Regulatory focus and the family-work interface: The role of regulatory fit between cohabiting partners

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Regulatory focus and the family–work interface: The role of regulatory fit between cohabiting partners

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The aim of the present study was to examine the impact of regulatory focus in goal pursuit and regulatory fit between marital partners on family conditions and the family–work interface. We hypothesized that when both partners are high on promotion focus (fit) they experience higher developmental possibilities at home and have an increased likelihood of family-to-work facilitation (FWF). In addition, we hypothesized that when both partners are prevention focused (fit) they experience less home demands and less family-to-work conflict (FWC). In total, 131 working couples participated in the study. Each partner provided information about his/her own regulatory focus, perceptions of home demands and home developmental possibilities, and experienced FWF and FWC. Results of moderated structural equation modelling analyses largely supported our hypotheses since the interaction between partners’ promotion focus predicted the levels of home developmental possibilities and FWF, whereas the interaction between partners’ prevention focus predicted home demands in the expected direction. In conclusion, the fit between partners’ self regulatory styles can influence family life and, consequently, the impact of family on work.

Keywords: Cohabiting partners; Family–work conflict; Family–work facilitation; Regulatory fit; Regulatory focus.

Researchers have long recognized that work and family are not separate, but rather interdependent domains or roles with “permeable” boundaries (Kanter, 1977; Pleck, 1977). Accumulated research evidence shows that one’s functioning at work may have a substantial (negative or positive) impact on one’s functioning at home (Byron, 2005; Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeau, & Brinley, 2005). Simultaneously, one’s functioning at home may also influence one’s functioning at work in a negative or positive way (Byron, 2005; Eby et al., 2005). The work–family interface is defined as a process whereby one’s functioning and behaviour in one domain is influenced by quantitative and qualitative demands and resources from the other domain (Demerouti, Bakker, & Voydanoff, 2010; Demerouti, Geurts, & Kompier, 2004; Geurts & Demerouti, 2003). In this study, we will focus on how the interaction between partners’ characteristics influences family functioning as well as the impact of family on the work domain. The impact may be negative when one’s functioning or performance at work is hampered by the intrusion of demands from the home domain, e.g., a sick child that inhibits one from going to work (“Family–Work Conflict”; FWC). The impact may also be positive when one’s functioning or performance at work is facilitated by resources from the home domain, e.g., going back to work after having had an enjoyable weekend with the family (“Family–Work Facilitation”; FWF).

Previous research has mainly focused on the conditions at work that have the potential to influence the family, while our knowledge on the conditions at home that may influence functioning at work is still limited (Byron, 2005; Eby et al., 2005). In the present study, we will examine the determinants of FWC and FWF by focusing on the way partners...
guide each other’s goal-directed behaviours, i.e., self-regulation (Karoly, 1993). The family represents a system where individuals also try to pursue goals, like creating a supportive environment for one’s children or looking out for one’s family’s financial security (Spiegel, Grant-Pillow, & Higgins, 2004). We focus on partners because they represent the two key players in determining family conditions. Higgins’ (1998, 2000) regulatory focus theory forms the basis of this study as it integrates individual and contextual determinants of goal-directed behaviour and therefore is appropriate to study family processes. Lanaj, Chang, and Johnson (2012) recently highlighted the need to examine regulatory focus in interpersonal relationships and its effects on work outcomes. Insights from self-regulation theory may also be relevant in explaining outcomes like FWC and FWF. The central aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between individuals’ regulatory focus, regulatory fit between partners, and the family–work interface.

Regulatory focus and regulatory fit

Regulatory focus theory (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Higgins, 1998) proposes that human motivation serves to satisfy the two basic needs of approaching pleasure and avoiding pain. The theory suggests that these desired hedonic end-states are reached through self-regulatory processes, which refer to the processes by which people seek to align themselves with appropriate goals or standards (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Kröper, Fay, Lindberg, & Meinel, 2010). Two distinct types of regulatory systems, called promotion and prevention focus, drive this process of self-regulation. When promotion focused, individuals are motivated by growth and development needs, have strong ideals, and prefer gain to the avoidance of losses. When prevention focused, individuals are responsive to security needs, the responsibility for safety and protection, have strong emphasis on obligations, and prefer the avoidance of loss to gains.

Regulatory focus has been examined both as a chronic individual-difference variable (e.g., Higgins et al., 2001; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997), and as a temporary, situationally induced state (e.g., Shah & Higgins, 1997). Chronic regulatory foci have also been observed at work (Wallace & Chen, 2006) and at home in behaviour of parents towards their children (Keller, 2008). Promotion and prevention foci are independent dimensions (Higgins, 1998). As such, it is possible that a person has high levels in one focus, both foci (i.e., avoid misfortunes by approaching successes), or neither focus (i.e., appear amotivated) (Johnson, Chang, & Yang, 2010).

According to Higgins et al. (2001), “both promotion and prevention involve motivation to approach or attain a new task goal, [but] they differ in their orientations towards how to successfully attain the goal” (p. 21). Thus, individuals may strive to attain task goals using either a promotion focus which maximizes positive outcomes (e.g., advancement, accomplishment), or a prevention focus which minimizes negative outcomes (e.g., errors, rule violations; Higgins, 2000; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Wallace & Chen, 2006). The former usually use eagerness strategies while the latter adopt vigilant strategies ( Förster, Higgins, & Bianco, 2003). However, in some situations the use of one regulatory focus can be more beneficial than the other.

What seems to determine the success of the regulatory focus is the relation between the motivational orientation of the actor and desired end state as set by the task or situation (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Each regulatory focus (of the actor) tends to have stronger effects on outcomes when paired with conditions that fit goal pursuit strategies (Lanaj et al., 2012), where three effects can occur: (1) The actor feels right about what she/he is doing in the goal-pursuit activity; (2) there is increased strength of engagement in the goal-pursuit activity; or (3) the actor feels good after engaging in the behaviour (Latimer et al., 2008). The desired end state can be specified by the environment through process feedback, task instructions, or goal framing (Higgins et al., 1997). Recently it has also been demonstrated that the regulatory focus of a message can be communicated by a source using nonverbal communication, e.g., gestures, speech rate, and body position and movement, to convey a sense of eagerness or a sense of vigilance during message delivery (Cesario, Higgins, & Scholer, 2008). Generally, environments that emphasize growth and gains should foster a promotion focus because they stimulate eagerness strategies. In contrast, environments that emphasize duties and nonlosses foster prevention focus because they stimulate vigilant strategies (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Family environments sustain regulatory foci through the way that family life is organized (e.g., the clarity of individual obligations, autonomy of individual members, free time family activities). Key persons that influence the regulatory focus of the family are the partners.

In the present study, the regulatory focus of one’s partner is considered to be a proxy of situation-induced regulatory focus. Similarly, parents are viewed to induce situational focus in the child rearing, while supervisors are main players in forming situational focus within organizations (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). This occurs through partners communicating messages in which they refer to and specify which behaviours are or are not hoped for, or should or should not be performed as well as through nonverbal behaviour during the delivery of the message. In both ways, partners can prime situational
focus but they can also induce a focus via playing themselves a behavioural role (modelling), the use of language and symbols, and the feedback they provide to their partner’s attempts to self-regulate.

**REGULATORY FIT AND FAMILY-RELATED OUTCOMES**

Experimental research has shown that the best goal performance is found for individuals who experience regulatory fit between the means/strategies they use and both their chronic (preference for a specific focus) and situation-induced regulatory state (Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998). We expect that regulatory fit between partners will have favourable effects on specific family conditions (in terms of home developmental possibilities and demands) as well as the likelihood that each partner experiences family–work conflict or facilitation. This assumption can be explained by the effects of regulatory fit that have been suggested in the literature. When both partners strive to achieve similar goals by using comparable strategies, they will be more motivated to achieve their goals and they will feel good in the behaviour necessary for goal achievement (Latimer et al., 2008).

Specifically, promotion focused individuals with a promotion focused partner will stimulate family environments that emphasize the development of their members (i.e., promotion focused family), because both partners focus on growth and try to achieve their development needs using eagerness and approach strategies (cf. Higgins, 1998). This can happen, for instance, by recognizing the partner when he/she did well, by reflecting regularly on dreams and ideals together with the partner, or by stimulating the partner/children to invest in their own development during free time (cf. Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Similarly, it has been found that individuals with a chronic promotion focus more often apply an active responsive parental style by expressing their affection towards their children, showing sympathy and expressing feelings of pride for their children (Keller, 2008). Moreover, people high in promotion focus have been found to be high on values such as achievement, self-direction, and stimulation (Leikas, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, & Lindeman, 2009). This means that because individuals tend to communicate their focus and as promotion focused individuals are driven by growth, they will be able to find more developmental possibilities at home when the partner is also high on promotion focus. Developmental possibilities at home refer to opportunities offered to individuals during their free time to develop themselves and their talents as well as to learn new things.

Insights from regulatory focus theory have been applied to explain parents’ behaviour towards their children (Keller, 2008), the evaluation of romantic alternatives in terms of potential partners (Finkel, Molden, Johnson, & Eastwick, 2009), and the forgiveness of a relationship partner (Molden & Finkel, 2010). Recently it was found that when partners experienced regulatory fit between their own and their partner’s promotion focus, they were more successful in moving towards their ideal self, i.e., their aspirations (Righetti, Rusbult, & Finkenauer, 2010). This is because the partner conveys understanding, validation, and care for the needs and wishes of the target person (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Much research indicates that similarity generally predicts attraction and relationship quality more strongly than complementarity does (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007).

Based on these findings, we suggest that the misfit conditions (where one partner is high and the other low on promotion focus) should be related to lower developmental possibilities, and when both partners are high on promotion focus should be related to higher developmental possibilities at home. Regulatory fit can also occur when both partners are low on promotion focus. However, individuals low on promotion focus are not stimulated by growth and development, so we expect the effect of promotion focus on developmental possibilities at home to occur only in high promotion focus conditions. Specifically,

**Hypothesis 1a:** When one partner is high on promotion focus, the developmental possibilities at home will be higher when the other partner is also high rather than low on promotion focus.

Because promotion-focused individuals are driven by challenges, families in which both partners are high on promotion focus (fit) should increase the likelihood of family–work facilitation (FWF). There are two possible explanations for this relationship. First, as we saw previously, in the fit conditions the preferences of the individuals match those of their partners and therefore they feel right about and are motivated to pursue their goals (at home), as well as they feel good after engaging in the activity/behaviour necessary for goal pursuit. In this way, the family domain provides means/resources that help individual functioning in the work domain and thus fosters facilitation. Second, as suggested by Higgins (1998, 2000), Cropanzano, Paddock, Rupp, Bagger, and Baldwin (2008) found that when individuals were promotion focused and the situation-induced focus was also promotion focused, they experienced emotions of cheerfulness. Such positive emotions can spill over from the family to the work domain and help individuals perform their work tasks as their resource reservoirs are filled (Carlson, Witt, Zivnuska, Kacmar, & Grzywacz, 2008). These positive emotions may facilitate functioning in other life domains like work. Similarly, Lobel (1991) suggested that a person
may achieve family–work balance by applying consistent personal values across family and work domains. Hence:

**Hypothesis 1b:** When one partner is high on promotion focus, FWF will be higher when the other partner is also high rather than low on promotion focus.

A similar line of reasoning applies also to prevention focus. However, the outcomes related to prevention focus are different from the outcomes related to promotion focus (cf. Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007). When both partners are prevention focused (fit) they should experience less home demands and less FWC than when one partner is low and the other partner is high on prevention focus. Because both partners focus on obligations and demands at home, they will both make sure that home demands are successfully managed. Both partners will strive to take care of their duties and obligations using vigilance and avoidance strategies (cf. Higgins, 1998). This can be achieved, for instance, by criticizing the partner when he/she did not fulfill the home obligations or by reflecting regularly on obligations and how to prevent failures of the family members (Brockner & Higgins, 2001). Thus, prevention-focused individuals communicate their focus through verbal communication and nonverbal behaviour. In this way, when both partners are high on prevention focus (fit) they will experience less home demands. Similarly, Keller (2008) found that parents with a preference for a prevention focus were inclined to use an active restrictive parental style reflecting the concept of authoritarian parenting by frequently spanking, criticizing, and punishing their children when they were disobedient. Moreover, individuals high on prevention focus were found to be high on conformity values such that they restrained from action that might have violated social norms or upset others (Leikas et al., 2009).

When individuals are prevention focused and the situation-induced focus is also prevention focus, it has been found that they experience emotions of quiescence and serenity (Cronpanzno et al., 2008; Higgins, 1998). In other words, the condition where both partners are high on prevention focus fit should be related to lower experienced tension and pressure (rather than cheerfulness as is the case with promotion focus fit). Because prevention-focused individuals concentrate on the minimization of negative outcomes, they will make sure that their family life does not affect their work performance in an unfavourable way and thus they will experience less family-to-work conflict (cf. Demerouti et al., 2010). This will not be the case when only one partner is high and the other low on prevention focus, i.e., a misfit condition, as well as when both partners are low on prevention focus. In the latter case, neither partner is driven by the minimization of negative outcomes. Thus, our final two hypotheses are:

**Hypothesis 2a:** When one partner is high on prevention focus, home demands will be lower when the other partner is also high rather than low on prevention focus.

**Hypothesis 2b:** When one partner is high on prevention focus, FWC will be lower when the other partner is also high rather than low on prevention focus. FWC will be lowest when there is a fit, rather than lack of fit between partners’ prevention foci.

**METHOD**

**Sample and procedure**

The participants in the study were 131 dual-earner couples in The Netherlands. They were recruited by three masters-level students as part of their masters’ theses. Each student approached 50 working couples who were family members or friends, which resulted in a sample with very heterogeneous jobs. Of the 150 packages of questionnaires that were distributed, 131 were returned completed, resulting in a response rate of 87%. The students handed out two identical questionnaires, one for each partner. To provide anonymity, the questionnaires were coded to allow the researchers to match the partners. The partners were asked to fill out the questionnaires independently. Each couple returned the questionnaires in a prestamped envelope addressed to the university. During data collection the master students followed up with the prospective respondents regularly via phone or email and stressed the importance of both partners participating in the study. As the students knew the code of the questionnaires that each couple received, they followed up the couples for which only one partner had filled out the questionnaire. In this way, only two individual responses were received that did not have a partner’s survey and these were excluded from the analyses.

Twenty-eight per cent of the couples had no children, 23% of the couples had at least one child of 3 years or younger, 32% had children between the ages of 4 and 12 years, and 37% had children 13 years of age or older. The mean age of the men was 42.60 years ($SD = 10.12$) and the mean age of the women was 40.48 years ($SD = 10.51$). About 50% of the men and 44% of the women had completed a university or college degree. Sixty-six per cent of the men worked with people (e.g., provision of service), 16% worked with things (e.g., production), and 18%
with information (e.g., information technology). The majority of the women worked with people (77%), 15% worked with information, and 8% worked with things. Of all the men, 42% were supervisors and they worked more than 36 hours per week on average (SD = 7.10). Only 27% of the women had a supervisory position, and they worked an average of 30 hours per week (SD = 9.85). The women had 16.98 years (SD = 10.65) of work experience on average and the men had 20.86 years (SD = 11.34) experience on average. Thus, compared to the Dutch population, the sample consisted of somewhat older, highly educated couples with older children and longer job experience.

**Measures**

**Individual regulatory focus.** Regulatory focus of respondents was measured with the 18-item Promotion/Prevention scale (nine items each for promotion and prevention focus) developed by Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002). Because this scale was developed for students and refers to academic goals, it was modified such that it referred to life in general. Items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = “seldom/never” to 5 = “to a great extent”. A prevention focus sample item reads “I often worry that I will fail to accomplish my goals”, and a promotion focus sample item reads “I often think about the person I would ideally like to be in the future”.

**Regulatory fit.** All hypotheses suggest that the effect of an individual’s regulatory focus on outcomes will depend on the regulatory focus of the partner, i.e., regulatory fit. Therefore, consistent with similar to practices applied in earlier research testing the effect of regulatory fit (e.g., Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004), we operationalized fit as the statistical interaction between both partner’s focus. Specifically, prevention fit was operationalized as the statistical interaction (term) between one’s own prevention focus and the partner’s prevention focus, whereas promotion fit was operationalized as the statistical interaction (term) between one’s own promotion fit and the partner’s promotion fit.

Home developmental possibilities were assessed by a scale developed by Demerouti et al. (2010). The scale conceptually mirrors Van Veldhoven, De Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, and Meijman’s (2002) job developmental possibilities scale. Home developmental possibilities were measured by three items including “I can develop my talents during my free time”. The response categories ranged from 1 = “never” to 5 = “always”. Each participant reported about the own home resources.

Home demands were measured with a scale developed by Peeters, Montgomery, Bakker, and Schaufeli (2005). The scale conceptually mirrors Karasek’s (1985) psychological demands scale. The home demands scale included five items, such as “Do you find that you are busy at home?” Responses could be made on a 5-point scale (1 = “never”, 5 = “always”).

**Family–work conflict and facilitation.** The extent to which the family conflicts with or facilitates work was assessed with the Dutch questionnaire “Survey Work-home Interference Nijmegen” (SWING; Geurts, Taris, Kompier, Dikkers, van Hooff, & Kinnunen, 2005). Each scale included three items and asked participants to respond to “How often does it happen that…” with the following item reflecting FWC “you have difficulty concentrating on your work because you are preoccupied with domestic matters?”, and this item reflecting FWF “after spending a pleasant weekend with your spouse/family/friends, you have more fun in your job?” The scale ranged from 1 = “never” to 5 = “always”.

**Strategy of analysis**

Because our data could be considered as having a hierarchical structure with individuals nested within couples, before testing our hypotheses, we examined the between-person and within-person variance of all dependent variables by means of hierarchical linear modelling (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). For FWC and home developmental possibilities we found zero variance for Level 2 (couple) (corresponding to a ICC = 0 for both variables). For FWF, the ICC was $\rho = .31$ meaning that 31% of the total variance was between couples, whereas for home demands the ICC was $\rho = .20$, indicating that 20% of the total variance was between couples. According to LeBreton and Senter (2008) an ICC $< .30$ indicates lack of agreement, whereas values between .31 and .50 indicate weak agreement. While ICC’s are not high enough to warrant aggregating the data to the couple level, two of the four dependent variables have a couple effect. The minor couple effects indicate that there is no agreement between self and partner reports on FWC and home developmental possibilities, very low agreement for home demands, and low agreement regarding FWF. Because the low between-person variance does not justify the use of multilevel analysis, we decided to test our hypotheses using structural equation modelling. This strategy was also supported by the fact that the model could not run with multilevel structural equation modelling (using Mplus).

We analysed the covariance matrix of the matched responses of the partners with moderated structural equation modelling and with maximum-likelihood estimation using the AMOS software package (Arbuckle, 2005). The model tested is shown in Figure 1.
All variables including the interaction term are modelled as latent factors with one indicator. Including the items of each scale would result in the model with no less than 56 manifest variables; such large models cannot result in a satisfactory fit (Bentler & Chou, 1987). All latent factors were corrected for random measurement error by setting the random error variance of each construct equal to the product of its variance and one minus its internal consistency (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993).

Parameters were constrained following the strategy of Mathieu, Tannenbaum, and Salas (1992; see also Cortina, Chen, & Dunlap, 2001). Specifically, own and partner’s promotion and prevention focus were standardized so that the formula advanced by Bohrnstedt and Marwell (1978) could be applied to calculate the reliability of the interaction terms. The interaction terms represent the multiplied product terms on the scale level. The reliability of the interaction term for own and partner’s promotion focus was .62 and for own and partners prevention focus was .66. The reliability of the product terms is acceptable. These values were used to fix the λ values for the paths from the latent interaction factors to their indicators. As with all model variables, the error variance of the indicator of the latent interaction factor was set equal to the product of its variance and one minus its reliability. Finally, for own and partner’s promotion and prevention focus, the path from the latent variables to their corresponding observed variables was equal to the square root of the reliability of the observed score.

Both partners provided information about their own regulatory focus, FWC, FWF, developmental possibilities at home, and home demands. An individual’s regulatory focus was included twice in the analysis: once to predict, for example, his or her own FWF, and once to predict the FWF of the partner. This also means that the same interaction score of a couple’s regulatory focus predicted the FWF of the man as well as the FWF of the woman.

In addition to the structural relationships, we included two correlations (see Figure 1): a correlation between own and partner’s prevention focus as well as a correlation between own and partner’s promotion focus. This is because the indicators of the factors of regulatory focus share the same measurement method, namely the same instrument that includes items related to goals and uses the same answer format. Finally, we included the control variables family status (i.e., whether the couples had child(ren) living at home or not) and working times (i.e., whether they worked regular or irregular shifts) as manifest exogenous variables with paths to all endogenous latent factors (i.e., home developmental possibilities, home demands, FWF, FWC).

The fit of the models to the data was assessed with the chi-square ($\chi^2$) statistic, the Goodness of Fit Index.
RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability coefficients are shown in Table 1. In order to follow a meaningful way to categorize the individual and the partner, we decided that the regulatory focus of the individual represents the focus of the men while the regulatory focus of the partner represents the focus of the women. All variables with the exception of scales for home demands and home developmental possibilities had acceptable levels of reliability. The two three-item scales were slightly below the typical cutoff of .70 (Nunnally, 1978) but Voss, Stem, and Fotopoulos (2000) consider such reliabilities acceptable. The average interitem correlation was .38 for developmental possibilities and .34 for home demands, which also suggests that the responses to the items belonging to the same scale were (internally) consistent.

Results of moderated structural equation modelling

The results of the hypothesized model are displayed in Figure 2. The model had a marginally acceptable fit to the data, \( \chi^2(44) = 86.047, p = .001, \) GFI = .95, TLI = .67, RMSEA = .06, since except for the TLI the GFI and RMSEA are near the criteria suggested by Hoyle (1995) and Hu and Bentler (1999). An explanation why the TLI is low compared to the other fit indices is that the average correlation between the variables is not high (Bollen & Long, 1993). This is not surprising since we expected moderation effects. In instances where the fit of the Null model (or independence model which is used by AMOS to calculate TLI) is rather good, the proposed model does not represent an improvement over the Null model and therefore the TLI tends to be low.

The interaction between both partners’ promotion foci had a significant effect on home developmental possibilities, \( \beta = .19, p < .05. \) In a similar vein, the interaction between partners’ promotion focus had a significant effect on FWF, \( \beta = .24, p < .05. \) No main effect of partners’ promotion focus emerged except for the effect of individual’s promotion focus on home developmental possibilities, \( \beta = .18, p < .05. \) The interaction between both partners’ prevention focus had a significant effect on home demands, \( \beta = -.39, p < .05. \) However, the interaction between

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**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Prevention focus(^1)</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.80</td>
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<td>.08</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Partner’s prevention focus(^2)</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Partner’s promotion focus(^2)</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Home demands</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Home developmental poss.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.67</td>
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<td>7. Family–work conflict</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Family–work facilitation</td>
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<td>.89</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( N = 262, *p < .05, **p < .01. \) Men’s focus. Women’s focus.

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\( \chi^2 \) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). In addition, two fit indices, which are less sensitive to sample size, were used: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). For the GFI, CFI, and TLI, values of .90 are acceptable and values equal to or higher than .95 are indicative of good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999); for the RMSEA, values of .05 indicate good fit and values up to .08 represent reasonable errors of approximation (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

Prior to hypotheses testing, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to test the measurement model. The 30 items loaded on the six hypothesized factors, i.e., prevention focus, promotion focus, home developmental possibilities, home demands, FWC, and FWF. Note that no differentiation between one’s own and the partner’s regulatory focus was made as these variables contain the same data. The six-factor model showed a rather poor fit to follow a meaningful way to categorize the individual and the partner, we decided that the regulatory focus of the individual represents the focus of the men while the regulatory focus of the partner represents the focus of the women. All variables with the exception of scales for home demands and home developmental possibilities had acceptable levels of reliability. The two three-item scales were slightly below the typical cutoff of .70 (Nunnally, 1978) but Voss, Stem, and Fotopoulos (2000) consider such reliabilities acceptable. The average interitem correlation was .38 for developmental possibilities and .34 for home demands, which also suggests that the responses to the items belonging to the same scale were (internally) consistent.
partners’ prevention focus had a nonsignificant effect on FWC, $\beta = -0.09$, ns, rejecting Hypothesis 2b.

In a final step and as suggested by Cortina et al. (2001), the model was tested without the path from each interaction term to the respective criterion variables, allowing a $\chi^2$-test of the difference in fit between the model with and without this path. When the path from the interaction term of partners’ promotion focus to home developmental possibilities was eliminated it resulted in a significant chi-square difference, indicating that the model without this path had a worse fit, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 4.28$, $p < .05$. Similarly, elimination of the path from the interaction term of partners’ promotion focus to FWF resulted in a significant chi-square difference meaning that the model without this path had worse fit, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 5.90$, $p < .05$. When the path from the interaction of partners’ prevention focus to home demands was deleted the fit of the model worsened significantly, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 4.87$, $p < .05$. However, elimination of the path from the interaction term of partners’ prevention focus to FWC did not worsen the fit of the model to the data, $\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1.11$, ns. Taken together, the interaction between partners’ promotion foci was significant for predicting both home developmental possibilities and FWF, whereas the interaction between partners’ prevention foci predicted home demands but failed to directly predict FWC.

A graphical representation of the interaction effects is presented in Figures 3a–c. When one partner was high on promotion focus the developmental possibilities at home was higher when the other partner was also high rather than low on promotion focus (Figure 3a). This finding substantiates Hypothesis 1a. Similarly and substantiating Hypothesis 1b, when one partner was high on promotion focus FWF was higher when the other partner was also high rather than low on promotion focus (Figure 3b). Interestingly, when both partners were low on promotion focus (representing the other fit condition) they also experienced high FWF. Finally, when one partner was high on prevention focus home demands were lower when the other partner was also high rather than low on prevention focus (Figure 3c). This latter finding substantiates Hypothesis 2a. Taken together, the model explains 8.2% of the variance in developmental possibilities, 12.7% of the variance in home demands, 9.9% of the variance in FWF, and 11.4% of the variance in FWC.

DISCUSSION

This study is the first to examine whether the fit between self-regulation of cohabiting partners determines the conditions at home, and the degree to which the partners experience that their family life interferes with or facilitates participation in work. More specifically, this study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to confirm the assumptions of regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998, 2000, 2005) in
Figure 3.  
(a) Interaction effect of partners’ promotion focus on home developmental possibilities. 
(b) Interaction effect of partners’ promotion focus on family–work facilitation. 
(c) Interaction effect of partners’ prevention focus on home demands.
the family domain by showing that (1) fit between partners’ promotion foci is related to higher developmental possibilities at home and more family–work facilitation and (2) fit between partners’ prevention focus is related to reduced demands at home.

As predicted, when both partners emphasized growth and resources and were driven by challenges, i.e., promotion focused, they successfully managed their family with work such that the family environment facilitated participation in the work domain. There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, it has been found that when individuals are promotion focused and the situation-induced focus is also promotion focus, they experience emotions of cheerfulness (Cropanzano et al., 2008; Higgins, 1998, 2000). Such positive feelings of joyfulness and happiness can spill over from the family to the work domain and help individuals perform their work tasks as their resource reservoirs are filled. A second explanation involves the finding that the fit between partners’ promotion foci was related to more home developmental possibilities and to FWF and that home developmental possibilities and FWF were also related. This means that partners who are driven by challenges create for each other a family situation in which the development of its members is supported and stimulated. Family environments that stimulate the development of their members have been found to enhance family–work facilitation. For instance, Demerouti et al. (2010) found that men’s home resources including social support, developmental possibilities, and autonomy at home were positively related to family–work facilitation.

When both partners were driven by obligations and demands, we found that they reported less home demands. There are at least two plausible explanations for this finding. A first explanation is that when individuals are prevention focused and the situation-induced focus is also prevention focus, they experience emotions of quiescence and serenity (Cropanzano et al., 2008; Higgins, 1998). In other words, the fit of partners’ prevention foci is related to the absence of experienced tension and pressure. Therefore, both partners report that they experience lower home demands than when only one partner is high in prevention focus. A second explanation has to do with the behaviours that probably most prevention focused partners show when they are at home. As both partners are driven by obligations and their aim is to avoid not fulfilling them (Higgins, 1998, 2000), they will both make sure that household chores and all other home obligations will be satisfactorily accomplished. A family life where both partners invest in their obligations would be expected to create the perception that demands at home are not high. Note, however, that the hypothesized interaction effect of partners’ prevention focus on family–work conflict was not confirmed. This indicates that the fit between partners in the way that they respond to demands is not sufficient to diminish the unfavourable effect of family to work, i.e., FWC. Other demanding aspects at home—like the misbehaviour of children—have been found to be better predictors of family-to-work conflict (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

The main effect of individuals’ chronic promotion focus on opportunities for development at home is interesting as it validates the dimension of promotion focus where people are expected to be driven by challenges. We found no main effect of prevention focus on the perception of demands at home. Apparently, prevention focus does not influence the perception of demands at least from a perspective of fulfilling demands and obligations and therefore does not necessarily mean creating and thus perceiving more demands. Another intriguing finding concerns the pattern of the interactions. For all interactions, we found that both fit conditions (i.e., high-high and low-low) were equally favourable for the focal outcomes. This underscores the assumptions of regulatory focus theory that the fit between individual and situational focus is important in eliciting positive outcomes (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Lanaj et al., 2012). However, it also indicates that not only the presence of a similar focus between partners but also the absence of a strong focus in both partners (i.e., the low-low promotion fit condition) is beneficial for family life as well as for FWF. Thus, the incongruence between partners’ self-regulation is also minimal in the low-low condition.

It is interesting to note that the fit conditions for promotion focus, namely when both partners were high on promotion focus or when both partners were low on promotion focus, experience the highest levels of developmental possibilities at home and FWF. Similarly, the lowest demands at home were reported when both partners were low on prevention focus followed by the condition where both partners were high on prevention focus. These findings substantiate the regulatory fit idea of the theory (Higgins, 1998). Moreover, the regulatory fit assumption is further substantiated by the (unreported) finding that none of the other possible interaction effects was found to be significant, i.e., the effect of promotion fit on home demands and FWC or of prevention fit on developmental possibilities and FWF.

Although the present study included no direct work-specific outcomes or behaviours, it did include FWC and FWF. The latter variables have been related to important work-related outcomes. Specifically, Demerouti et al. (2010) found that (colleague ratings of) FWF were predictive of (self and colleague ratings of) extrarole performance, whereas (colleague ratings of) FWC were predictive of (self and colleague ratings of) inrole performance. In this
way, our study uncovers conditions at home that have the potential to influence the work domain in a favourable and unfavourable way.

Study limitations
One limitation of the study is that it is based on survey data with self-report measures and a cross-sectional design was used. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences. In addition to potential self-report bias due to negative affect, common method variance might have played a role. Consequently, the true associations between the constructs might be weaker than the relationships observed in the study. However, the fact that the findings confirmed theoretically derived hypotheses, the hypotheses are consistent with earlier research, and the bivariate correlations are not that high suggests that common method variance is not a serious threat to the findings. Further, we incorporated information from both partners. In this way, we were able to predict the focal outcomes by using information from both partners.

A second limitation concerns potential selection biases, i.e., sampling biases and nonresponse biases. It is possible that couples who participated in this study were more interested and successful in work-life balance, or that couples enjoying a good work–life balance found no need to participate in the study. The advantage of this recruitment method was that the participants were employed in very heterogeneous jobs, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the sample consisted of relatively highly educated dual-earner couples employed in human services, which is the majority of the working population in The Netherlands. Thus, although the composition of the sample appeared to be similar to the Dutch working population, it was not randomly selected from the Dutch population. Since the study examines the strength of the relationships rather than the mean scores of the model variables, it can be assumed that the impact of response bias is limited (cf. Bakker, Demerouti, & Dollard, 2008). Future studies should try to replicate the findings in more representative samples and in other countries.

A third limitation concerns the measurement of regulatory focus. We measured regulatory focus as a general individual characteristic rather than specific regulatory focus that individuals use in their family life. However, it is possible that the regulatory focus that one uses at home differs from the focus used in other contexts. For instance, Wallace, Johnson, and Frazier (2009) found that work-based regulatory focus is not synonymous with general regulatory focus. Therefore, we strongly advise future researchers to use specific scales per life domain when they are interested in capturing regulatory focus. However, it is interesting to note that self and partner prevention focus as well as self and partner promotion focus were significantly and positively correlated, which indicates that the partners tend to use similar self-regulation or to prime consistent regulatory foci in one another.1

Implications
The present results have implications not only for researchers but also for marital partners, family counselling, and organizations. Family counsellors/therapists can use the insights of the present study in their practice as we showed that it may be helpful for individuals and their partners to recognize their own and their partner’s preference for a regulatory focus such that they are aware that a possible misfit might exist and to discuss openly if the misfit might be a problem in specific situations. It is not only important to know that the regulatory fit between partners can be a beneficial condition for family life and for interrole management, but also to uncover the conditions that lead to a specific focus. Such development of awareness is particularly relevant in the absence of fit. However, our knowledge on the drivers of a specific regulatory focus is rather limited and more research is required.

Note, however, that because regulatory focus was originally conceptualized as being malleable, it might be possible for couples with mismatching regulatory foci to change regulatory focus. Although we lack evidence about possible interventions, it seems plausible to assume that some of the ways that Brockner and Higgins (2001) suggest to promote a specific focus at work could also be applied to partners at home. For instance, individuals could provide prevention focus feedback to their partner in order to induce their partner’s promotion focus. Alternatively, they may use prevention focus language and emphasize demands and obligations such that they stimulate their partner’s prevention focus. Such interventions demand great interpersonal skills from the individuals, the willingness to invest time in improving marital relationships, as well as the supervision of a family counsellor/therapist.

CONCLUSION
This study was successful in applying the insights from regulatory focus theory to family life in order to examine the impact on the family–work interface. On a higher abstraction level, the study shows that family conditions and family–work interface depend on the interplay between partners’ goal-directed behaviour. In this way each partner is viewed as an active creator of

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1We thank the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.
of his/her own family conditions and the potential family influences on work in positive or negative way.

The processes by which partners’ respective orientations may interact with each other, and how these interactions may shape important relationship outcomes, seem to be a rich source of future investigation. The regulatory focus of individuals in the family system can help to uncover the way through which the self-regulation or the goal-directed behaviour of each partner influences family life and consequently work (cf. Lanaj et al., 2012). Regulatory focus may be one of the factors that influence people’s ability to organize their family life together with their partner and the way they function at work, for better or worse.

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