulfillment of obligations and responsibilities. In this regard, the goals of the independent and relational selves are qualitatively different, with the former assumed to be regulated by promotion focus, and the latter assumed to be regulated by prevention focus.

In line with the assumptions of regulation focus theory, studies have indicated a strong association between independent self-construal and promotion focus, and between relational self-construal and prevention focus (Lalwani, Shrum, & Chiu, 2009; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000).

Lee et al. (2000), for example, found that people with independent self-construal tended to be more promotion focused than people with relational self-construal, whereas people with relational self-construal tended to be more prevention focused than people with independent self-construal.

Although the relationship between regulation focus strategies and self-construal is well-documented, the emotional responses that are given in situations in which relational or independent self-aspects are experienced as frustrated have not yet been investigated, to the best of our knowledge. Through an analysis of Turkish University students, the present study addresses whether prevention focus and promotion focus regulate differentially emotional reactions to situations in which people experience that their relational and independent self-aspects are frustrated.

The notion that people have both an outer layer and an inner core, and inner core is not essentially reflected in that outer layer is commonly agreed among researchers. This inner core of the individual is conceptualized as the true self (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009) or authentic self (Goldman, 2006) refer to authenticity as the unrestricted functioning of one’s true self in daily life. It has also been defined as the perception of one’s own behavior as self-initiated or self-determined (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Sheldon et al. (1997) emphasized that people feel most authentic when they act with a full sense of choice and self-expression.

Schlegel et al. (2009) asserted that the notion of the true self is especially common and familiar in Western society, which implies that authenticity is a distinctive characteristic of independent self-construal. However, Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson, and Tolman (2008) suggested that relational selves do not necessarily perceive authenticity as a consistent expression of a stable set of attributes. Rather, they use other criteria to evaluate how their selves are authentic, such as the degree of harmony or levels of intimacy experienced in the relationship.

In this respect, authenticity may play an important role in the relationship between self regulation focus and emotional responses to situations that make individuals feel frustrated when experiencing their relational and independent self-aspects, as it would seem that if the self-aspects are experienced as a compulsion, its frustration would not elicit an emotional response due to a lack of genuine relevance with the self.

Based on this reasoning, the present study suggests that emotional responses to frustrations of experiences related to independent and relational self-aspects would be predicted differentially by the two self regulation foci through authenticity. In particular, we propose a path model in which promotion focus predicts the emotional responses to frustration of independent self-aspects, while prevention focus predicts the emotional responses to frustrations of relational self-aspects. Both relationships would be mediated by authenticity (Fig1).

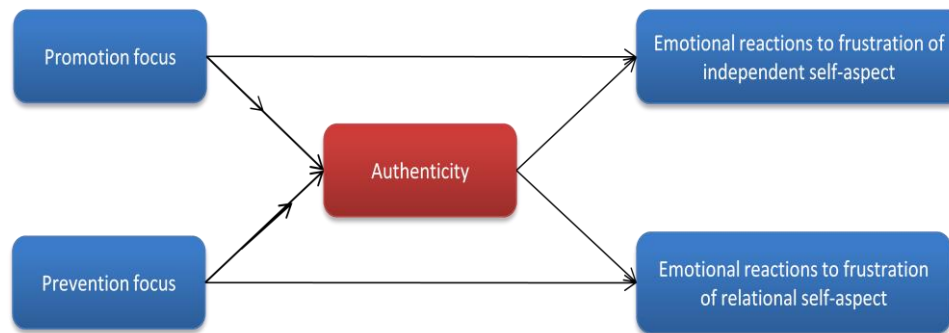


Fig 1. The proposed model

METHOD

Participants: The sample comprised 317 (156 male, 161 female) undergraduate students of Mersin University, Turkey, with a mean age of 22.33 for males and 21.29 for females.

Procedure: All participants completed the three scales voluntarily, in addition to their demographical information. The participants were assured that their responses would be anonymous and were informed that there were no right or wrong answers.

MEASURES

Prevention/Promotion Scale: We used Turkish adaptation of Lockwood, Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002) Prevention/Promotion Scale to measure the participants' chronic self-regulatory foci. Each item was to be answered with a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (not at all true for me) to 9 (very true for me). To test the factorability of the scale, a factor analysis with a varimax rotation was carried out, after which, three items were excluded due either to their cross-loading or no-loading.

The analysis of the remaining 15 items confirmed the two-factor structure of the scale. In our sample, eight items (e.g. "I am worried that I will fall short of my responsibilities and obligations") loaded onto the prevention focus factor, and explained 22% of variance, with $\alpha = 0.75$; and seven items (e.g. "In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life") loaded onto the promotion focus factor, and explained 23% of variance, with $\alpha = 0.82$.

Authenticity Scale: In order to assess the participants' authenticity level, a four-itemed Authentic Living subscale of Linley and Joseph's (2002) Authenticity Scale was translated into Turkish by the researchers and reverse translated by a professional translator who was also a native speaker. The items were 7-point Likert type (1=not at all true of me, 7=very true of me). A principle axis factoring analysis showed that all four items (e.g. "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs") loaded on a single factor, and explained 62% of the variance, with $\alpha = 0.78$.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO FRUSTRATION OF SELF-ASPECTS SCALE.

The researchers generated eight items to assess the participants' emotional responses to frustration of their independent and relational self-aspects of self. The participants were required to indicate to what extent they felt angry, depressed, restless and sad regarding each item (see Appendix). The scale was 5-point Likert type, ranging from 1 (never feel) to 5 (feel intensely). The mean value of the scores of the four emotions was accepted as each item's score. The results of the principle axis factoring analysis with varimax rotation showed that four items loaded on "Emotional Responses to Frustration of Relational Self-Aspects" factor, and explained 26% of the variance, with $\alpha = 0.84$. The remaining four items loaded on the "Emotional Responses to Frustration of Independent Self-Aspect" factor, and explained 23% of the variance, with $\alpha = 0.80$. To test for validity, (Singelis, 1994) independent/relational self-construal scale was used, and correlated significantly with the relational self-construal self-subscale ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). Consistent with this finding, Singelis' (1994) independent self-construal subscale correlated significantly with both 'Emotional Responses to Frustration of Independent Self-Aspects' ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.01$), and 'Emotional Responses to Frustration of Relational Self-Aspects' ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), although the former association was much more robust. Similarly, Singelis (1994) relational self-construal subscale correlated significantly with both 'Emotional Responses to Frustration of Relational Self-Aspects' ($r = 0.80$, $p < 0.01$) and with 'Emotional Responses to Frustration of Independent Self-Aspects' ($r = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$), although the former relationship was much stronger.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations and correlations of all measures are presented in Table 1. The proposed model was tested using Lisrel 8.51. All of the variables in the proposed model were observed variables, and as such can be described as a path model (David, Kline, & Dai, 2005). Goodness of fit statistics of the analysis showed that $\chi^2 (1) = 16.45$, $p = 0.000$, $\chi^2 /df = 16.45$, SRMR = 0.05, AGFI = 0.70, GFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.94, AIC = 44.45 and RMSEA = 0.22.

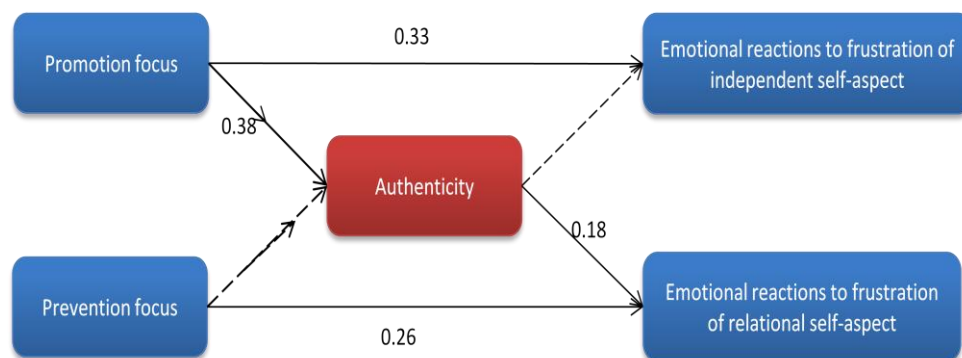
Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlations of all measure.

Means (sd)	1	2	3	4	5
Promotion focus	7.29 (1.29)	1			
Prevention focus	5.86 (1.52)	0.48**	1		
Authentic living	5.57(1.04)	0.38**	0.24**	1	
Emotions (independent-self)	3.89(.64)	0.32**	0.14*	0.18*	1
Emotions (relational-self)	3.79(.73)	0.26**	0.33**	0.28**	0.28**

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

After an examination of the parameters, the non-significant paths were removed. In addition, the modification indices suggested that the error terms between 'emotional responses to relational self frustration' and 'emotional responses to independent self frustration' were correlated. These two outcome variables reflect the emotional reactions to the frustration of the two aspects of the same self, and so constituted the two dimensions of a single scale, the error terms of 'emotional responses to relational self-frustration' and 'emotional responses to independent self-frustration' were allowed to be correlated. The analysis was repeated, and the correlation coefficient between the error terms of the two outcome variables was found to be not so strong ($r = 0.20$). Furthermore, the parameter estimates of the before and after correlating the error terms were almost the same. The modified model was found to fit much better with the data with $\chi^2(2) = 2.62$, $p > .05$, SRMR = .02, AGFI = 0.98, GFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, AIC = 28.62 and RMSEA = 0.03. We also tested an alternative model in which the emotional responses to relational and independent self-frustration were the mediators and authenticity was an outcome. The results of the

alternative model testing showed no better fit, $\chi^2(1) = 18.45$, $p = 0.000$, $\chi^2/df = 18.45$, SRMR = 0.06, AGFI = 0.68, GFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.93, AIC = 45.64 and RMSEA = 0.23, than the proposed model. The results indicated that 'promotion focus' predicted directly 'emotional responses to independent self-frustration' ($t = 4.68$, $p < 0.01$); and 'prevention focus' predicted directly 'emotional responses to relational self-frustration' ($t = 4.33$, $p < 0.01$). The beta coefficients of all significant relationships are presented in Figure 2. Regarding the indirect effects, the results indicated that 'authenticity' partly mediated the relationship between 'promotion focus' and 'emotional responses to relational self-frustration' ($t = 3.01$, $p < 0.01$). The proposed model was also tested through a mediation analysis with multiple regressions, following (Baron & Kenny, 1986) procedure. Accordingly, 'authenticity' failed to mediate the relationship between prevention focus and the two outcome variables, while 'promotion focus' predicted 'emotional responses to frustration of the relational self' through 'authenticity' (Sobel test = 3.09, SE = 0.01, $p < 0.01$), confirming the results of the analysis of the structural equation modeling (Fig 2).

**Fig 2.** Beta coefficients after modification.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigates the connection between self-regulation and emotional responses to the frustration of self-aspects in the context of Turkey, which has been classified as collectivistic culturally (Hofstede, 1984; Kağıtçibasi, 1996), but in which the coexistence of the independent and relational aspects of the self within the same individuals to almost equal importance is becoming common, especially in the developed sectors. It was presumed that authenticity would be a crucial

concept in the relationship between self-regulation focus and emotional responses to frustration of independent/relational self-aspects. Accordingly, we proposed and tested a model that suggested promotion focus could be a predictor of emotional responses to frustration of independent self-aspects, while prevention focus would predict the emotional responses to frustrations of relational self-aspects, and that both relationships would be mediated by authenticity. The analysis confirmed partly the proposed model. As expected,

while promotion focus predicted directly emotional responses to frustration of the independent self-aspect, prevention focus predicted directly the emotional responses to frustration of the relational self-aspect, consistent with previous studies (Lalwani et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2000). The match between promotion focus and emotional response to the frustration of independent self-aspect seems reasonable, in that independence orientation values autonomy, uniqueness and positive distinctiveness from others, all of which have been regarded as developmental achievements (Imamoglu, 2003). Thus, if the goals are to be unique and distinct, the self-system is more likely to be regulated by promotion focus, which inspires accomplishment and development. In contrast, as relatedness orientation values the maintenance of group harmony, prevention focus would appear to be a more appropriate strategy to ensure the avoidance of mistakes that might damage in-group harmony and relationships with significant others (Higgins, 1997; Lee & Semin, 2009). It was believed that authenticity may play a crucial role, assuming that those individuals who experience their selves authentically would be more likely to give emotional responses to the frustration of self-related experiences. However, the present study showed that authenticity mediated neither the relationship between promotion focus and frustration of independent self-aspects, nor the relationship between prevention focus and frustration of relational self-aspects. Instead, the results showed surprisingly that authenticity was a mediator between promotion focus and emotional responses to frustration of relational self-aspect. That is, relational self-aspects were guided not only by prevention focus, but also by promotion focus by means of authenticity. This surprising finding implicates that the goals of relational self-construal, such as safeguarding significant others' interests, are also to be fulfilled through promotion strategies, such as risk taking or eagerness, to the extent to which such relational goals are self-determined or self-chosen. In this regard, relational goals may have two different functions. Firstly, relational goals such as the well-being of significant others or in-group success as a whole might be internalized just like individualistic goals, thus reflect one's true self. As such, adopting promotion strategies may serve group-level accomplishment and growth, which, in turn, may contribute

to individual-level accomplishment and growth. Secondly, realizing relational goals may guarantee the fulfillment of one's individualistic goals, such as being unique. Collectivistic cultures are considered as being composed of interrelated individuals, each of whom engages in unique activities in the social network (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). From this perspective, in the accomplishment of relational goals, each individual plays a distinctive role from which s/he derives their uniqueness, which is identified as one of the promotion-oriented goals (Higgins, 1997). Accordingly, relational goals may not always match up with prevention focus strategies, and may sometimes correspond to promotion focus strategies. Furthermore, the accomplishment of relational goals such as safeguarding in-group harmony and the well-being of significant others may provide a secure context in which individuals realize their individualistic goals. To put it differently, in a cultural context such as Turkey, personal achievement (e.g. academic success) may depend on how much social support an individual receives from the in-group or from significant others. If the emotional or material support received from the group or from significant others is related to his/her accomplishment of individualistic goals, then relational goals (e.g. perpetuating good relationships with parents) could also be dealt with by way of promotion strategies. The present study is certainly not free of shortcomings. First of all, the study was based on single self-reported data, which provided insights into the nature of relationships between regulation focus, authenticity and emotional responses to frustration of self-aspects, but not into the causality between them. Furthermore, the study made no cultural comparisons, which definitely limits the understanding of the findings. Although Turkish university students were considered to be an suitable sample due to the likelihood of a coexistence of relational and independent aspects, their self-reported data was not compared either with the data from more traditional collectivistic parts of Turkey (e.g. rural areas), or with data from other individualistic (e.g. Western) or collectivistic (e.g. Eastern) cultures. That said, the current study makes a unique contribution to literature in showing that relational aspects of self are regulated not only by prevention focus, but also by promotion focus through authenticity.

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