Unsuccessful Purchase Experiences and Future Consumer Decisions: Effects of Initial Goal Setting Processes and Counterfactual Thoughts

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It was hypothesized that a failure experience in the initial goal pursuit task might increase preparation for a subsequent future decision and that the effect is moderated by the goal setting processes during the initial task. These expectations were confirmed both in anagram solving situations (experiments 1) and in consumer purchase decision situations (experiment 2). In addition, the effect was mediated by the amount of upward (vs. downward) counterfactual thoughts generated in response to the failure. Finally, the effect was quite independent of the level of affect that participants experienced after the failure.

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ABSTRACT
It is hypothesized that a failure experience in the initial goal pursuit task might increase preparation for a subsequent future task and that the effect is moderated by the goal setting processes during the initial task. The results of two laboratory experiments support these predictions. In addition, the effect is mediated by the amount of upward (vs. downward) counterfactual thoughts generated in response to the failure. Finally, the effect is quite independent of the level of affect that participants experience after the failure.

INTRODUCTION
When people experience a failure in their goal pursuit, they tend to imagine better or worse consequences that differ from the outcomes that have actually occurred. These imaginary thoughts, which are called counterfactual thinking (CFT), influence affect or feeling people experience after the failure. That is, people may feel better, if they mentally simulate even worse alternative outcomes that might also have happened (i.e., downward CFT), whereas they may feel even worse if they consider better outcomes that might also have occurred (i.e., upward CFT). The affective function has received extensive empirical support in the literature (e.g., Roese 1997 for a review).

Counterfactual thinking may provide another important function for individuals, namely a preparatory function, which is the central focus of the present research. That is, counterfactual thinking may provide preparatory functions such that upward CFT may stimulate people to prepare for the future. Further, the literature suggests that this function is likely to occur at the expense of immediate feelings of dissatisfaction. Thus, there might be a trade-off between the two functions. Nonetheless, little research on the relationship between CFT and preparation for future and on the factors governing the relationship has been conducted. The purpose of the present research is to investigate this matter. Specifically, over two experiments we demonstrate that initial goal setting processes determine the direction of counterfactual thinking in response to a goal failure, which in turn, influences the level of preparation for the future. Further, this effect occurs both in an anagram solving situation (experiment 1) and in a consumer purchase decision situation (experiment 2). In addition, the effect is shown to be mediated by the relative magnitude of upward versus downward CFT in response to a goal failure. Finally, the effect was quite independent of the level of affect that participants experienced after the failure.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
Counterfactuals, Affect, and Preparation
Counterfactual thinking (CFT) refers to mental simulations of alternative outcomes that might have occurred in response to the actual outcomes. Counterfactuals are typically in the form of conditional propositions, embracing both antecedents (e.g., “if-only”) and consequents (e.g., “might have been”). Once in mind, these counterfactual thoughts influence a wide range of judgments and affective reactions, including self-inferences, regret, and happiness (Roese 1997 for a review).

Counterfactual thoughts may have an affective function (i.e., making people feel better) and a preparatory function (i.e., making people better prepared for the future), for which the direction of CFT plays an important role. That is, a downward CFT (i.e., thoughts about alternative outcomes that are worse than actuality) rather than an upward CFT (i.e., thoughts about alternative outcomes that are better than actuality) is likely to produce an affective function, whereas the preparative function may be well served by upward rather than downward counterfactuals. For example, Roese (1994) manipulated the direction of counterfactuals that participants generated after recalling a negative episode in life. Participants who were asked to generate downward counterfactuals subsequently reported more positive affect than those asked to generate upward counterfactuals. However, the upward CFT participants showed more preparative intentions for a future episode than the downward CFT participants. These suggest that upward counterfactuals may prepare a person for the future at the expense of immediate feelings of dissatisfaction, whereas downward counterfactuals may enhance satisfaction at the expense of leaving a person unprepared for the future. Further, this trade-off has been advocated by other researchers (e.g., Boninger, Gliether, and Stratham 1994; Markman et al. 1993).

Goal Setting Processes, Counterfactuals, and Preparation
The existing literature has identified various factors that might determine the direction of counterfactual thinking (upward vs. downward). For example, the nature of the past outcome (e.g., failure vs. success; Markman et al. 1993), the mutability of past outcomes (e.g., Gilovich and Medvec 1994), individual differences (e.g., prevention vs. promotion focus in self-regulation: Roese and Hur 1997), and contextual factors (e.g., priming of enjoyment vs. performance: Sanna, Meier, and Wegner 2001) were shown to influence the direction of counterfactuals.

Little attention has been directed to goal setting processes as a potential determinant of the direction of counterfactual thinking (except for Burrus and Roese 2006). According to the goal setting literature (e.g., Oettingen 2000, Oettingen, Pak, and Schnetter 2001) and the construal level theories (e.g., Burrus and Roese 2006), goal setting routes can vary in terms of how extensively people engage in higher construal level (‘why’) versus lower construal level (‘how’) features of a goal. The construal level theory (Trope and Liberman 2003) posits that the same object can be represented at multiple construal levels. Similarly the goal setting procedure can consider either why (i.e., the benefits of attaining a goal: high level construal) or how (i.e., ease or difficulty of achieving a goal: low level construal). The why-only route to goal setting concentrates on the positive consequence of goal attainment. For example, during the setting of a goal of losing weight, people may solely fantasize about better-looking appearance after a successful weight loss. In contrast, the how-only route is based on mere reflections on difficulties that must be overcome to attain a goal. Thus, people may focus primarily on the difficulty of performing daily exercise and keeping low-calorie diet program during setting a goal of losing weight.
Burrus and Roese (2006) examined the influence of the construal level of the goal setting on counterfactual judgment (i.e., the extent to which personal actions change the goal). They found insignificant (study 1) or marginally significant (study 2) difference in counterfactual judgment between the participants who concentrated on the thoughts related to why they should have achieved a goal and the participants who listed how they have achieved a goal. The results imply that the extent to which people generate counterfactual thoughts is not strongly influenced by whether the goal setting is done at a higher construal level or at a lower construal level.

However, the literature on the goal setting procedure presents a third way of setting a goal (Oettingen et al. 2001). The third, balanced route to goal setting rests on simultaneous consideration of high and low construal levels of goal attainment. In this case, people might consider both better-looking appearance and difficulty of keeping low-calorie diet. Considering both construal levels tends to strengthen goal commitment when the goal is perceived to be attainable since mental contrasting transforms the higher level features into something to be achieved and the lower level features into something to be done (Oettingen 2000; Oettingen et al. 2001). As a result, the increased level of goal commitment might serve as a basis for generating counterfactuals after experiencing a failure in goal pursuit.

Based on this, we contend that goal setting processes should influence counterfactual thinking in response to a failure of goal pursuit, thereby affecting the level of preparation for the future. Specifically, we expect that after experiencing a failure, one is more likely to generate upward counterfactual thinking when both the high and low construal level features of a goal are simultaneously considered (i.e., ‘balanced’ goal setting) rather than when one considers only either high or low construal level features of goal attainment. Since the literature suggests that upward CFT leads to a higher level of future preparation (e.g., Roese 1997), we further expected that the balanced goal setting processes would lead to a higher level of preparation for the future than either why-only or how-only goal setting processes. These hypotheses were tested and confirmed in anagram solving task situation (experiment 1) and in an online shopping task situation (experiment 2).

**EXPERIMENT 1**

Experiment 1 tests the effect of the goal setting type on future preparation after experiencing a failure to achieve a goal. We hypothesize that the levels of counterfactual thinking and preparation are higher when one considers both why and how rather than only one feature. Another goal of experiment 1 is to test the mediating role of upward (vs. downward) counterfactual thinking in the effect of goal setting type on preparation. To do so, two types of instructions for CFT generation (unrestricted CFT vs. restricted CFT) were employed crossed over the goal-setting conditions (why-only vs. how-only vs. balanced). Participants were either allowed to freely imagine and write down counterfactual thoughts that came to mind (i.e., unrestricted CFT) or asked to imagine and write down only one CFT (i.e., restricted CFT). If the effect of goal setting processes on future preparation is mediated by their influence on the relative magnitude of upward (vs. downward) CFT, as hypothesized, the influence of the goal setting type on the future preparation will be significantly greater for the balanced condition than the other conditions in the unrestricted-CFT conditions, but the effects will be eliminated in the restricted-CFT conditions. These predictions were tested in a situation in which participants in three goal setting processes set initial goals, solved anagrams as a target task, and received negative feedback about their performance.

**Method**

**Participants and Design.** A total of 156 undergraduate students from a large university participated in the experiment. They received a pen as a gift for participation. Participants were randomly assigned to each combination of 3 (goal setting type: why-only vs. how-only vs. balanced) x 2 (CFT generation: unrestricted vs. restricted CFT) conditions.

**Stimuli and Procedure.** The experiment was conducted in classrooms. Upon arrival, participants were told that they would participate in an anagram test and that if they solved seven or more out of 10 anagrams, they would receive a prize valued at about $10. Then, they were given a booklet which contained instructions and anagrams. The cover page presented a brief overview of the study. The second page presented sample anagram tests. The manipulation of the type of goal setting process was achieved on the third page. Participants in the why-only conditions were first asked to imagine and write down the positive consequences of winning $10 by solving at least seven anagrams. Participants in the how-only conditions were asked to write down difficulties and obstacles to overcome to attain the cash prize. In the balanced conditions, participants were instructed to write down both benefits and costs of attaining the goal. The thoughts written down by the participants in each condition were later classified into why-related and how-related thoughts, and served as a manipulation check for the goal setting processes.

The test anagrams were presented on the next page. Participants were presented with ten moderately difficult anagrams: FARCS (scarf), WOMNA (woman), RACMAIE (America), RCNOTEC (concert), ARESMEU (measure), EOPYALM (Maypole), UPRETTM (trumpet), TLPHSOAI (hospital), TORVALEE (elevator), and TMGRNAKE (marketing). Participants were allowed to take as much time as they wanted to solve the anagrams, but actually took no longer than 15 minutes. This task was followed by a short break during which participants’ correct answers were counted. Then, when the session resumed, participants were informed their anagram test scores. No one solved more than six anagrams correctly (average anagram solved=2.28, SD=1.42) and there was no significant influence of experimental variables on the number of correct answers ($p’>.10$). Thus, all participants were informed that they had failed to correctly solve at least seven anagrams.

Then, participants were asked to open the second booklet that included measures for counterfactual thinking, affect, and preparation. First, counterfactual thinking in response to the negative feedback was measured by asking participants to write down their current thoughts and feelings about the anagram test in an “if—then” format. In the restricted CFT conditions, the participants were asked to imagine and write down only one counterfactual thought that came to mind, whereas there was no restriction on the number of listed thoughts in the unrestricted CFT conditions. These thoughts were later classified into upward CFT and downward CFT. After this, the affect that participants experienced after the feedback was assessed along four 9-point scales (1=strongly disagree, 9=strongly agree) that captured satisfaction, happiness, sadness, and gloominess. The four ratings were averaged to form a composite index of affect ($\alpha=.87$). Finally, participants’ future preparation was assessed by asking participants to indicate their agreement with two statements along scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree): “I am willing to participate in the next anagram test” and “I am ready to participate in another anagram test.” These ratings were averaged to form a composite index of future preparation ($\alpha=.94$). After completing the measures, participants were debriefed and dismissed.
Manipulation Checks. To check if the manipulation of goal setting process (why-only vs. how-only vs. balanced) was successful, the thoughts that participants had generated during the goal setting stage were classified into why-related thoughts (i.e., thought related to the benefits of attaining the goal) and how-related thoughts (i.e., things to do to achieve the goal) by two independent judges (inter-judge reliability=.88). Then, the frequency of these thoughts were analyzed by a 3 (goal setting type) x 2 (CFT generation) x 2 (type of goal-related thoughts: benefit vs. cost) mixed ANOVA. As expected, participants generated more why-related thoughts than how-related thoughts in why-only conditions ($M=2.72$ vs. $M=0.63$), fewer why-related thoughts than how-related thoughts in how-only conditions ($M=0.70$ vs. $M=2.15$), and both thoughts quite equally in the balanced condition ($M=1.69$ vs. $M=1.48$). These results indicate that the experimental variables were successfully manipulated.

Counterfactual Thinking. We predicted that the direction of counterfactual thinking (i.e., upward vs. downward CFT) would be affected by the process through which one initially sets a goal. To test this prediction, two independent judges coded counterfactual thoughts into upward CFT if the thoughts mentioned imagined outcomes that were better than what had actually happened, and into downward CFT if they were about worse outcomes than what had actually occurred (inter-judge reliability=.89). Disagreements between the two judges were resolved through discussion.

Table 1 shows the numbers of upward CFT and downward CFT and the difference between the two scores as a function of goal setting conditions and CFT generation. Overall, participants generated more upward CFT than downward CFT (96% vs. 4% of 164 CFT in the unrestricted CFT condition). This is consistent with the existing research suggesting that people tend to generate upward CFT than downward CFT when they experience a negative outcome (e.g., Sanna 1997).

Our prediction was tested by a 3 (goal setting type) x 2 (CFT generation) ANOVA on the relative magnitude of upward and downward CFT generated after the negative feedback. In the unrestricted CFT conditions, a larger number of upward CFT (vs. downward CFT) was generated in the balanced conditions ($M=3.07$) than either in the why-only conditions ($M=1.79$; $F(1, 150)=32.38$, $p<.01$) or in the how-only conditions ($M=1.12$; $F(1, 150)=72.72$, $p<.01$). The difference in the latter two conditions was also significant ($F(1, 150)=8.90$, $p<.01$). Under the restricted CFT conditions, however, the difference between the upward and downward CFT was virtually identical over goal setting conditions ($F<1.0$). This pattern was confirmed by a significant interaction of goal setting and CFT generation on the relative magnitude of upward versus downward CFT ($F(2, 150)=55.06$, $p<.01$).

Preparation. It was hypothesized that the level of preparation would be higher in the balanced conditions than in the why-only or how-only conditions, when participants were allowed to freely generate CFT, but that the effect would be eliminated if participants were restricted to generate only one CFT. This prediction was confirmed by an analysis of preparation ratings as a function of goal setting and CFT-generation. As shown in table 1, when CFT generation was restricted, the preparation level did not significantly vary over the three goal setting conditions ($F<1.0$). When CFT was freely generated, however, the level of preparation was higher in the balanced condition ($M=6.00$) than in the why-only condition ($M=5.00$; $F(1, 150)=6.54$, $p<.05$) or in the how-only condition ($M=4.36$; $F(1, 150)=18.66$, $p<.01$). The latter two conditions did not significantly differ from each other ($F(1, 150)=2.78$, $p>.10$). This pattern was confirmed by a significant interaction effect in an omnibus ANOVA test ($F(2, 150)=4.72$, $p<.05$).

Mediating Role of CFT. The mediating role of CFT in the effect of goal setting on preparation was further tested in the unrestricted CFT conditions using the procedure suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Goal setting processes significantly influenced both the level of future preparation ($F(2, 73)=13.66$, $p<.01$) and the relative magnitude of upward CFT (vs. downward CFT) generated after the negative feedback ($F(2, 73)=13.66$, $p<.01$). To examine the mediating role of CFT between goal setting and preparation, an ANCOVA was conducted with the relative magnitude of upward versus downward CFT being a covariate. The effect of goal setting on preparation, which was originally significant ($F=13.66$), was substantially reduced to only a marginal significance when the relative magnitude of CFT was co-varied ($F(2, 72)=2.69$, $p=.08$). These results indicated that the effect of goal setting processes on preparation was mediated by their influence on the relative magnitude of upward versus downward CFT, as hypothesized.

Affect. The affect that participants experienced upon receiving the failure feedback was also analyzed as a function of the goal setting conditions. A two-way ANOVA on the affect yielded a marginally significant effect of the goal setting type ($F(2, 150)=2.86$, $p<.10$). Planned contrasts indicated that affect in the why-only conditions ($M=2.42$) was less positive than either in the how-only conditions ($M=2.67$; $F(1, 150)=4.65$, $p<.05$) or in the balanced conditions ($M=2.65$; $F(1, 150)=3.95$, $p<.05$), with the difference between the latter two conditions being insignificant ($F<1.0$). The main effect of CFT generation and its interaction with goal setting type were not significant ($F's<1.0$). Thus, a negative relationship
between affect and preparation was not supported since the pattern of the effect of goal setting on affect was inconsistent with the effect on preparation.

**Discussion**

The results from experiment 1 were generally consistent with our proposition that the balanced goal setting process, compared to either why-only or how-only processes, would lead to a higher level of preparation for the future, and that the effect would be accounted for by the mediating role of the CFT relative magnitude of upward CFT. In addition, the increased preparation set for the future in the balanced conditions was not at the expense of immediate feelings of dissatisfaction, contrary to the previous research. The next experiment attempted to find evidence showing the influence of goal setting on CFT and preparation in an online shopping context.

**EXPERIMENT 2**

Experiment 2 was conducted to replicate the results from experiment 1 in a consumer behavior domain. Participants in the experiment were invited to a computer-simulated online shopping for an MP3 player, in which they were led to experience an unsuccessful purchase episode, and then asked to indicate the level of preparation for a next online shopping. As in the previous Experiment, the initial goal setting process was experimentally manipulated, and its impact on CFT, affect, and preparation was investigated.

**Method**

Participants and Design. A total of 90 undergraduate students from a large university participated in the experiment for extra course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three goal-setting conditions (why-only vs. how-only vs. balanced), as explained below.

Stimuli and Procedure. We simulated an online shopping episode in which participants were asked to make a purchase decision for an MP3 player after browsing product information at online stores. The experiment was conducted in a computer lab. Several sessions of 10 to 15 participants were run. Upon arrival, participants were seated in front of a PC, which was programmed to display instructions, stimuli, and questions on the screen. Participants moved to a next screen by clicking their mouse when they finished the current screen page. However, the experimenter controlled the pace of this proceeding by asking participants to click the mouse to move to the next screen only after all participants finished the task on the current screen page.

The first screen displayed an overview of the study. Participants were informed that the study intended to explore consumers’ online shopping behavior. The second screen displayed some key attributes to consider when purchasing an MP3 player (e.g., easy to carry, file storage, etc.) and benefits of online shopping. With this preamble, the next screen manipulated the type of goal setting processes. First, all participants were given the same goal of purchasing an MP3 player online at a good price. However, they were asked to first consider either only higher or lower construal level features of the goal or both, depending on the assigned experimental conditions. Specifically, participants in the why-only condition were asked to imagine and type in positive consequences of successfully purchasing an MP3 player at an online store (e.g., “good quality product at a less expensive price”). Participants in the how-only condition were asked to consider the obstacles and difficulties in purchasing an MP3 player online (e.g., “too many products to compare across online stores”). In the balanced condition, participants were asked to imagine both benefits and costs of successful online shopping.

After this, participants were given a task of searching product information online to select the MP3 player model to purchase and provided with nine online shopping store names on a screen. A click on a particular store name popped up a window for the online shopping mall carrying a variety of products including MP3 players. Participants were allowed to browse stores on the list at their own pace and to stop search whenever they wished. They completed the shopping task by clicking an icon for the selected MP3 player.

All listed stores except for the one named “Happy Dream Mall” were hyperlinked to corresponding websites such that clicking a name led participants to the shopping mall website. However, Happy Dream Mall was a hypothetical one that was created for the experiment. Thus, the computer screen displayed a sign of “connecting...” indefinitely when participants clicked the name. This was necessary to operationalize a negative feedback on the shopping task, as explained shortly.

**Negative Feedback.** After completing the search and making a purchase decision for the MP3 model, participants were then asked to move to the next screen on which a post-purchase scenario was presented. Specifically, participants were instructed to imagine that they had received the MP3 player model that they had ordered. In addition, they were told that the same model was on sale in “Happy Dream Mall” and that the price was the lowest among the all shopping malls. This information was deemed effective in eliciting participants’ counterfactual thinking, “I should have waited longer until the website was accessed...”

Dependent Measures. The next two screens asked participants to write down their counterfactual thoughts upon receiving the negative feedback on an empty sheet separately provided by the experimenter, and measured participants’ level of affect along the same scales as employed in experiment 1. After this, participants’ preparation level for the next online shopping was assessed on two 9-point scales that measured their willingness and readiness to shop online again (α=.72). Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

**Results**

Manipulation Checks. The manipulation of goal setting processes was successful. An analysis of thoughts generated during the goal setting stage indicated that participants in the why-only conditions generated more why-related thoughts than how-related thoughts (M=5.20 vs. M=10), whereas the reverse was true in the how-only condition (M=.25 vs. M=.89). In the balanced condition, however, participants generated both types of thoughts quite equally (M=3.04 vs. M=2.64). This pattern was confirmed by a significant two-way interaction of goal setting processes (why-only vs. how-only vs. balanced) and type of thoughts (F(2, 83)=92.54, p<.01), as expected.

Counterfactual Thinking. Participants generated more upward (vs. downward) CFT in the balanced conditions (M=2.75) than either in the why-only conditions (M=1.93, F(1, 83)=11.37, p<.01) or in the how-only conditions (M=1.04, F(1, 83)=49.09, p<.01), as expected (table 2). The difference between the latter two conditions was also significant (F(1, 83)=13.71, p<.01). This pattern was confirmed by the significant main effect of goal setting conditions in an omnibus ANOVA (F(2, 83)=27.53, p<.01).

Preparation. The extent to which participants felt prepared for a future online shopping was analyzed as a function of goal setting conditions (Table 2). As expected, the overall effect of goal setting was significant (F(2, 83)=12.73, p<.01). The preparation level was significantly higher in the balanced condition (M=6.30) than either in the why-only condition (M=5.15, F(1, 83)=16.26, p<.01) or in the how-only condition (M=4.95; F(1, 83)=20.54, p<.01). The
latter two conditions did not differ significantly \( (F<1.0) \). These results replicated the findings of experiment 1 and confirmed our hypothesis.

Mediating Role of CFT. As shown earlier, goal setting processes significantly influenced both future preparation \( (F(2, 83)=12.73, p<.01) \) and the relative magnitude of upward CFT \( (F(2, 83)=27.53, p<.01) \). The results of an ANCOVA with the magnitude of upward (vs. downward) CFG as a covariate indicated that the effect of goal setting on preparation, which was originally significant \( (F=12.73) \), was reduced but still remained significant \( (F(2, 82)=10.44, p<.01) \). Therefore, the mediating role of CFT was not confirmed in experiment 2.

Affect. Not surprisingly, participants felt quite unhappy \( (M=2.62) \) when they received the negative feedback. This unhappiness did not significantly vary over the goal setting conditions \( (F(2, 83)=2.26, p>.10) \).

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research extends Burrus and Roese (2006), who found insignificant or weak influence of the construal level (high vs. low) of goal setting on counterfactual thinking, and examines how counterfactual thoughts and the preparation level for the future after experiencing a failure in goal pursuit is affected by the process through which one initially sets a goal. The results of the present research provide strong support for our prediction that consideration of both positive consequences and difficulties of attaining a goal during the goal setting, compared to consideration of only one, leads to better preparation for the future after experiencing a failure in the current goal pursuit. The results of two experiments consistently demonstrated that goal setting processes significantly influenced both preparation level and the relative magnitude of upward versus downward of CFT in the hypothesized direction. Further, this effect was true regardless of whether the task involved an anagram solving (experiments 1) or a consumer decision (experiment 2).

The present research also identifies these effects. That is, the mediating role of upward versus downward counterfactual thinking was confirmed by covariance analyses showing that the effect was reduced to non-significance when the relative number of upward versus downward CFT was co-varied in experiments 1. This mediation was further confirmed when the extent to which counterfactual thinking was experimentally manipulated. That is, experiment 1 has shown that the effect of goal setting processes on preparations was substantial when the generation of CFT was freely allowed, but eliminated if it is experimentally restricted. These results seem to provide strong support for the mediating role of CFT.

The existing literature suggests that upward counterfactuals may enhance satisfaction at the expense of leaving a person unprepared for the future (e.g., Boninger et al. 1994; Markman et al. 1993). Our results suggest that such a trade-off is not always the case. That is, our goal setting manipulation had a significant effect on participants’ upward CFT after experiencing a failure, which in turn influenced the level of future preparation. However, the manipulation had no effect on the level of affect participants experienced after the failure. This seems consistent with previous research that demonstrated self-efficacy as moderating of the affective consequences of upward and downward counterfactual thinking (Sanna 1997). Thus, counterfactual direction may not be so closely linked to affect.

Studies on regulatory focus in self regulation often experimentally manipulate the regulatory focus variably by asking participants in the promotion focus conditions to consider things that they want to happen and how to achieve them, but those in the prevention focus conditions to consider how to avoid things that they do not want to happen in their lives (e.g., Liberman et al. 2001). To reiterate, we manipulated the initial goal setting processes by varying focus of consideration during the goal setting stage (i.e., focusing on positive consequences, difficulties and obstacles, vs. both). Thus, this procedure can be seen as somewhat analogous to that of regulatory focus manipulation. To this extent, one may explain the differences we observed in preparations among goal setting conditions in terms of differences in regulatory focus. This explanation can not be entirely dismissed because we didn’t measure participants’ level of regulatory focus. However, it is unlikely to be the case for at least two reasons. First, if this explanation is valid, one should expect the highest preparation level in the why-only conditions. However, our results consistently showed the highest level in the balanced conditions, not in the why-only conditions.

Second, the alternative explanation is based on research suggesting that promotion focused individuals tend to generate upward CFT than prevention focused individuals (e.g., Roese and Hur 1999). However, our results indicate that the relative magnitude of upward (vs. downward) CFT was largest in the balanced, not in the why-only conditions.

### REFERENCES


