

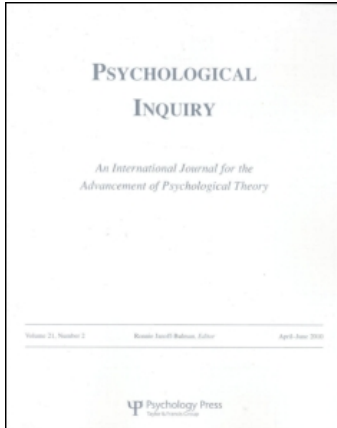
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Do Global and Local Systems Feel Different?

Tal Eyal^a; Ayelet Fishbach^b

^a Department of Psychology, Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel ^b Booth School of Business, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

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Do Global and Local Systems Feel Different?

Tal Eyal

Department of Psychology, Ben Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel

Ayelet Fishbach

Booth School of Business, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

Förster and Dannenberg offer an overarching model of global versus local processing that accounts for a large number of social-psychological phenomena. Including a large number of findings under a single umbrella is an admirable goal. Accordingly, their model is general, broad, abstract, and global. It provides a possible window (or a lens) through which to view research on a variety of topics while identifying the commonalities between these topics, and, in this regard, their model nicely demonstrates their key tenet that global processing promotes assimilation. In our view, the main contribution of GLOMO^{sys} model is that it suggests global versus local processing is more than simply attending to the gestalt meaning versus specific details of a stimulus. Global versus local processing is a mechanism through which situational factors (e.g., mood, obstacles, or temporal distance) influence how people infuse a stimulus with meaning to effectively self-regulate their behavior. In essence, the GLOMO^{sys} model addresses a process of cognitive tuning that prepares the motivational system for upcoming situations.

In our commentary, we discuss how affect, including general moods and specific emotions, influences self-regulation through global versus local cognitive tuning. We focus on affect because we believe affect is central to the core idea of GLOMO^{sys} as well as construal level theory (CLT; Liberman & Trope, 2008), its impact on level of processing is relatively understudied, and this impact happens to be the focus of our own research program on abstract versus concrete emotions. We suggest emotions vary by their level of abstractness and that abstract (i.e., self-conscious) emotions monitor the pursuit of long-term goals, whereas concrete (i.e., basic) emotions monitor the pursuit of short-term goals. This impact of emotions provides a nice illustration for the GLOMO^{sys} model: Emotions infuse the situation with meaning, which in turn helps people self-regulate their behavior in this situation.

Mood and Self-Regulation

Extensive research demonstrates that the valence of mood triggers the level of processing styles: Positive mood triggers global and abstract processing, whereas

negative mood triggers local and concrete processing (for review, see Huntsinger, Clore, & Bar-Anan, in press). These different processing styles influence task performance, such that positive mood improves performance on tasks that require abstract thinking, whereas negative mood improves performance of tasks that require concrete thinking (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). According to Förster and Dannenberg's analysis, these moods prepare the person to act. Specifically, by triggering global processing, positive mood facilitates exploration of novel alternatives and pursuit of growth goals, whereas by triggering local processing, negative mood inhibits such tendencies.

The most common explanation for these effects of mood on self-regulation comes from the mood-as-information perspective (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). It suggests positive mood provides information that the environment is safe and therefore elicits a global, heuristic-based, top-down processing style that is adaptive for behavior in benign and safe environments. In addition, negative mood signals danger in the environment and therefore elicits a more local, bottom-up processing style that is adaptive for handling problematic situations.

Beyond these effects of general moods, specific positive and negative emotions (e.g., pride and shame) can also provide information relevant for self-regulation. However, unlike moods, emotions operate by providing meaning for specific events to which individuals respond. For example, pride signals an important achievement and sadness signals a loss. As we next elaborate, the signal emotions carry may depend on their abstractness. Abstract emotions provide information to the individual regarding pursuit of abstract goals, whereas concrete emotions provide information regarding pursuit of concrete goals.

Emotion and Self-Regulation

We suggest emotions vary by their abstractness—some (positive and negative) emotions are more abstract than others. Specifically, emotions such as pride, guilt, and shame (i.e., self-conscious emotions) entail

abstraction because people experience these emotions when they evaluate themselves from an external perspective removed from the self (Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy & Robins, 2004). For example, pride involves evaluating the self in light of distant social expectations and norms; guilt involves evaluating a past action in light of hypothetical moral standards (Beer & Keltner, 2004; Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tracy & Robins, 2004; Williams & Bybee, 1994); and love (vs. lust) involves evaluation of a distant, future self (Förster, Özelsel, & Epstude, 2010). In contrast, emotions such as joy, sadness, and fear (i.e., basic emotions) are concrete because people experience them when they evaluate themselves from a proximal perspective that is close to the self (Plutchik, 1980; Tooby & Cosmides, 1990; for a review, see Ekman, 1999). For example, fear is a response to an immediately threatening situation, sadness is a response to an immediate loss, and joy or happiness is a response to an immediate gain (Lazarus, 1991).

Our distinction between abstract and concrete emotions echoes the distinction between global and local processes. When the level of construal of psychological variables is conceptual—as with emotions—researchers refer to abstract versus concrete processing levels. However, when the level of processing is perceptual, researchers refer to global versus local processing levels (Liberman & Förster, 2009).

In a series of studies, Eyal and Bar-Anan (2010) explored the idea that self-conscious emotions (e.g., pride) entail greater abstraction than basic emotions (e.g., joy). For example, using the Implicit Association Task (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), they documented an implicit association between emotions and psychological distance. Specifically, they found that people associate words related to positive and negative basic emotions (e.g., joy vs. sadness) with words related to temporal and social proximity (e.g., *tomorrow*, *we*) and that they associate words related to positive and negative self-conscious emotions (e.g., pride vs. shame) with words related to temporal and social distance (e.g., *next year*, *they*). Assuming people associate some emotions (e.g., pride, shame) with greater abstraction and psychological distance and associate other emotions (e.g., joy, sadness) with greater concreteness and psychological proximity is therefore reasonable.

Research by Eyal and Fishbach (2010) examines the role of abstract and concrete emotions in motivating action. We find that abstract emotions help monitor the pursuit of abstract goals and concrete emotions help monitor the pursuit of concrete goals. We demonstrated these effects in the context of a self-control conflict between long- and short-term goals that compete for resources or that directly undermine each other (e.g., save money vs. impulsive spending, eating healthily vs. not; for review, see Fishbach & Converse, 2010). Within a

self-control conflict, goals that offer long-term benefits are more abstract than goals that offer short-term benefits (a.k.a. temptations), because the long-term goals serve more central interests that will materialize in the more distant future and require multiple actions (Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006). Therefore, abstract emotions such as pride and shame help regulate pursuit of long-term goals, and emotions such as joy and sadness help regulate pursuit of short-term goals.

Emotions exert their influence on self-control behavior via several routes. First, resolving self-control conflicts in favor of either the long- or the short-term goal results in distinct emotional consequences. For example, achieving athletes may feel pride after winning a medal (a long-term goal) and joy when getting a rest break from their exercise regimes (a short-term goal). In a study that examined how long- versus short-term goals feel, participants identified several of their everyday activities as corresponding to a long- or short-term goal (e.g., workout in the gym, watch TV) and then reported their emotional experience upon pursuing or failing to pursue these goals. Participants reported experiencing abstract, self-conscious emotions (pride and shame) following pursuit of long-term goals, and they reported experiencing concrete, basic emotions (happiness vs. sadness) following pursuit of short-term goals.

Second, part of the reason people pursue certain goals is to experience the positive emotion that characterizes goal attainment. Activation of abstract versus concrete emotional terms reminds one of the matching goals and it cues pursuit of these goals. In a study that tested for the impact of priming emotional terms, we primed health-conscious individuals with “pride” (abstract) versus “happiness” (concrete). As expected, the pride prime decreased consumption of unhealthy food compared with the happiness prime. In another study, the pride (vs. happiness) prime increased persistence on an unsolvable task that was presumably indicative of academic success (see also Katzir, Eyal, Meiran, & Kessler, in press, for the effect of priming abstract emotional terms on improved inhibition control).

Finally, the experience of abstract versus concrete emotions can relax the desire to pursue the matching goal, for example, when students who feel pride quit earlier on a difficult task than students who feel joy. This relaxation of effort occurs because, presumably, part of the reason for pursuing the goal in the first place—the rewarding emotional experience—no longer exists. Indeed, we find that people who are feeling proud at the moment are often less likely to pursue their long-term goals than those experiencing a concrete positive emotion (e.g., joy, happiness) at the moment.

Overall, similar to cognitions (Semin & Fiedler, 1988), actions (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987), and goals (Fujita et al., 2006), specific emotions vary by their level of abstraction, and these variations are

meaningful for their self-regulatory function. Incorporating the emotional hierarchy into models of levels of processing (GLOMO^{sys}, CLT) does not preclude that positive mood results in more global processing than negative mood (Förster & Dannenberg, this issue; Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Rather, we suggest that taking into account hierarchies of emotions will be useful for exploring the processes of self-regulation.

Note

Address correspondence to Tal Eyal, Department of Psychology, Ben-Gurion University, Beer Sheva 43210, Israel. E-mail: taleyal@bgu.ac.il or Ayelet Fishbach, The University of Chicago, Booth School of Business, 5807 S. Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637. E-mail: ayelet.fishbach@ChicagoBooth.edu

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