

Abstract

Higgins (1998) pointed out that two self-regulation systems that concerned with two different outcomes. The individuals with promotion focus tend to desire positive outcomes, while those with prevention focus prefer to avoid the negative outcomes. This study investigates the relationships between the Chinese university students' regulatory focus and emotional functioning, i.e., depression and self-esteem. Previous studies postulate that people with depression are less likely to actively pursue desirable goals, the same as those facing the significant dysfunction within promotion focus. The failures will also weaken the strength of promotion focus. As to the prevention focus, the failure of the system, however, enhances the prevention system, which leads to the increased likelihood of anxiety in some previous research. Furthermore, evidence shows that prevention focus is associated with depression in the past study. Regarding the regulatory focus and self-esteem, a similar motivational tendency is shared between self-esteem and promotion focus as they are motivated by enhancing outcomes. As to the self-esteem and prevention focus, both are motivated by the protective outcome. It is believed that regulatory focus is associated with self-esteem. In this study, 209 undergraduates from the Chinese University of Hong Kong participated in the first wave survey, and 120 students participated in second wave survey. The results show that prevention focus is positively associated with depression, but the promotion focus is not statistically associated with depression. Besides, the results show a positive correlation between promotion focus and self-esteem, while a negative relationship is found between prevention focus and self-esteem.

Key words: regulatory focus, system failure, depression, self-esteem, motivational tendency