

For what it's worth: The regulatory pleasure and purpose of a good life

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How does one define a good life? How does one pursue and experience it? What are the implications for actually living it? The present approach employs regulatory focus theory to consider the purpose of a good life and the basic self-regulatory functions it may serve. In support of this approach, research is presented suggesting that regulatory focus may impact not only whether individuals come to define the good life in terms of is desired or required in such a life, but also how they work in pursuit of such a life and how they experience living it. A final study suggests that regulatory focus may impact not only how one defines, pursues and experiences a good life but how one considers it ending.

When one does not know what harbor one is making for, no wind is the right wind. -Seneca

Why is living a good life often so challenging? Why might it be difficult, at times, even to define? Research and theorizing in social psychology on the nature of well-being have long understood that pursuing a good life involves more than simply the continued pursuit of good times. Indeed, much of this work has distinguished a hedonic sense of well-being, which emphasizes the actual experience of positivity in a good life (for instance, Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999) from a eudaemonic sense, which focuses on the process, and purpose, of living such a life (see Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky 2013; Cheung, 2010; Deci & Ryan 2008; Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher 2009; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002;; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2006; Ryff, 1989). The approach outlined here elaborates on this distinction by considering recent work on the nature and process of self-regulation in order to better understand not only how individuals may come to define the good life, but how they pursue and experience it and why they may be challenged by it.

The pleasure and purpose of a good life

The current approach starts by assuming that individuals have a varied sense of the good life that nevertheless is ultimately defined in terms of what makes them happy and what gives them purpose and meaning. Clearly a good life is one that involves positivity and personal happiness and models of well-being have traditionally acknowledged the significance of hedonic experience (See Diener, 1984; 2000). The

recent rise in interest for positive psychological processes has renewed focus in social psychology on the benefits of happiness and positive affective experiences for general well-being (Lyubormirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). In a review of the literature, for instance, Lyubormirsky et al (2005) found happiness to be associated with a wide variety of successful work, health and social outcomes. Similarly, Fredrickson's (2001; 2004) broaden-and-build theory proposes that the positive emotions commonly associated with the good life, such as enjoyment and happiness, generally encourage novel and exploratory thought and behavior that may better encourage skill development and mastery over time. Pleasant social interactions for example, may encourage future interactions and ultimately help to refine the social skills required to navigate these interactions smoothly. Research has also suggested, however, that the pursuit of happiness and positivity can prove surprisingly challenging (see Gilbert, 2006). Work by Gilbert, Wilson and their colleagues, for instance, has found that individuals often fail to understand exactly what will make them happy (Wilson & Gilbert 2003) and overestimate how long and how consistently happiness may last (see Quoidbach, Gilbert, & Wilson 2013;). We may also hold mistaken beliefs about how choice impacts our well-being and the ultimate control we have over our own happiness (see, Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyubomirsky, White, & Lehman, 2002; . A good life defined solely in terms of levels of happiness and positivity, then, may be one that individuals often have difficulty realizing and maintaining. Moreover, such a life may also prove to be costly, as the motivation literature has long recognized that negativity,

and negative emotions can often serve productive self-regulatory ends (see, for instance, Oettingen, 2014).

Like other recent eudaimonic approaches to well-being, then, the current approach assumes that the good life is one that not only provides positivity but also purpose in fulfilling fundamental regulatory needs (see also Emmons, 1986; McGregor, McAdams & Little, 2006; Romero, Villar, Luengo & Gómez-Fraguela, 2009; Steger, Kashdan, & Oishi 2008). Indeed, the self-regulatory purpose of a good life may determine how such a life is ultimately lived, how it impacts daily behavior and experience, and its role it plays in general well-being. In this assumption, the current approach is similar to other recent perspectives on the good life that have focused the purpose of pursuing it and the process through which it is best realized. Research on self-determination and self-concordance, for instance, has assumed that well-being is linked to the pursuit and fulfillment of intrinsic needs for autonomy, connectedness and growth (see Deci & Ryan 2000; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Deci and Ryan (1991). From this perspective, a good life is one that addresses individuals' intrinsic needs and perceiving how one's life should be shaped to address such needs may pose an ongoing challenge, especially given the pervasiveness of extrinsic pressures and rewards. Indeed, in studies spanning elementary through medical school a variety of workplace settings and a diversity of cultures have consistently demonstrated that goals motivated for autonomous reasons (vs. controlled reasons) may be pursued differently than when pursued for extrinsic reasons. Intrinsic goals may be pursued more creatively (Amabile, 1983), for instance, with more cognitive flexibility and depth (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987; McGraw & McCullers, 1979; Williams & Deci, 1996), and with more perseverance

(Vallerand and Bissonnette, 1992). Grolnick and Ryan (1987) found that students who were more autonomous in reading text material showed greater conceptual understanding of the material than those who were more externally motivated (see also Black and Deci 2000; Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci 1991). Similarly, Ryan and Connell (1989) found that although both internally and externally motivated children adopted achievement goals in the classroom, children's external motivation for pursuing classroom goals was positively correlated with anxiety in school and maladaptive coping with failures, whereas their internal motivation was positively correlated with enjoyment of school and proactive coping with failures. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the pursuit of intrinsically motivated goals is ultimately linked to more satisfaction (Deci, Connell & Ryan, 1989) as well as greater well-being and self-esteem (Deci, Nezlek & Sheinman, 1981; Langer & Rodin, 1976). Sheldon and Elliot (1998) reported that more intrinsic (autonomous) reasons for pursuing achievement goals among college students (rather than external reasons) were associated with more goal commitment and goal attainment. Moreover, Sheldon and Kasser (1998) found that when students were more intrinsically motivated in their goal pursuits they made more goal-related progress and this progress had more positive effects on well-being (relative to those motivated for external reasons). Such findings inspired the self-concordance model (see Sheldon and Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001), which assert that when individuals pursue self-concordant goals (i.e., goals consistent with their intrinsic motivations) they do so with more effort and with greater likelihood of attainment. Moreover, such attainment is more likely to benefit well-being. In this model, then, well-being depends not only on realizing one's goals but realizing the

“right” goals, those that satisfy intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness. Supporting their model, Sheldon and Houser-Marko (2001) found evidence for an “upward spiral” in students’ pursuit of self-concordant goals. Incoming freshmen with self-concordant goals for their first semester were more likely to attain them, which in turn predicted increased psychological adjustment as well as even greater self-concordance for the next semester’s goals. This increase in self-concordance was linked to even greater goal attainment during students’ 2nd semester, which led to further increases in psychological adjustment by the end of the year. The benefits of self-concordance, then, are not only immediate but may build over time. Even more recently, Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008) have suggested that a good life should be defined by how it satisfies basic needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy, how it encourages the pursuit of intrinsic goals for personal growth, relationships, community and health (rather than extrinsic goals, such as wealth, fame, image, and power), and how it supports autonomous, volitional, consensual behavior as well a general sense of awareness. Yet these need-based life assessments may themselves prove challenging. Recent work on self-infiltration, for instance, has suggested that individuals can often be mistaken in the inferences they make about their own needs, confusing them with the desires and needs others may have for them (Baumann & Kuhl, 2003).

The focus of a good life

The approach taken here is inspired by research and theorizing on regulatory focus theory (see Higgins, 1997) which also encourages a definition of the good life that

emphasizes its underlying regulatory purpose (see Higgins, Cornwell & Franks, 2014). Regulatory focus theory proposes that individuals develop distinct regulatory systems in pursuit of basic needs for achievement and gain (promotion), and for safety and security (prevention). Individuals' promotion focus on achievement and gain and is, in turn, represented by their hopes wishes and aspirations (labeled their "ideals").

Alternatively, individuals' prevention focus on safety and security and is defined by their duties, responsibilities and obligations (collectively labeled individuals' "oughts"). The theory suggests that individuals may differ in their focus on promotion and prevention either because the situation calls for it (as when they are in immediate danger or sense a good opportunity) or because of chronic differences that arise from distinct histories of punishment and reward (as may arise, for instance, because of differences in parental discipline and affection). Differences in individuals' focus on promotion and prevention, in turn, may affect how they respond to everyday events. Outcomes may be experienced quite differently when seen in terms of one's promotion needs for advancement and gain, or in terms of one's prevention need for safety and security. Indeed, considerable research over the last two decades has examined how differences in regulatory focus may influence the process of self-regulation from beginning to end: from goal adoption to ongoing pursuit to the emotional consequences of successful and unsuccessful outcomes (see Higgins, 2014).

Perceiving the good life in terms of how it addresses fundamental needs for promotion and prevention may not only shape what one looks for in such a life, it may ultimately impact the strategies and behaviors one employs in pursuing it and the experiences one has in living it. Indeed, past research has suggested that whereas a

promotion focus is associated with eagerness-related strategies for goal attainment, a prevention focus is associated with strategic vigilance (see Higgins, 1997). Freitas, Liberman, Salovey, and Higgins (2002), for instance, found that participants with a prevention focus prefer to initiate goal pursuit more quickly than individuals with a promotion focus, presumably because duties and obligations often demand immediate fulfillment. Consistent with a tendency towards eagerness, Forster, Higgins, and Bianco (2003) have found that a promotion focus is associated with a preference for speed in completing task goals. Consistent with a tendency for vigilance, however, a prevention focus was associated with a preference for accuracy. Taken together, then, past research has suggested that duties and obligations demand immediate, careful, attention whereas ideals and aspirations may often be more flexibly pursued (see also Shah & Kruglanski, 2000a). Of course, living the good life involves more than the use of general strategies. Like other pursuits they must also invoke specific behavior and action. Here too, regulatory focus may play an important role. Shah, Higgins and Friedman (1998) examined how regulatory focus affected the specific ways in which goals were pursued behaviorally. In particular, they found that whereas promotion-focused individuals eagerly employed approach-related means in pursuing their ideals, prevention focused individuals more vigilantly pursued duties and obligations via avoidance-related means. Thus, if academic success is seen as an ideal, promotion-focused individuals might utilize approach-related behaviors designed for the success of “straight A’s” and the raising of their GPA, such as studying extra hours and seeking out teachers. Alternatively, if academic success is viewed as an obligation, prevention-focused individuals might instead focus on avoidance-related strategies designed to

prevent harm to their GPA, such as forgoing parties and social activities on the weekend (see also Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994). Moreover, these distinct behavioral tendencies may only grow stronger over the course of a pursuit. By measuring approach and avoidance intensity through arm flexion and extension, for instance, Forster, Higgins, and Idson (1998) found that approach and avoidance inclinations increased as progress was made towards goal attainment and the goals themselves “loomed larger”. Subsequent research on regulatory fit has found that individuals are generally more successful, committed, and engaged when the specific demands and opportunities of a goal pursuit “fit” the strategic preferences of one’s current regulatory focus (see Higgins, 2000; Higgins, Cornwell & Franks, 2014). Frietas, Liberman, and Higgins (2002), for example, found that prevention-focused individuals were more engaged and effective with goal pursuits that required them to resist temptations or distractions, as the avoidance involved fit their prevention focus (see also Spiegel, Grant-Pillow, & Higgins, 2004). As is soon discussed, the same behavioral and strategic preferences may be evident in our pursuit of the good life generally.

Finally, a consideration of regulatory focus may also be useful for understanding the various ways living a good life may be felt, both positively and negatively, as differences in regulatory focus have long been linked to qualitatively different in positive and negative emotional experiences. Realizing one’s ideals has consistently been found to be experienced in happy terms whereas failing to do so is experienced as dejection and loss. Not living up to one’s obligations, alternatively, invokes anxiety and agitation whereas fulfilling one’s obligations is brings relief and calm (see Higgins,

1987; 1997). Moreover, one's engagement and immersion in pursuits, regardless of their ultimate outcome may depend on the fit between one's regulatory focus and how these pursuits unfold behaviorally (see Franks & Higgins, 2014).

What's desired in a good life and what's required.

The above research suggests that how individuals come to define a good life may depend in large part on the purpose they seek in it. Whereas a promotion focus may lead one to consider what one desires in a good life, a prevention focus may lead one to consider what a good life requires. Moreover, what's required and what's desired for a good life may ultimately influence not only how we come to define it but the impact it ultimately has on our overall well-being. For example, after first having participants complete a composite measure of regulatory focus (Haws et al 2010) , Shah (2016) recently asked online participants both the extent to which they personally desired and the extent to which they felt they needed more traits growth, spirituality, wisdom joy, social connection, health, security, success, wealth and status, traits and states commonly associated with living the good life (see, for instance, Baumeister et al. 2013; Gallagher et al 2009, Morris & Small, 1971) .

As illustrated in Table 1, participants' promotion focus was found to be positively correlated with the degree to which they ideally wanted more of the traits and states that defined the good life, whereas participants' prevention focus was found to positively relate to the degree to which they felt they needed more of these same traits and states. Perhaps more importantly, this study also found that participants' regulatory focus moderated how important it was to their overall well-being that they address their wants and needs. Indeed, participants' promotion focus was found to

significantly increase the impact of what they ideally wanted on their overall satisfaction with life, as measured by the SWLS (see Diener et al 1985; Pavot & Diener 1993). Alternatively, participants' prevention focus was found to significantly increase the impact of what they felt they needed on their satisfaction with life.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

And as discussed, focusing on what's desired and what's required in a good life may also lead to differences in how such a life is pursued. With this in mind, Shah (2016) asked the same online participants about potential origins of the good life. Specifically, the extent to which the good life originated with them and with others, as well as the extent to which it was the result of various behavioral strategies, such as enthusiasm, vigilance, assertion and restraint. As is illustrated in Table 2, participants' promotion focus was associated with an orientation towards assertion and enthusiasm in pursuing the good life whereas their prevention focus was associated with restraint and self-control.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

A follow-up study gave participants an online version of Morris's 13-item Ways of Living scale (Morris and Stone, 1971) after again completing the composite measure of regulatory focus (Hawes et al 2010). As illustrated in Table 3, participants' promotion

focus score was found to be associated with the items from the Ways of Living scale that reflected challenge and risk whereas participants' prevention focus was found to be associated with those items that reflected obedient and vigilant ways of living.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

In a third study, Shah (2016) had online participants again complete the composite regulatory focus strength measure (Hawes et al 2010), and then ask them to imagine an individual they knew well who had a resolution to exercise at least 15 days a month in the upcoming year. Ultimately this person does average 15 days of exercise a month over the course of the year and the participants were then randomly shown one of two charts indicating how this individuals' performance varied from month to month. Although the overall performance was identical both charts, one indicated rather consistent monthly performance for the year while the other showed monthly performance that increased over the course of the year, as illustrated in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

After viewing the charts participants were asked to indicated how positive and satisfied they predicted the individuals would be with their performance overall and how satisfied they would be with this performance. As illustrated in Table 4, participants' promotion focus strength was associated with greater positivity predictions and self-reports for the performance that increased over time. Participants'

prevention focus strength, alternatively, was associated with greater positivity predictions and self-reports for performance that was consistent over the course of the year.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Participants' regulatory focus, then, may impact how individuals ultimately experience positivity in their own lives. For promotion-focused individuals, the good life may be experienced most positively to the extent to which their lives allow them to fulfill their ideals and personal desires in a manner that fits with a focus on achievement and gain. Alternatively, for prevention-focused individuals the good life may be experienced most positively to the extent to which their lives allow them to address their basic needs and requirements in a manner best fitting with a focus on security and safety (see also Higgins, Cornwell, & Franks 2014).

Pursuing a good end: Regulatory focus and end-of-life planning.

Finally, recent work by Tyszkowski & Shah (2016) has examined how regulatory focus may come to impact not only how we pursue good lives but also potentially how we plan to end them. Indeed, despite significant benefit for themselves and their loved-ones, individuals are often reluctant to consider and plan for their death and end of life care (see Vail, Juhl, Arndt, Vess, Routledge & Rutjens, 2012) . As a result, end-of-life decisions are often left to loved ones and often results in care that is inconsistent with

individuals' wishes or intentions (Brinkman-Stoppelenburg, Rietjens, & van der Heide, 2014).

Tyszkowski & Shah (2016) examined whether end-of-life and advanced-care discussions could be encouraged through different social and behavioral pathways, as determined by individuals' regulatory focus on promotion or prevention. Through their differing tendencies towards eagerness and approach vs. vigilance and avoidance it was predicted that regulatory focus may influence not only the likelihood of considering end-of-life care, but the manner in which this consideration would best unfold through medical intervention. To examine these possibilities, 311 participants were recruited for an online survey that included a measure of participants' regulatory focus towards promotion and prevention (the RFQ-SR, see Summerville & Roese 2008), as well as assessments of the frequency of their medical care over the last 12 months and the ease with which they felt they could discuss medical issues with their doctor or doctors. Finally, this survey included a four-item assessment of participants' consideration of their end-of-life medical care as well and assessments of their overall health, age and income. Consistent with past work, Tyszkowski & Shah (2016) found that the extent to which participants had thought about, discussed, and planned end-of-life medical treatment was positively related to both the frequency of their medical care visits and the ease with which they could talk with their doctor. Moreover, the strength of participants' prevention focus was found to encourage consideration of end-of-life care both directly and indirectly (by increasing the frequency of medical care). Although the strength of participants' promotion focus was not found to directly encourage

consideration of end-of-life care, it was found to relate indirectly by increasing the ease with which participants proactively initiated discussions with their doctors about end-of-life care, as illustrated in Figure 2.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

These initial findings have implications for understanding how individuals' planning for the end-of-life may best be supported, depending on whether such planning reflects a focus on promotion or prevention concerns. Indeed, Identification of individuals as either prevention or promotion focused may allow for the tailoring of clinical interventions meant to maximize the information on end-of-life planning that physicians can effectively convey to their patients.

A good life with purpose

In detailing the implications of considering the basic regulatory purposes of leading a good life, the present analysis has sought to highlight the utility of a self-regulatory approach to understanding the challenges involved in defining and leading a good life. In doing so, it has sought to examine why individuals might come to define such a life differently and why they might ultimately pursue and experience it in very different ways. Though this analysis is hardly complete, it perhaps provides an initial framework for understanding other self-regulatory challenges that may arise as individuals define, pursue, experience and perhaps maintain their good life as well as the challenges they face in planning for its ultimate end.

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N=606	Desires For Good Life	Requirements For Good Life
Promotion Focus	.14***	0.06
Prevention Focus	-.11**	.09*

*** p < .05, **p < .01. *** p < .001**

Table 1: Partial correlations of regulatory focus with what is desired and required for a good life

The good life comes from...

N=606	Enthusiasm	Vigilance	Assertion	Restraint	Self	Others
Promotion Focus	.13*	-0.05	.15***	0.07	0.24***	-0.03
Prevention Focus	0.05	.17**	0.07	.12*	.081*	.14***

* p < .05, ** p < .01 ***p < .001

Table 2: Partial correlations of regulatory focus with perceived determinants of the good life.

Proactive and Reactive Ways of Living...

N=348	Constantly Master Changing Conditions	Wait in Quiet Receptivity	Chance Adventuresome Deeds	Obey the Cosmic Purpose
Promotion Focus	.21***	-0.05	.21***	0.07
Prevention Focus	0.04	.11*	-0.07	.12*

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Partial correlations of regulatory focus with ratings of ways of living

N=307	Predicted Positivity From Growth	Own Positivity From Growth	Predicted Positivity From Stability	Own Positivity From Stability
Promotion Focus	.14*	.11*	-0.04	-0.05
Prevention Focus	0.05	0.02	.15**	.14**

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

Table 4: Partial correlations of regulatory focus with predicted and own satisfaction from growth and stability in fulfilling a new year's resolution.

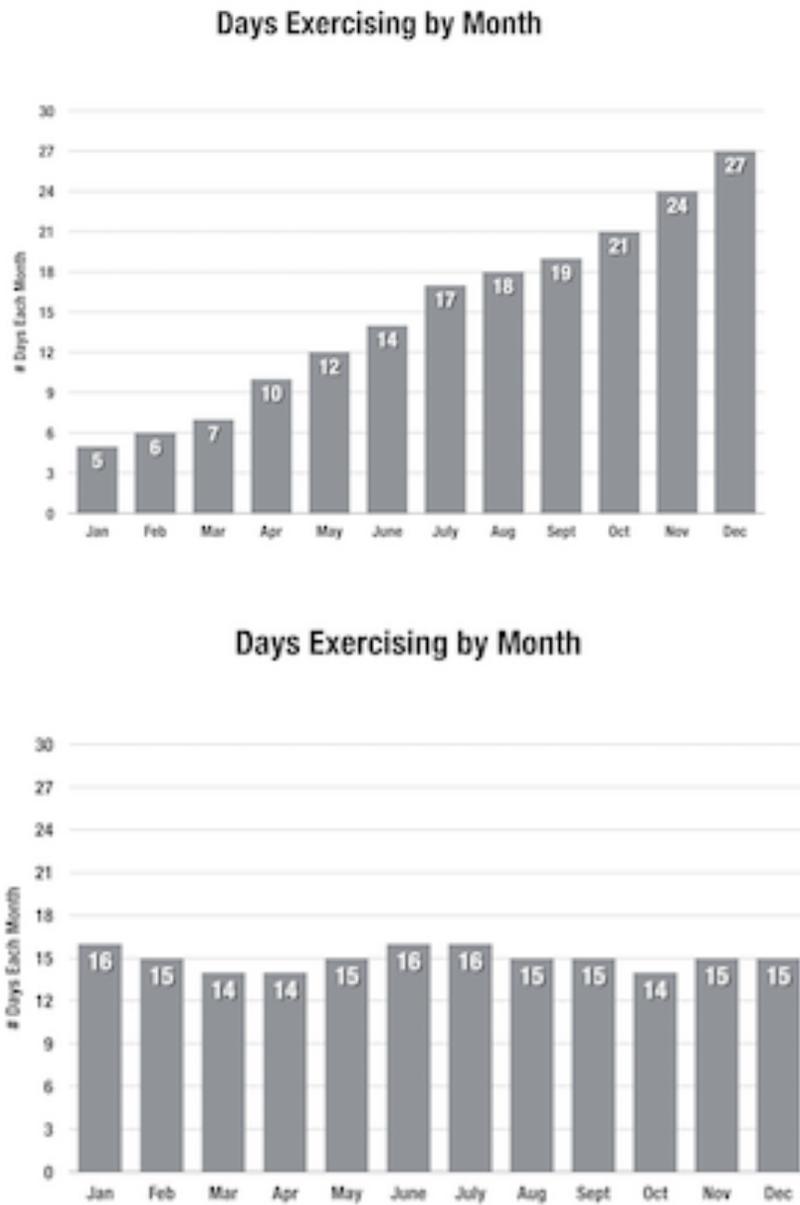
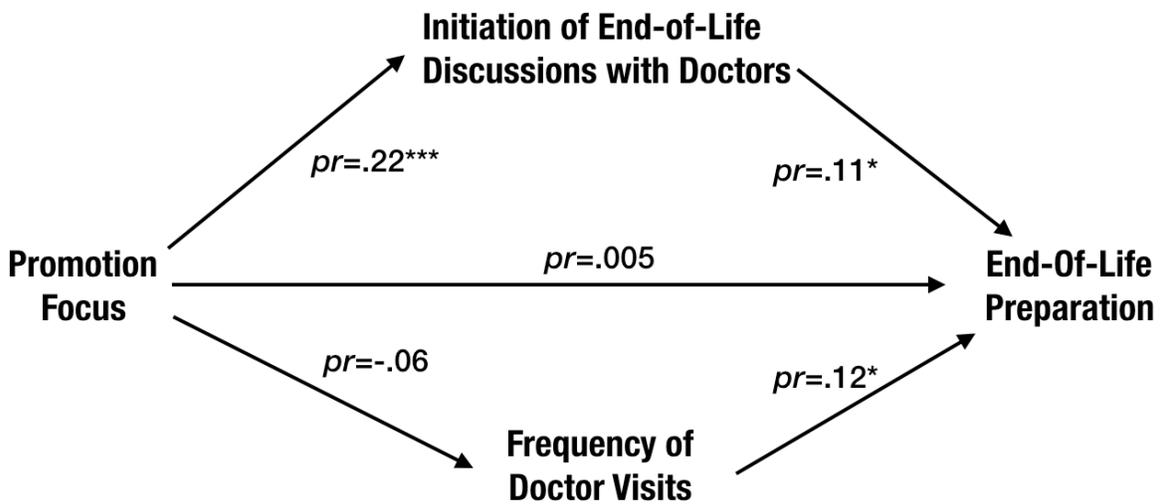
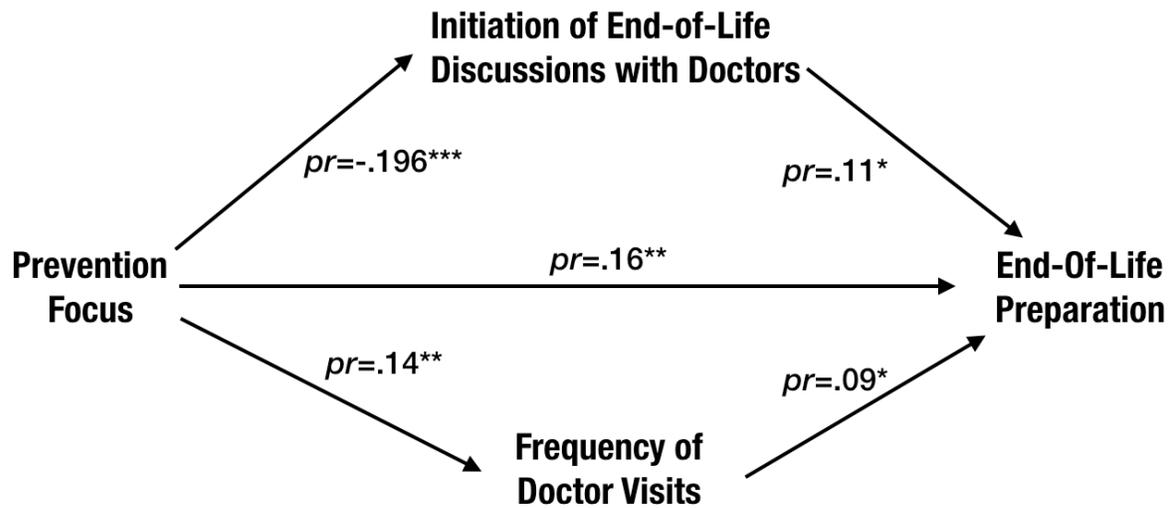


Figure 1: Hypothetical resolution performance over the course of a year



* $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$, $n=311$

Figure 2: Regulatory Focus and End-of-Life Planning