Apocalypse Now: the Effect of Fear and Time Orientation on Choice Deferral

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Five experiments demonstrate that fear, by increasing present-focus, reduces deferral and increases choice. This effect is mediated by increasingly positive evaluations of known products within the choice set. We also demonstrate that the reduction in choice deferral is unique to fear; other discrete emotions do not lead to deferred choice.

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The Surprising Effects of Affect
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Paper #1: Two Roads to Affect Effects
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Paper #2: Apocalypse Now: The Effect of Fear and Time Orientation on Choice Deferral
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Paper #3: The Different Effects of Benign versus Malicious Envy on Self-Control
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Paper #4: The Need to Feel Better
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SESSION OVERVIEW
It is well accepted that affect and emotion are among the principal drivers of consumer behavior. Within the body of work that examines these effects, more insight is needed on the impact of affect. Our symposium addresses this need by bringing authors from three continents together to articulate the gap in knowledge around affect and fill this gap with an enriched understanding of fear, envy and affect regulation.

In the first paper, Puccinelli and colleagues present a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative review of the effects of affect, focusing on when affect leads to affect congruent effects and when affect leads to affect incongruent effects. White and colleagues examine fear and find that fear increases choice and reduces deferral. Next, Huang and Sengupta show that benign envy improves self-control compared to malicious envy, because of heightened self-awareness in the former. Finally, Chen and Pham advance a new need to feel better construct with four distinct dimensions and demonstrate its predictive validity with respect to affect regulation.

Together these papers emphasize the important contribution of affect research to our understanding of consumer behavior. Collectively, they underscore the role of relevance in affective experience (Puccinelli et al.). The importance of fear to a situation leads to immediate as opposed to deferred action (White et al.). The relevance of self-awareness on the effects of envy (Huang and Sengupta). And the role of individual differences in the need to feel better (Chen and Pham).

This session includes qualitative and quantitative review and experimental methodologies to examine the impact of affect. The session also considers the influence of affect from several perspectives: Congruence and incongruence (Puccinelli et al.), choice deferral (White et al.), self-control (Huang and Sengupta) and affect regulation (Chen and Pham). As such it is likely to engage audiences both within and beyond the domain of affect and emotion. Each of the pieces of research included represent completed papers consisting of several studies and extensive analyses. Importantly, the session represents a unique opportunity to consider the effects of affect in concert to draw important generalizations about affective phenomena.

As a group all of these papers examine when affect leads to positive and negative effects, exploring in particular how these effects are shaped by attribution and goals.

Two Roads to Affect Effects

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Imagine a customer walking into a bank. He finds the branch is playing his favorite song and offering free cookies both of which put him in a good mood. However, when a salesperson approaches offering to help him open an account, he is even more critical of the bank’s offerings. His goal to assess the account options accurately and not to be influenced by his good mood makes him more critical of the options. This scenario highlights the complex and consequential nature of consumer affect. Given the ubiquity of affect (i.e., mood and emotion) and its tremendous impact on consumer behavior, it is critical to understand when positive affect will be advantageous and when it could be detrimental to a favorable consumer response.

The substantial role that affective feelings play in people’s judgments and decisions has been the focus of behavioral and marketing research for the past few decades (Bechara et al. 1997; Epstein 1994; Novak and Hoffman 2009; Pham 1998; Pham et al. 2001; Schwarz and Clore 1996). During that period, it has examined the effects of different feelings states and responses (e.g., positive vs. negative moods, pleasant vs. unpleasant feelings) on a variety of judgment related variables (Edell and Burke 1987; Gardner 1985; Kahn and Isen 1993; Luce 1998; Morales and Fitzsimons 2007; Wilterich and Haws 2011), it has examined the conditions that promote a greater influence of feelings on judgement (Greifeneder, Bless, and Pham 2011), such as accessibility, diagnosticity (Feldman and Lynch 1988), representativeness and relevancy (Gorn, Goldberg, and Basu 1993; Kim, Park, and Schwarz 2010; Raghunathan, Pham, and Corfman 2006; Siemer and Reisenzein 1998), and it has examined the influence of feelings under different processing abilities, such as distraction (Albarracin and Kumkale 2003; Albarracin and Wyer 2001), time pressure (Pham et al. 2001; Siemer and Reisenzein 1998), or cognitive load (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999).

Affect And Consumer Response
Given the ubiquity of affect (i.e., mood and emotion) and its tremendous impact on customer behavior (Averill 1983), it is critical to understand when positive affect will be advantageous and when it could be detrimental to a favorable consumer response. Research on the affect-congruence effect suggests that consumers in a positive affective state should evaluate offerings more positively and those in a negative affective state should evaluate offerings more negatively (Forgas 1995; Pham 2009). Several mechanisms have been identified as underlying this effect. At an unconscious level, it is suggested that a priming effect leads affect to bring more affect-related content to mind (Forgas 1995), for example, feelings have been found to be more influential when people are instructed to pay attention to them, which presumably increases their relative accessibility compared to other inputs (Siemer and Reisenzein 1998; White and McFarland 2009). In this case, the influence of feelings is done relatively auto-
matically and without much deliberation, or filtering. As such, consumers just transfer their affective reactions to whatever object is in front of them, similar to the classic halo effect. At a more conscious level, however, it is the perceived diagnosticity of the feelings that is the basis for judgment. The affect-as-information (AAI) effect suggests that individuals use affect as an informative cue and base their favorability or unfavorability of an option on how it makes them feel at the time of judgment (Pham et al. 2001, Schwarz and Clore 1983). However, if consumers find their feelings to not be representative of the target or irrelevant to the judgment at hand (such as in the case of upbeat music in a bank), they might overcorrect for their reactions that in turn will result in a less favorable attitude toward the product—effect incongruence.

Regardless of this vast amount of research on affective feelings, the direct effect of positive or negative affect on consumer behavior is still unclear. Some research suggests that the valence of the feelings will lead to the same valence of the response, hence, positive affect leads to a favorable consumer response, while negative affect leads to an unfavorable response, an effect also known as the affect congruence effect (Brown, Homer, and Inman 1998; Forgas 1995; Greifeneder et al. 2011; Pham 1998; Schwarz and Clore 1983, 1988). Other research, on the other hand, finds that this effect can disappear or even be reversed, also known as the affect incongruence effect (Cavanaugh, Bettman, and Luce 2015; Erber, Wegner, and Therriault 1996; Goldsmith, Cho, and Dhur 2012; Labroo and Mukhopadhyay 2009; Lasaleta, Sedikides, and Vohs 2014; Puccinelli 2006; Puccinelli, Wilcox, and Grewal 2015; Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski 2014). Hence, hypothetically, a clothing store can play upbeat or somber music, a bank could give away cookies or not, and an advertiser could feature smiling or serious models, without fully being aware of the impact these affective features might have on consumers’ attitude and purchase behavior. In other words, how does affect (Griskevicius et al. 2009; Morales, Wu, and Fitzsimons 2012; Pham 1998; Pham, Lee, and Stephen 2012) influence consumers’ evaluation and behavior? When can managers expect positive affect to lead to favorable consumer evaluation and behavior? When might this effect be attenuated?

Present Research

Managers launch ad campaigns and develop retail strategies designed to make consumers feel good, where the hope or lay belief is that feeling good will carry over to the brand, products, and store, and lead consumers to evaluate the brand more favorably, buy more product and remain in the store longer. However, in reality, that is not always the case. Our research identifies situations where managers can utilize positive effects of feel-good strategies and situations where there are pitfalls that can lead such a strategy to backfire. In our research, then, there are two possible types of effect: affect congruence and affect incongruence. This paper will qualitatively and quantitatively review the research on affect to identify the principal factors driving affect congruence versus affect incongruence effects.

In addition to the contribution of this paper to the role of affect theory directly, the impact of affect in practical terms is quite substantial since understanding the role of affect has very real implications for managers. Managers can significantly increase the favorability of consumer evaluations toward their brand and purchase intentions toward their products by using informed elicitation of positive affect. The papers that follow will offer a more nuanced understanding of how the specific emotions of fear (White et al.) and envy (Huang and Sengupta) impact behavior.

Apocalypse Now: The Effect of Fear and Time Orientation on Choice Deferral

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Although researchers have examined how a range of psychological processes can influence consumer choice among sets of alternatives, less is known about the factors that shape choice deferral. Because the decision to choose or defer underlies every consumer decision, the psychology of choice deferral is integral to understanding consumer behavior. In the current investigation, we consider the role of incidental fear in deferral. In doing so, we focus on the functional relationship between fear, time orientation, and situational vigilance. Following on the previous paper (Puccinelli et al.) the current paper exemplifies the counterintuitive notion that a negative affective state (i.e., fear) increases favorable behavior (i.e., choice).

Past research has highlighted the usefulness of considering the functionality of specific emotions—in particular, how emotions help people navigate recurring sets of threats and opportunities (e.g., Griskevicius, Shiota, and Nowlis 2010). As part of a broader self-protection system (Daly and Wilson 2005), fear may uniquely affect choice deferral. Once activated, this system increases vigilance to the current environment, enhances present-focus, and fosters perceptions that the future is risky (Angie et al. 2011; Davis et al. 2011). When it comes to choice, increasing focus on the present is likely to reduce deferral—a person facing a threat may not be around long enough to choose in the future. Supporting this, people are less likely to defer choice when facing time pressure (Dhar and Nowlis 1999). More generally, because fear enhances vigilance and attention to details of the current situation, people experiencing fear may increasingly value non-threatening aspects of their environment. Thus, fear may lead people to value products that they encounter in their present environment more—regardless of whether they choose them or not.

In five experiments, we examine the impact of fear on choice deferral. In study 1, participants were randomly assigned to read a story designed to elicit fear, disgust, or no emotion. Afterwards, participants made a series of decisions in which they could select among several products in a choice set or “wait to get more information.” Participants made eight such decisions among choice sets that represented a variety of products. In line with the functional perspective, participants in the fear condition were significantly less likely to defer choice than participants in the other conditions ($p < .03$).

Much previous research has distinguished emotions based upon their underlying appraisal tendencies (Smith and Ellsworth 1985). In study 2 we compared fear to a range of other emotions selected to represent variation along several appraisal dimensions (disgust, sadness, hope, and pride). Participants were exposed to pictures designed to elicit one of these emotions. Then, they completed the same dependent measure from study 1. Participants in the fear condition were less likely to defer choice than participants in any of the other emotion conditions ($p = .002$); none of the other emotion conditions were significantly different from one another ($ps > .3$). Together, studies 1 and 2 support our initial contention that fear reduces choice deferral, and that this tendency is unique to fear, exclusive from other emotions with similar appraisal tendencies.

In study 3, we tested whether the relationship between fear and deferral is mediated by an increased focus on the present. Participants were randomly assigned to view a series of pictures that either elicited fear or no emotion. Next, they completed the dependent variable from the previous studies and a measure of time orientation that assessed present- versus future-focus (Strathman et al. 1994). Participants in the fear condition deferred less than those in the con-
control condition ($p < .05$) and also became more present-focused ($p < .01$). Importantly, the increased present-focus mediated the relationship between the fear manipulation and deferral (95% CI: .0045, .0343).

In addition to reducing deferral, the functional perspective also would predict that people concerned with fear may value products that they encounter in their present environment more, regardless of whether they choose them. In study 4, we tested this prediction. Rather than giving participants the option to “wait to get more information,” participants in study 4 could opt to defer choice by selecting “none” of the products. If fear is increasing participants’ valuation of products, people primed with fear should elect to choose a product—even when they don’t have to make a choice because they perceive options in the present choice set more favorably than any unknown or future options. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of the three stories from study 1 and completed the modified dependent variable. As predicted, participants in the fear condition were less likely to defer choice than participants in the other conditions ($ps < .05$).

Study 5 used the same independent and dependent variables from study 4. However, after deciding whether to select a product or defer choice, participants also rated how much they liked each product. As in previous studies, participants in the fear condition were less likely to defer ($ps < .05$). Moreover, relative to the other conditions and consistent with the proposed underlying process, participants in the fear condition also rated all of the products that they were presented with more favorably ($ps < .03$)—even those that they did not choose.

Taken together, these findings highlight the role of incidental fear in choice deferral. Specifically, we documented that: (1) fear increases choice and reduces deferral, (2) the link between fear and choice is mediated by (a) negative perceptions of unknown products and (b) positive evaluations of known products, and (4) other discrete emotions do not similarly affect the tendency to defer choice. This work stands in contrast to past research (Luce 1998), which suggested that general negativity could increase deferral. In so doing, we highlight the unique aspects of fear that prompt action in the current situation, compared to a more general view of negative emotions. These results show how a fleeting situational factor, such as briefly activating the emotion of fear, can help marketers increase the likelihood that consumers make a choice and thereby “close the sale.”

The next paper (Huang and Sengupta) will build on this investigation by examining how different types of envy shape self-control.

The Different Effects of Benign versus Malicious Envy on Self-Control

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Although it is an emotion that is both ubiquitous to consumer settings and a prime motivator of purchase behavior (van de Ven, Zeeelenberg, and Pieters 2011; Crusius and Mussweiler 2012), envy—the negative feeling induced by wanting something that another person has (Smith and Kim 2007)—has been surprisingly understudied in our field. Of late, however, consumer scholars have sought to understand this emotion, with one focus being on the distinction between benign envy (which occurs when the envied possession/achievement is deemed to be deserved, e.g., a job promotion based on hard work) and malicious envy (which occurs when the envied possession/achievement is deemed to be undeserved, e.g., a job promotion based on being the boss’s relative; van de Ven, Zeeelenberg, and Pieters 2009; Chan and Sengupta 2013). Expanding on the previous paper (White et al.) the current paper explores how the underlying attribution process for envy shapes its effects on self-control.

This paper extends current understanding on the distinction between benign and malicious envy by examining their impact on consumer decision-making. We propose that benign envy, as compared to malicious envy, heightens people’s self-awareness and therefore benefits subsequent self-control. Benign envy is characterized by greater causal attribution to the self and a motivation to improve oneself, both of which induce a focus on the self and its role in creating and changing the current situation—hallmarks of self-awareness (Duval and Wicklund 1972). In contrast, malicious envy is characterized by a motivation to undermine the envied target, which focuses attention outward on the target and the unfair situation. Further, past work finds that heightened self-awareness promotes a correspondence between people’s behaviors and normative standards (Gibbons 1990; Wicklund and Duval 1972). Assuming that self-control represents a normative ideal for most people, we argue that benign envy (vs. malicious envy) enhances self-control. We tested this and related hypotheses in a series of studies.

Experiment 1a tested our basic premise by having student participants read a neutral scenario, or one that either elicited benign or malicious envy by describing a fellow student in a course as having received an A+ either deservedly or undeservedly. Self-control was then measured by observing their preference between chocolate cake and fruit salad; a preference for the latter indicates greater self-control (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). As predicted, envy type influenced self-control ($F(2, 99) = 3.20, p = .045$), such that participants in the benign envy condition reported greater relative preference for the salad (vs. cake; $M = 5.52$) than those in the malicious envy ($M = 4.18$; $t(99) = 2.07, p = .041$) and control conditions ($M = 4.03$; $t(99) = 2.13, p = .032$; higher numbers indicate salad preference).

Experiment 1b used a similar procedure but also included a standard measure of self-awareness (Govern and Marsch 2001). Benign envy produced both greater self-awareness ($M = 4.76$) and greater preference for the salad ($M = 6.57$) than malicious envy (Self-awareness: $M = 4.25$; $F(1, 59) = 4.22, p = .044$; Preference: $M = 5.13$; $F(1, 59) = 4.26, p = .044$). Importantly, the effect of envy type on self-control was mediated by self-awareness (95% CI: .03-.1.08). Although overall mood was more positive for benign (vs. malicious) envy, controlling for mood did not affect self-control results in any of our studies.

Experiment 2 further examined the role of self-awareness in driving the effect of envy on self-control. We manipulated both envy type (via a job promotion scenario similar to the opening vignette) and self-awareness (via a priming task). If the self-control improvement for benign (vs. malicious) envy is based on improved self-awareness, priming the latter should increase self-control for those experiencing malicious envy, but not for benignly envious people, who are already experiencing high self-awareness. Envy type and self-awareness indeed exerted an interactive effect on self-control ($F(1, 118) = 4.57, p = .035$). Further, preference for salad under malicious envy was greater when self-awareness was primed ($M_{self-aware} = 5.31, M_{no-prime} = 3.88$; $t(118) = 1.95, p = .05$). No such effect was obtained in the benign envy condition ($M_{self-aware} = 4.63, M_{no-prime} = 5.45$; $t(118) = 1.08, p = .28$). That priming actually seemed to (non-significantly) decrease self-control in this condition might be a manifestation of a contrast effect (Herr, Sherman and Fazio 1983).

Not only does the self-awareness distinction between benign and malicious envy enable a prediction of immediate choice, it also contains implications for sequential decisions (e.g., Mukhopadhyay, Sengupta and Ramanathan 2008). Our final study first presented benignly vs. maliciously envious participants with a scenario
in which they and a friend jointly ordered either an indulgent dessert or a healthy one. We then presented them with the cake-salad choice. We predicted that benignly envious participants would exhibit choice consistency (greater likelihood of choosing salad in the second choice when the first scenario indicated a preference for the healthy dessert than the indulgent one). The rationale was that benign envy increases private self-awareness; it should therefore increase the likelihood that participants attribute the first choice to themselves (vs. the friend; Duval and Wicklund 1972). Further, self-aware participants are likely to infer their own preferences from the choice they just made (Bern 1972); consequently, the next choice is likely to be consistent with the earlier one (Mukhopadhyay et al. 2008). No particular prediction about choice consistency was made for malicious envy. As predicted, the thought of having chosen a healthy (vs. indulgent) dessert earlier led to greater relative preference for salad (vs. cake; \( M = 4.45 \) vs. \( M = 3.13; t(142) = 1.94, p = .054 \)) in the benign envy case. In the malicious envy condition, relative preference was not influenced by prior choice (\( M_{\text{salad}} = 3.46, M_{\text{salad}} = 4.11; t(142) = .89, p = .37; 2\)-way interaction \( F(1, 142) = 3.91, p = .050 \).

Collectively, these results, and others from parallel studies in our lab not described here, contribute to both the envy literature (highlighting hitherto-unexamined effects of feeling benignly versus maliciously envious) and also the self-awareness literature by identifying a new antecedent of increased self-awareness, benign envy. More broadly, this research provides insights into consumer decision-making by showing how envy—a widely-prevalent consumer emotion—can influence decisions in seemingly-unrelated contexts.

The paper that follows moves on from the previous ones in the session by considering individual differences in the goals elicited by an affective state.

**The Need to Feel Better**

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

In modern societies, consumption in one form or another is often regarded as a major affect-regulatory device (Luomala and Laaksonen, 1999). In advertising campaigns, products and services are often marketed as ways to make consumers “feel better” if they are in a bad mood (e.g., flowers, spas, movies, alcohol, etc.). This phenomenon is widely based on the popular lay-belief that negative mood is unpleasant, and therefore people necessarily strive to repair their negative mood. The previous papers illustrate how a negative affective state does not always lead to affect regulation. Moreover, one can think of instances where people dwell on their negative mood and do nothing to improve it (Andrade and Cohen 2007). For instance, people may seek out melancholic music when they feel sad, or choose to remain miserable when something frustrates them. Our research proposes that people vary considerably in the degree to which they need to feel better when they experience negative feelings. Specifically, it advances current understanding of why certain individuals choose to remain in their negative mood, or even bring on unpleasant emotions, rather than to improve their mood. To this end, we have developed a construct called the “Need to Feel Better” (NFB) which encompasses four distinct facets: 1) behavioral tendency to repair bad moods, 2) aversion to negative feelings, 3) pleasure derived from negative feelings, and 4) tendency to reflect on negative feelings.

Differentiating individuals on their NFB allows us to predict when people are likely to engage in mood repair. Hence, we have developed a scale that includes 16 items which tap into the four different facets of NFB. The scale possesses good internal consistency (\( \alpha = .85 \)), test-retest reliability at two weeks (\( r = .68 \)), and construct validity. Our data shows that females tend to have higher NFB than males (\( M_{\text{female}} = 4.52 \) vs. \( M_{\text{male}} = 4.29; t(518) = 4.17, p < .001 \)), and that NFB is positively associated with age (\( r = .09, p < .05 \)). NFB is also correlated with the Big Five personality traits (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991); it is positively correlated with extraversion (\( r = .21, p < .01 \)), agreeableness (\( r = .31, p < .001 \)), and conscientiousness (\( r = .22, p < .01 \)) but negatively correlated with neuroticism (\( r = -.17, p < .05 \)). Furthermore, NFB is associated with more frequent engagement in common mood repair activities such as leisure shopping (\( r = .24, p < .005 \)) and exercise (\( r = .19, p < .05 \)). Finally, people with NFB report greater life satisfaction (\( r = .19, p < .05 \)) and happiness (\( r = .26, p < .005 \)).

We conducted three experiments to test the predictive validity of the NFB construct. The first two experiments tested whether high-NFB individuals would be more likely than low-NFB individuals to regulate their affect by choosing positive stimuli when they experience negative (vs. neutral) affect. Both experiments comprised two-parts that were separated by a week. In part 1, participants filled out the NFB scale. In part 2, participants in the negative-affect condition watched a sad video whereas those in the neutral-affect condition watched a documentary on computers. After watching the video, participants answered some questions about the video and their mood. Following that, they were told that they would be evaluating different media items (e.g., recorded music, newspaper articles) and that due to time constraints they could choose which items to review. In Experiment 1, student participants made a choice between two neutral pieces of music (a distractor question), followed by a choice between a happy (“Minutes to Midnight”) and a sad (“A Rainy Day”) song (key dependent variable; Cohen and Andrade 2004). High-NFB participants were more likely to choose the happy song when they experienced negative (vs. neutral) affect (\( \beta = - .69, Wald = 4.95, p = .026 \); this difference was non-significant among low-NFB participants (\( \beta = .21, Wald = .65, p = .419 \)). In Experiment 2, Mechanical Turk participants were presented with six different pair-wise choices of news article headlines: three were distractor choices, and the other three included a positive and a negative option. The key dependent variable was the number of positive options participants chose among these three choices. High-NFB participants chose more positive options to repair their negative affect (\( \beta = -.35, t(156) = -3.28, p = .001 \); this difference was non-significant among low-NFB participants (\( \beta = .02, t(156) = .14, p = .885 \)).

To provide further evidence for the predictive validity of our construct, we investigated whether high-NFB (vs. low-NFB) individuals would display more favorable attitudes towards products with mood-lifting benefits independent of their existing affect. We measured Mechanical Turk participants’ NFB scores in part 1. After a week, in part 2, we showed them an advertisement for a vitamin C health supplement that either highlighted its mood-lifting benefits or not. After viewing the ad, participants were asked to indicate their interest in buying the product. Results showed that high-NFB participants indicated greater interest when the mood-lifting appeal was present versus absent (\( \beta = .55, t(146) = 2.86, p = .005 \), but the same difference was non-significant among low-NFB participants (\( \beta = .11, t(146) = .55, p = .582 \)). These results suggest that NFB predicts how attractive products are towards mood-lifting appeals in marketing.

Our research proposes a new construct called the “Need to Feel Better,” and provides evidence of individual differences on this motivational construct. It challenges the assumption that people have a universal tendency to want to feel better, and that people necessarily engage in affect-regulation when they feel bad. It enhances our understanding of why certain individuals choose not to regulate their
negative affect and also allows us to decipher when people would behave in a mood-congruent versus mood-incongruent way (Cohen and Andrade 2004). Our research has implications for the marketing of “feel-good” products (e.g., aromatherapy and vacation packages) and the use of mood repair appeals (e.g., Volkswagen’s “Get Happy” campaign). Marketing strategies that incorporate such appeals should be targeted at consumer segments that tend to have higher NFB. Finally, our research also has implications for consumer satisfaction with product consumption, and more broadly, consumer welfare. Finally this paper offers a conclusion to the session as it moves beyond the impact of affect to the ways in which goals may or may not shape the influence of affect on behavior.

REFERENCES


