**Introduction**

**Background**
- According to regulatory fit theory (Higgins, 1997, 2000), people can pursue the same goal with different orientations
  - A person’s goal orientation can be:
    - Promotion focused – heightened concern with positive outcomes, accomplishments, and ideals
    - Prevention focused – heightened concern with negative outcomes, obligations, and oughts
  - Fit occurs when:
    1. A promotion focus is paired with a goal that places importance on gains, rewards, and accomplishments
    2. A prevention focus is paired with a goal that places importance on losses, consequences, and responsibilities
- Previous research has shown that greater fit leads to potential benefits such as improved performance and increased motivation; fit is thought to result in a feeling of overall “rightness” (Higgins, 1997, 2000; Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998)
- However, research has relied on self-report measures and performance differences to assess the effects of regulatory fit, which have several limitations:
  1. Self-report questionnaires are administered after completion of a task and do not necessarily reflect how a person feels during the task
  2. Many factors affect performance differences, and having performed well as an end result does not directly speak to what a person experiences during the task
  3. Fit-derived “rightness” may not be something that a person can consciously identify, and thus it may not be possible to directly reflect and report on it

**Purpose**
- Examines how individuals are affected psychologically while they are actually experiencing a regulatory fit situation versus not
- To assess responses during regulatory fit (and lack thereof), we applied the biopsychosocial model of challenge and threat (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996) and measured cardiovascular responses
  - The model holds that cardiovascular responses reveal psychological evaluations of personal resources versus situational demands (i.e., confidence)

**Biopsychosocial Model of Challenge and Threat**
- Positive motivational states (challenge) and negative motivational states (threat) are determined by the ratio of evaluated resources and demands in a situation where a person is working toward an important goal
  - **Challenge** occurs when personal resources are high and situational demands are low
    - Increase in heart rate (HR) from resting baseline - heart beats faster
    - Increase in ventricular contractility (VC) - heart beats harder
    - Low total peripheral resistance (TPR) - arteries dilate
    - High cardiac output (CO) - heart pumps more blood
  - **Threat** occurs when situational demands are high and personal resources are low
    - Like during challenge: increase in HR and VC
    - Unlike during challenge:
      - High TPR
      - Low CO

**Method**
- **Participants**
  - 120 University at Buffalo undergraduates (61 women)
- **Procedure**
  - Completed reaction time task (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997) to determine dominant orientation (promotion vs. prevention focus)
    - Reactions times (RTs) were measured while participants:
      - Listed 4 separate attributes they felt they ought to possess
      - Listed 4 separate attributes they felt they ideally wanted to possess
      - Faster RTs = greater promotion focus
      - A discrepancy score was calculated to determine dominant orientation by subtracting mean RT to ought words from ideal words (higher values indicated greater prevention focus)
    - Sat for a 5-minute resting baseline after physiological sensors were attached
    - Experienced one of two conditions:
      - Accomplishment prime: told to think about their upcoming weekend and what goals they wished to accomplish in order to acquire desirable outcomes (consistent with promotion)
      - Obligation prime: told to think about their upcoming weekend and what responsibilities they needed to complete in order to avoid potentially undesirable outcomes (consistent with prevention)
    - Presented a 2-minute speech about their plans for the weekend while their physiological responses were measured

**Hypotheses**
- **Accomplishment Prime Condition**
  - Exhibit **challenge** when dominantly promotion focused
  - Fit will provide high resources
  - Exhibit **threat** when dominantly prevention focused
  - Lack of fit will create low resources
- **Obligation Prime Condition**
  - Exhibit **threat** when dominantly promotion focused
  - Lack of fit will create low resources
  - Exhibit **challenge** when dominantly prevention focused
  - Fit will provide high resources

**Results**
- Regression analyses were conducted using RT discrepancy scores as a continuous variable and speech prime as a dichotomous variable, predicting cardiovascular markers of challenge/threat

**Conclusion**
- Despite prior research on the positive motivational effects of regulatory fit, the results of this investigation suggest that people with a dominant prevention focus may not necessarily experience a more positive psychological state while pursuing a goal that places importance on obligations
  - It is possible that people who are habitually concerned with potential losses may feel a heightened sense of obligation when in a situation that fits their orientation
  - In other words, fit may be motivating for prevention-focused individuals due to a heightened perception of obligation instead of a feeling of “rightness”
- It is thus unclear whether or not feelings of rightness permeate throughout all occurrences of regulatory fit
- These findings also suggest that prevention-focused individuals were more reactive to prime condition than promotion-focused individuals
  - Further research should investigate whether or not prevention-focused people acquire an overall heightened sensitivity to situational characteristics

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**Challenge/Threat Index**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime Prime</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Obligation Prime**
- TPR and CO values were combined to create a standardized index score of challenge/threat (higher values indicated greater challenge)

**Challenge/Threat**
- Statistical analyses are ongoing
- Preliminary analyses revealed a significant interaction ($B = .54, p < .01$)
  - Contrary to predictions, those in the obligation prime condition exhibited significantly greater threat when they were prevention focused (fit) compared to when they were promotion focused (lack of fit; $B = -.27, p < .05$), whereas the opposite pattern emerged for those in the accomplishment prime condition ($B = .27, p < .05$)
  - Furthermore, prevention-focused individuals exhibited significantly greater threat when they spoke about obligations compared to when they spoke about accomplishments ($B = .80, p < .01$), whereas promotion-focused individuals did not significantly differ across conditions ($p = .25$)