



Reports

Like or dislike: Intrapersonal regulatory fit affects the intensity of interpersonal evaluation ☆

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Regulatory fit is a motivational force affecting interpersonal evaluation.
- Different manipulations of regulatory fit affect interpersonal evaluation.
- Regulatory fit transfers to interpersonal evaluation separate from the fit experience.
- Rather than valence, regulatory fit affects intensity in either direction.
- Regulatory fit enhances liking or disliking others.

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ABSTRACT

Regulatory fit is an experience of motivational force that makes individuals feel 'right'. Prior work has almost exclusively focused on how regulatory fit affects individuals' experience of tasks, activities, and products and has primarily focused on the bright side of regulatory fit. The current research sought to provide evidence that the motivational force from regulatory fit affects *interpersonal evaluation*, and to reveal both the bright and dark side of regulatory fit. Specifically, Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrate that regulatory fit between evaluator regulatory focus (measured or imposed) and the regulatory focus expressed in an application letter, enhances liking for the job applicant. Experiments 3 and 4 show that incidentally induced regulatory fit (relative to non-fit) enhances liking for an initially liked target person but enhances disliking for an initially hated target person. Hence, this research helps better understand consequences of regulatory fit for interpersonal evaluation, both like and dislike.

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Introduction

Regulatory fit is an experience of motivational force that arises when different components of self-regulation are aligned. Regulatory fit has been identified as a key factor in determining the extent to which individuals like tasks, activities, and products (Aaker & Lee, 2006; Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins, 2000). Yet, although self-regulation often occurs in a social environment, the investigation of the influence of regulatory fit on the liking for others is still uncharted terrain. Additionally, prior research has primarily focused on the 'bright' side of regulatory fit. However, as regulatory fit is an experience of motivational force rather than valence, its effects should be more a matter of intensity than of

direction. Therefore, the purpose of the present research was to demonstrate that regulatory fit (1) affects individuals' evaluation of others, and (2) leads to greater liking for an initially liked target person or greater disliking for an initially hated target person (Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004). Demonstrating that regulatory fit may enhance both liking (the bright side) and disliking (the dark side) of another person is important for the understanding of person perception and of regulatory fit, and may aid in providing well-informed practical applications.

Regulatory focus and regulatory fit

Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) distinguishes two self-regulatory orientations that create sensitivities to different end-states and preferences for distinct strategic means. Specifically, a promotion focus, aiming at the 'ideal' self through eager advancement, draws the individual's attention toward possibilities to realize ambitions and aspirations. In contrast, a prevention focus, aiming at the 'ought' self through secure vigilance, draws the individual's attention toward possibilities to fulfill duties and obligations (Crowe & Higgins, 1997).

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Regulatory fit occurs when individuals' current or anticipated mode of goal-striving sustains their self-regulatory orientation, which feels 'right' and engages motivational intensity (Higgins, 2000). This rightness is thought to be (mis-)attributed to any aspect of the environment associated with the self-regulatory activity (Cesario et al., 2004). Accordingly, regulatory fit may strengthen attitudes toward tasks and objects associated with the activity at hand (Cesario et al., 2004; Higgins, Camacho, Idson, Spiegel, & Scholer, 2008). For example, individuals attach greater value to a chosen object if the strategy used to evaluate the object fits their orientation, and experience greater enjoyment of tasks and activities when instructions encourage them to perform the task in a fitting way (Aaker & Lee, 2006; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003; Lee & Aaker, 2004).

Current research

We argue that *intrapersonal* regulatory fit may have consequences for the intensity of *interpersonal* evaluation. That is, the motivational force conceptualization of regulatory fit implies that fit affects the *intensity* of feelings rather than the *valence* of feelings. In this research, we tested the impact of regulatory fit on the evaluation of a stranger toward whom individuals did not have an initial attitude (Experiments 1 & 2), and on the evaluation of a familiar person toward whom individuals were either positively inclined (Experiment 3) or negatively inclined (Experiment 4).

When individuals do not really know others, and have therefore not been able to form an individualized opinion about them, individuals' default seems to be to like these others. That is, literature on person perception suggests that individuals have a tendency to view even relative strangers positively when no information to the contrary is given (Sears, 1983; Zajonc, 1968). A person toward whom no initial attitude exists should therefore be viewed positively, and this tendency is expected to be enhanced by regulatory fit (see Vaughn, Harkness, & Clark, 2010). Thus, whereas regulatory fit affects the intensity of evaluation, rather than the direction, the default effect of regulatory fit on the evaluation of strangers may be to strengthen individuals' *liking* for the person. Experiments 1 and 2 used fictional motivation letters and tested the hypothesis that when a letter expresses the same regulatory focus the evaluator has, it makes the evaluator feel right or engaged and makes the evaluator like the unknown applicant more. Specifically, we tested whether evaluators' chronic focus (Experiment 1) or their imposed focus (Experiment 2) predicts their liking for job applicants with promotion-focused versus prevention-focused letters, mediated by experienced regulatory fit.

When other persons are familiar, individuals' attitude toward them may be positive or negative. Person perception research typically investigates factors that enhance either liking or disliking (Smith & Collins, 2009). Interestingly, the motivational force conceptualization of regulatory fit predicts that the same factor potentially strengthens both. Similar to the evaluation of a stranger, when a person is already positively inclined toward a familiar person, the experience of regulatory fit will lead to a more positive evaluation of that person (i.e., liking) than when regulatory fit is not experienced (Cesario, Higgins, & Scholer, 2008; Higgins, 2006). However, relative to non-fit, regulatory fit may lead to a more negative evaluation (i.e., disliking) when a person is already *negatively* inclined toward the other. That is, the 'rightness' individuals experience from regulatory fit may transfer to the evaluation of another person, and accordingly, strengthen individuals' initial evaluations, either positive or negative (e.g., Cesario et al., 2004). To test whether intrapersonal rightness from fit transfers to rightness of interpersonal evaluations, in Experiments 3 and 4, participants first completed a task through which regulatory fit was induced incidentally (Freitas & Higgins, 2002). Subsequently, participants thought about someone they liked (Experiment 3) or hated (Experiment 4). We tested whether liking (Experiment 3) and disliking (Experiment 4) for this person was stronger for individuals in an initial state of fit (relative to non-fit).

Experiment 1

Method

Participants

Participants were 72 social sciences students (79.2% female) from a Dutch university. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years ($M = 21.01$, $SD = 1.87$). Participants were recruited on campus and were paid 5 Euros (approximately US\$ 7).

Procedure

Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (Letter Regulatory Focus [promotion, prevention]). In the first part of the study, participants completed a regulatory focus measure. In the second part of the study, they read a job application letter and answered questions about the applicant. For the second part, participants were asked to imagine being head of their own company in a position to evaluate the applicant.

Regulatory focus was assessed using the 11-item regulatory focus questionnaire (Higgins et al., 2001). Individuals' predominant focus ($M = 0.28$, $SD = 0.79$) was computed by subtracting mean prevention ($\alpha = .75$) ratings from mean promotion ($\alpha = .65$) ratings (Cesario & Higgins, 2008).

Application letter regulatory focus. We designed a general open application letter, leaving applicant gender and nature of the job unspecified, but varying the promotion versus prevention goals and working styles that were expressed. The text of the letter differed per condition as follows; the prevention variant is displayed between brackets:

..... Since completing my education I have gained ten years of work experience. In my first job, which I started after completing my studies, I noticed that I have a strong desire for a position in which I am *challenged* (vs. a position with a lot of responsibility). At the moment I am employed at a company at which people strive for *innovation* (vs. *conservation*), and this aspect of the job suits me well. Specifically, I find the focus on *advancement* (vs. *responsible practices*) very pleasant.

Your organization seems very interesting to me. I would like to work in such an environment because it meets my level of *aspiration* (vs. *sense of duty*). My strengths are my *ambition and drive* (vs. *sense of responsibility and accuracy*). In addition, I value *unconventional ideas* (vs. *working within the limits of certain regulations*).

In order to achieve objectives I value *taking risks* (vs. *living up to norms*). In addition, I am able to focus on the *big picture* (vs. *details*) and have *high ambitions* (vs. *great precision*).

Regulatory fit was assessed by asking individuals about their dedication to the evaluation task (i.e., "How much dedication did you put into evaluating the application letter?"), representing subjective engagement as an indicator of regulatory fit (Higgins, 2000) on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Liking was assessed using the four items ($\alpha = .91$), "To what extent does the writer of this letter seem like a pleasant person to you?", "How pleasant do you think it would be to work with this person?", "How well would this person fit in your company?", and "How much would you like to work with this person?". The items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The correlation between fit and liking was, $r(72) = .32$, $p = .007$.

Results

We carried out two analyses, regressing regulatory fit and liking on predominant focus (centered), letter regulatory focus (coded 1: promotion, -1: prevention), and the interaction between the two. In both cases, the main effects were not significant, $Bs < |.11|$, $ts(68) < |0.88|$,

$ps > .38$, but the anticipated interaction was significant, $Bs > 0.36$, $ts(68) > 2.70$, $ps < .01$, which means that the two slopes differ significantly from each other (Figs. 1a and b). As expected, in the promotion letter condition, evaluators experienced more regulatory fit (Fig. 1a) and reported more liking for the applicant (Fig. 1b) when they were more predominantly promotion-focused. In contrast, in the prevention letter condition, evaluators perceived more regulatory fit (Fig. 1a) and indicated more liking for the applicant (Fig. 1b) when they were more predominantly prevention-focused. Additional tests (one-tailed, as our hypotheses were directional) showed that experienced regulatory fit in the promotion letter was significantly stronger than in prevention letter condition when participants were predominantly promotion-focused ($+1$ SD RFQ), $B = 0.37$, $SE_b = 0.15$, $t(68) = 2.50$, $p = .01$ (Fig. 1a). This difference reversed for prevention-focused participants (-1 SD RFQ), albeit that this difference was not statistically significant, $B = -0.20$, $SE_b = 0.15$, $t(68) = -1.36$, $p < .09$. For liking (Fig. 1b), follow-up tests revealed similar results, $B = 0.31$, $SE_b = .19$, $t(68) = 1.63$, $p < .06$ ($+1$ SD RFQ), and $B = -0.54$, $SE_b = .19$, $t(68) = -2.84$, $p < .01$ (-1 SD RFQ), indicating that in the promotion letter condition, relative to the prevention letter condition, predominantly promotion-focused individuals tended to like the applicant more, while the opposite was observed for predominantly prevention-focused individuals.

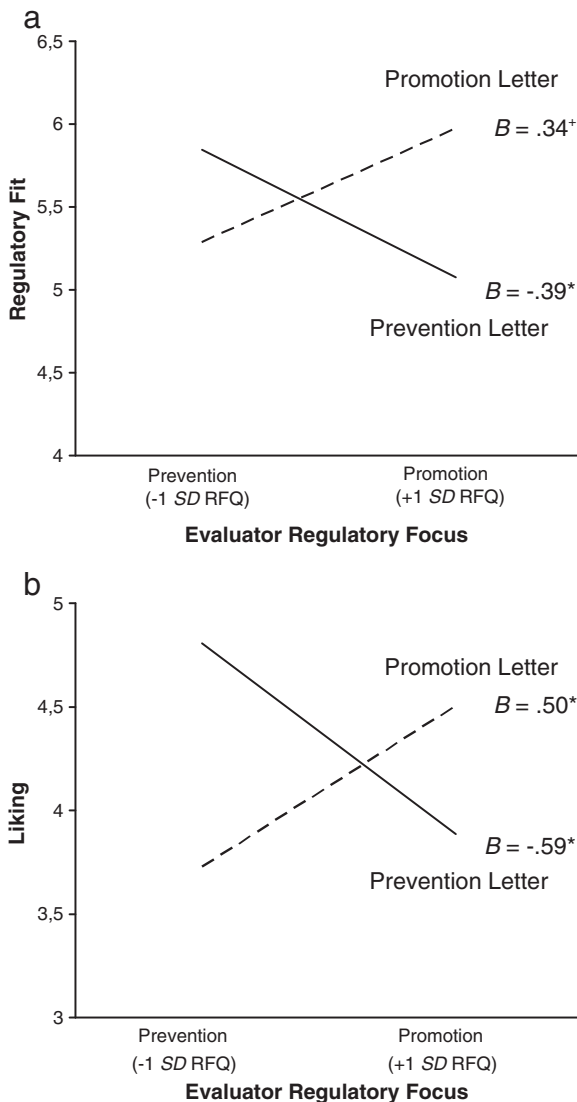


Fig. 1. Experienced regulatory fit and liking as a function of the fit between evaluator and application letter regulatory focus (Experiment 1). * $p < .05$; + $p < .07$.

Next, we tested whether experienced regulatory fit mediated the interactive effect of participants' predominant focus and application letter focus on liking using a technique developed by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007). After experienced regulatory fit was added to the model predicting liking, the interaction effect was reduced, $B = 0.42$, $SE_b = 0.18$, $t(67) = 2.40$, $p = .02$. The direct effect of experienced fit on liking was significant, $B = 0.31$, $SE_b = 0.15$, $t(67) = 2.08$, $p = .04$, and most importantly, in both the promotion letter condition, $B = 0.11$, $SE_b = 0.08$, $CI_{95\%} [.00; .30]$ and the prevention letter condition, $B = -0.12$, $SE_b = 0.09$, $CI_{95\%} [-.01; -.36]$, experienced regulatory fit mediated the effect of evaluators' predominant focus on liking.

Although Experiment 1 provides first support for our hypothesis, a limitation is that we cannot draw conclusions concerning the causal role of evaluators' focus. Experiment 2 aimed to address this limitation by manipulating evaluators' regulatory focus. Further, we aimed to replicate and extend the findings from Experiment 1 by including a different indicator of experienced fit: sense of rightness.

Experiment 2

Method

Participants

Participants were 60 psychology students (90.0% female) from a Dutch university participating in exchange for course credits. Their ages ranged from 17 to 32 years ($M = 19.75$, $SD = 2.70$).

Procedure

Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (Participant Regulatory Focus [promotion, prevention]) \times 2 (Letter Regulatory Focus [promotion, prevention]) between-subjects design. They first completed either a promotion focus or a prevention focus manipulation. The manipulation consisted of three open-ended questions asking participants to recall events in their lives dealing with promotion-focused or prevention-focused self-regulation (Higgins et al., 2001). As an example, in the promotion condition, participants responded to questions such as "Please think about a time in your life when you felt like you were making progress toward being successful in life". In the prevention condition, participants responded to questions such as "Please think about a time in your life when being sufficiently vigilant avoided you getting into trouble". The remainder of the procedure was identical to the procedure in Experiment 1.

Measures

Regulatory fit was assessed by asking individuals, "How right would it feel to hire this person?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*).

Liking was assessed using the scale from Experiment 1 ($\alpha = .93$). The correlation between fit and liking was, $r(60) = .68$, $p < .001$.

Results

Following previous regulatory fit research (Cesario et al., 2008), we compared the fit to the non-fit conditions. As anticipated, liking for the applicant was significantly greater in fit conditions ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.16$) relative to non-fit conditions ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.33$), $F(1, 58) = 7.44$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Similarly, experienced regulatory fit was significantly greater in fit conditions ($M = 6.65$, $SD = 1.54$) relative to non-fit conditions ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.80$), $F(1, 58) = 8.60$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .13$. In order to test whether the effect held across promotion fit and prevention fit, we also carried out analyses with the type of fit as a moderator. No significant interactions were observed either for experienced regulatory fit, $F(1, 56) = 0.63$, $p = .43$, or for liking,

$F(1, 56) = 1.02, p = .32$, indicating that the fit effect occurred regardless of whether it was promotion fit or prevention fit.

Mediation analysis employing bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) showed that after experienced regulatory fit was added to the model predicting liking, the effect of fit versus non-fit conditions on liking, $B = 0.88, SE_b = 0.32, t(58) = 2.73, p < .01$, was no longer significant, $B = 0.27, SE_b = 0.27, t(57) = 1.02, p = .31$ (Fig. 2). The direct effect of experienced regulatory fit on liking was significant, $B = 0.48, SE_b = 0.08, t(57) = 6.30, p < .001$, and experienced regulatory fit mediated the effect of the conditions on liking, $B = 0.63, SE_b = .27, CI_{95\%} [.18; 1.19]$.¹

The results from Experiment 2 replicated the findings from Experiment 1. In line with the expectation that others are evaluated relatively positively when no information to the contrary is given, we found that intrapersonal regulatory fit between evaluator regulatory focus (measured or imposed) and the regulatory focus expressed in an application letter, enhanced liking for the unknown job applicant.

In Experiments 3 and 4, we induced a state of regulatory fit incidentally and asked participants to think about a familiar person. First, this allows us to examine whether motivational force from intrapersonal regulatory fit on a separate task transfers to evaluation of others. Second, in Experiment 3, after the fit or non-fit induction, we asked participants to think about someone they liked. Fit conditions, relative to non-fit conditions, were expected to lead to greater liking. To address the largely neglected dark side of regulatory fit, in Experiment 4, we asked participants to think about someone they hated. Fit conditions, relative to non-fit conditions, were expected to lead to greater disliking. Thus, these experiments aimed to show that fit may strengthen liking and disliking, depending on individuals' initial attitude.

Experiment 3

Method

Participants

Participants were 73 individuals (54.8% female), recruited online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Their ages ranged from 18 to 61 years ($M = 34.74, SD = 9.62$).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (Goal [ideal, ought]) \times 2 (Strategy [eager, vigilant]) between-subjects design and first completed the regulatory fit or non-fit manipulation. Participants were then asked to take in mind someone they liked (either currently or in the past) and to think about the reasons for liking this person. Next, they completed measures of liking for this person and of regulatory fit.

Regulatory fit was manipulated following the procedure developed by Freitas and Higgins (2002), which has been successfully applied in a range of contexts (Cesario et al., 2004; Higgins et al., 2003). The fit and non-fit conditions are represented in promotion-focused and prevention-focused variants and imply pursuit of promotion goals versus prevention goals with eager means versus vigilant means. So, in the promotion fit condition, participants were asked to name a hope or aspiration they currently have and to list eager strategies for attaining this goal ("Please list some strategies you could use to make sure everything goes right and helps you attain ..."). In the prevention fit condition, participants were asked to name a duty or obligation they currently have and to list vigilant strategies for attaining

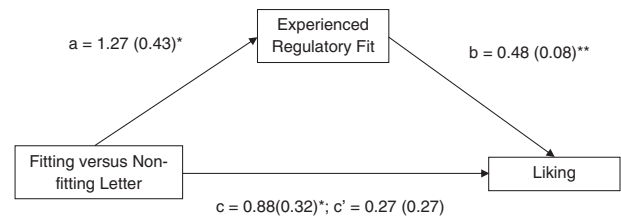


Fig. 2. Indirect effect of experienced regulatory fit in Experiment 2. * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

this goal ("Please list some strategies you could use to avoid anything that could go wrong and stop you from attaining ..."). In the non-fit conditions, hope or aspiration is paired with vigilant means, while duty or obligation is paired with eager means. In line with prior studies using this incidental induction of fit, we asked participants to carry out this task twice for different goals, keeping conditions constant.

Measures

Liking was assessed with the same measure as used in Experiments 1 and 2, but formulated more generally (rather than applied to the job context), using the items "This person is/was pleasant" and "This is/was a nice person", $r(73) = .61, p < .001$. The items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true).

Regulatory fit was assessed with the item "Liking this person feels right" on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true). The correlation between feeling right and liking was, $r(73) = .64, p < .001$.

Results

As in Experiment 2, we compared fit to non-fit conditions. Liking for target persons was significantly greater in fit conditions ($M = 4.89, SD = 0.31$) relative to non-fit conditions ($M = 4.66, SD = 0.49$), $F(1, 71) = 5.53, p = .02, \eta^2 = .07$. Similarly, experienced regulatory fit was significantly greater in fit conditions ($M = 4.85, SD = 0.37$) relative to non-fit conditions ($M = 4.44, SD = 0.96$), $F(1, 71) = 5.97, p = .02, \eta^2 = .08$. In order to test whether these effects held across promotion fit and prevention fit, we also carried out analyses with the type of fit as a moderator. No significant interactions were observed either for experienced regulatory fit, $F(1, 69) = 0.82, p = .37$, or for liking, $F(1, 69) = 1.31, p = .26$, indicating that the fit effect occurred regardless of whether it was promotion fit or prevention fit.²

Experiment 3 provided evidence that, compared with non-fit, regulatory fit led to greater liking for a liked target person. As regulatory fit was induced independent of the target person, these results suggest that feeling right transferred to the evaluation of the familiar other. In Experiment 4, we tested the prediction that regulatory fit, relative to non-fit, leads to greater disliking for an initially hated target person.

Experiment 4

Method

Participants

Participants were 74 individuals (60.8% female) who were recruited online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Buhrmester et al., 2011). Their ages ranged from 18 to 65 years ($M = 38.41, SD = 12.98$).

¹ In Experiments 1 and 2, we also measured perceived similarity to the applicant (e.g., "How much does the author of this letter resemble you?"). As evaluator focus and the focus in the application letter were similar, this could potentially contribute to liking. In both experiments, multiple mediation analyses indicated that the fit experience mediated the effects on liking beyond the mediation of perceived similarity.

² Although feeling right was assessed at the end of the experiment, we also tested whether this experience mediated the effect on liking. After feeling right was added to the model predicting liking, the effect on liking, $B = 0.41, SE_b = 0.17, t(71) = 2.44, p = .02$, was no longer significant, $B = 0.08, SE_b = 0.08, t(70) = 1.03, p = .30$. The direct effect of feeling right on liking was significant, $B = 0.22, SE_b = 0.10, t(70) = 6.45, p < .001$, and feeling right mediated the effect on liking, $B = 0.14, SE_b = 0.06, CI_{95\%} [0.04; 0.30]$.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions of a 2 (Goal [ideal, ought]) \times 2 (Strategy [eager, vigilant]) between-subjects design. The fit induction was identical to Experiment 3. Participants were then asked to take in mind someone they hated (either currently or in the past) and to think about why they hated this person. Finally, they completed measures of disliking and regulatory fit.

Measures

Disliking was assessed using the items “I dislike this person” and “This person is/was my enemy”, $r(74) = .42, p < .001$. The items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*).

Regulatory fit was assessed with the item “Hating this person feels right” on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*). The correlation between feeling right and disliking was, $r(74) = .48, p < .001$.

Results

Again, we compared the fit to the non-fit conditions. Disliking for the target person was significantly greater in fit conditions ($M = 4.53, SD = 0.64$) relative to non-fit conditions ($M = 4.12, SD = 0.94$), $F(1, 72) = 4.75, p = .03, \eta^2 = .06$. Similarly, experienced regulatory fit was significantly greater in fit conditions ($M = 3.80, SD = 1.45$) relative to non-fit conditions ($M = 3.10, SD = 1.43$), $F(1, 72) = 4.33, p = .04, \eta^2 = .06$. Additional analyses with the type of fit as a moderator revealed no significant interactions either for experienced regulatory fit, $F(1, 70) = 0.09, p = .77$, or for liking, $F(1, 70) = 0.34, p = .56$, indicating that the fit effect occurred regardless of whether it was promotion fit or prevention fit.³

General discussion

Four experiments supported the hypothesis that intrapersonal regulatory fit affects the intensity of interpersonal evaluation, both liking and disliking. When evaluating unfamiliar persons toward whom no personalized opinion has been formed, individuals' inclination is to assume that they are likable (Sears, 1983), and this tendency was enhanced by regulatory fit. Specifically, in Experiments 1 and 2, we found that regulatory fit, relative to non-fit, between evaluators' regulatory focus and the regulatory focus in an application letter led to greater liking for the unknown applicant. This effect was mediated by the experience of regulatory fit assessed as engagement (Experiment 1) or rightness (Experiment 2) and occurred when evaluators' regulatory focus was measured as chronic tendency (Experiment 1) or was situationally induced (Experiment 2). This is particularly noteworthy because it indeed suggests that the default effect of regulatory fit in interpersonal evaluations (i.e., when no initial attitude toward the other exists) is positive (cf., Vaughn et al., 2010).

When evaluating familiar persons toward whom individuals were either positively or negatively inclined, regulatory fit (compared to regulatory non-fit) intensified these evaluations. Experiment 3 showed that incidentally induced regulatory fit, relative to non-fit, led to greater liking for an initially liked target person. In contrast, Experiment 4 corroborated that incidentally induced regulatory fit, relative to non-fit, led

to greater disliking for an initially hated person. Thus, intrapersonal regulatory fit, stemming either from fit experienced integrally (an application letter that matched the evaluator's regulatory focus), or from the fit experienced incidentally (when goal and strategy match in a separate pre-evaluation task), affects the intensity of interpersonal evaluation.

Strengths and limitations

First, until recently, regulatory fit has mainly been applied to intrapersonal (Higgins & Spiegel, 2004) and intergroup (Sassenberg & Wolpin, 2008) outcomes, and only rarely to intragroup or interpersonal phenomena (Bohns & Higgins, 2011; Bohns et al., 2012; Righetti, Finkenauer, & Rusbult, 2011; Sassenberg, Jonas, Shah, & Brazy, 2007). The current findings contribute to the regulatory fit literature by demonstrating the influence of intrapersonal regulatory fit in interpersonal contexts (Vaughn et al., 2010).

Second, this research aids in understanding person perception. In Experiments 1 and 2, the target of evaluation was a hypothetical, unknown person. Because individuals tend to evaluate unknown others with a positivity bias (Sears, 1983), in a context wherein no initial attitude has been formed toward another person, regulatory fit enhances liking for the unknown other. In Experiment 3 and 4, we asked participants to recall a familiar person and demonstrated that when familiar persons are evaluated, regulatory fit can strengthen both positive and negative evaluations. It should be noted that actual interactions did not take place in any of the studies. Thus, these results do not speak to the potential of another person to elicit a feeling of fit (Bohns & Higgins, 2011; Righetti et al., 2011), but speak to the potential of a valence-independent intrapersonal process to affect interpersonal evaluation.

Third, investigating the potentially dark side of regulatory fit holds relevance to both person perception research and the regulatory fit literature. With regard to person perception, this research showed that, perhaps counter-intuitively, something (intrapersonally) pleasant contributes to the intensity of a negative evaluation of someone else. More generally, as opposed to identifying distinct factors that can enhance either liking or disliking (see Smith & Collins, 2009), this research on intrapersonal regulatory fit points at a single factor that affects both liking and disliking. With regard to the regulatory fit literature, prior research has primarily focused on the bright side of regulatory fit (see Lee & Higgins, 2009). One exception is the study by Cesario et al. (2004, Study 4). They showed that when individuals initially had negative thoughts about an ambiguous message, regulatory fit (relative to non-fit) made the message less persuasive. The current research aligns well with these findings, and extends them to evaluations of others (i.e., both liking and disliking). It may be noted that Idson, Liberman, and Higgins (2000, 2004) also discussed the negative potential of fit. They found that promotion-focused participants felt more positive after success, whereas prevention-focused participants felt more negative after failure. By manipulating fit incidentally and separate from outcomes, we provide strong and direct evidence for fit as a motivational force factor, rather than a valence factor (Cesario et al., 2004).

Fourth, a methodological strength of this research lies in the combination of different manipulations of regulatory fit. We first manipulated fit through the interplay between evaluators' chronic focus (Experiment 1) or imposed focus (Experiment 2) and the focus in an application letter and, subsequently, measured the subjective experience of fit. This does not provide the strongest evidence that intrapersonal regulatory fit causally affects interpersonal evaluations. In Experiments 3 and 4, we off-set this potential shortcoming by manipulating intrapersonal regulatory fit directly. As such, the four experiments together provide support for the causal relation between the intrapersonal experience of regulatory fit and interpersonal evaluation (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005).

A potential limitation may arise from Experiments 3 and 4, in which participants were asked to think of someone they liked or hated after being put in a state of fit or non-fit. This may raise concerns about regulatory fit leading participants to remember someone for whom they

³ After feeling right was added to the model predicting disliking, the effect on disliking, $B = 0.41, SE_b = 0.19, t(72) = 2.18, p = .03$, was no longer significant, $B = 0.24, SE_b = 0.18, t(71) = 1.36, p = .18$. The direct effect of feeling right on disliking was significant, $B = 0.25, SE_b = 0.06, t(71) = 4.15, p < .001$, and feeling right mediated the effect on disliking, $B = 0.17, SE_b = 0.09, CI_{95\%} [.01; 0.44]$. In Experiment 4 we also included the liking measure used in Experiment 3. As anticipated, relative to non-fit conditions, fit elicited significantly weaker liking, $F(1, 72) = 3.97, p = .05$, and this effect was not moderated by type of fit, $F(1, 70) = 0.61, p = .44$. This opposite effect on the measure of liking relative to Experiment 3 (and in parallel to disliking) rules out the possibility that the effect is due to a tendency to respond more strongly to any statement.

had more intense feelings. Crucial to note is that Cesario et al. (2004) found that the intensity of positive or negative message-related thoughts was not affected by regulatory fit, yet positivity-negativity of the thoughts interacted with fit versus non-fit to shape message persuasiveness. This suggests that regulatory fit does not lead people to bring to mind more intense information but strengthens the intensity of initial information. Further, if participants had been asked to think about someone they like or dislike before the fit induction, they would have already made, or at least started to make, the evaluation of the other person. Consequently, fit may be less likely to affect their evaluation. Taken together, our experiments provide consistent evidence for the hypothesis that intrapersonal regulatory fit affects the intensity of interpersonal evaluations. An interesting question for future research, however, is whether regulatory fit can change already formed opinions.

Conclusion

In social situations, individuals often evaluate how they feel about others. Although fit experiences may be conscious, knowledge of their source may lie outside of awareness. As such, regulatory fit may nonconsciously intensify judgments about others. As making individuals aware of fit as the source of evaluation disseminates its effects (Cesario et al., 2004), making individuals aware of the potential effect of fit on liking and disliking might allow them to more consciously evaluate their interactions. Doing so might allow them to consider whether their feelings have been affected by sources that have little or nothing to do with the actual extent to which others are likable or dislikable.

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