3-2010

The Effect of Subjective Experiences of Regulatory Fit on Trust

Leigh Ann Vaughn
Ithaca College, lvaughn@ithaca.edu

Audrey R. Harkness

Emily K. Clark

The Effect of Subjective Experiences of Regulatory Fit on Trust

Leigh Ann Vaughn, Audrey R. Harkness, Emily K. Clark

Ithaca College

Reference:
Vaughn, L. A., Harkness, A. R., & Clark, E. K. (2010). The effect of incidental experiences of regulatory fit on trust. *Personal Relationships, 17*, 57-69.

Abstract

Two experiments provide support for the hypothesis that, when people assess how much they trust another person, feelings of rightness from an initial, brief experience of regulatory fit (consistency between prevention or promotion regulatory focus of goals and strategic means) can suggest the other person is trustworthy, relative to feelings of wrongness from regulatory nonfit. This regulatory-fit effect on trust was stronger for acquaintances than for individuals participants knew well (Experiment 1) and was eliminated by drawing participants' attention to how right the earlier, trust judgment-irrelevant event made them feel (Experiment 2). We discuss implications for regulatory fit theory, possible applications to applied settings and to other populations, and possible effects of other types of regulatory fit.

The Effect of Subjective Experiences of Regulatory Fit on Trust

Trust appears to be essential for social relationships, and processes that can help or hinder the development of trust in very early stages of relationships are crucial to understand. This is because whether acquaintances develop into closer relationships could depend on small differences in initial guesses about how much to trust an acquaintance (see Weigel & Murray, 2000). These guesses may result from social judgment processes of which the actors may not be introspectively aware (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Although theory and research in psychology have proposed and found numerous situational, dispositional, and dyadic factors that affect trust once people are already in a personal or professional relationship (for excellent reviews, see Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kramer, 1999; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Simpson, 2007), relatively little research has focused on fundamental *social judgment* processes that could affect trust when people barely know the other person (though see Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). However, understanding such processes could help enhance basic understanding of how relationships develop. One such process, which we studied in this initial research, is how very brief, initial feelings can serve as information for later judgments not pertaining to the feelings-eliciting event (e.g., Clore, 1992; Martin, Ward, Achee, & Wyer, 1993; Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 2007). Similar to how nice weather can positively affect people's satisfaction with their lives as a whole (Schwarz & Clore, 1983), an initial event that feels right might later affect how right people feel about trusting an acquaintance unrelated to that event.

Because trust has been studied in various contexts in psychology (e.g., Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kramer, 1999; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Simpson, 2007) as well as other disciplines including economics (Williamson, 1993) and sociology (Gambetta, 1998), many conceptual definitions of trust were available for us to use in our research. We chose to use

the same conceptual definition of trust as in previous research that, like ours, was designed to examine how very brief, initial feelings may influence later, unrelated judgments of trust regarding either acquaintances or people who participants know well (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Specifically, like Dunn and Schweitzer (2005, p. 736; also see Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998), we define trust as "the willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another's behavior." Because, like Dunn and Schweitzer (2005), we were interested in the kinds of judgments of trust that would be relevant to both acquaintanceships and closer relationships, we used their measure of interpersonal trust (also see Johnson-George and Swap, 1982), which contains items such as, "I would give_____an important letter to mail after s/he mentions that s/he is stopping by the post office today" (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005, p. 748). This item (and the others in the scale) is about willingness to accept vulnerability in a specific situation with a narrow time frame; this makes the scale useful for capturing trust in initial as well as close relationships.

Even the sorts of very specific, trust-related judgments captured in Dunn and Schweitzer's (2005) trust inventory could be complex to make, however; there is information about the imagined situations, the possible motives of each person, and other factors that people could potentially take into account. People considering someone they do not know well will not have much information they can draw upon for judgments about how much to trust the other person in a specific context. If they lack the ability or motivation to engage in a complex process of carefully weighing various pieces information about their acquaintance, they might simplify their judgment process by implicitly or explicitly asking themselves "How do I feel about trusting this person?" In other words, they might use a feelings-as-information heuristic (e.g., Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Clore, 1992; Higgins, 2005; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; 2007). If

so, they could arrive at more positive assessments of trust the more right the idea of trusting the person seems to feel. In contrast, people considering close relationship partners or others they already know well are more likely to have previously-formed judgments about how much they can trust the other person in the specific circumstances in question. As a result, people judging the trustworthiness of others they know well should be less likely to use transient feelings as information (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; also see Forgas, 1995, 2001).

Feelings can last longer than conscious thoughts that gave rise to them, which means that people can become confused about where their feelings came from (e.g., Clore, 1992). As a result, an initial event can elicit feelings that influence later judgments – even about topics not pertaining to the initial event. People tend to assume that feelings are caused by the information that happens to be in mind as long as the feelings seem relevant (Higgins, 1998; Schwarz & Clore, 2007). This makes it possible for people to attribute feelings arising from an initial event to their judgments about a later topic that has nothing to do with the actual source of their feelings, as long as they implicitly ask "how do I feel about it?" and the feelings seem to have been caused by what they are judging (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1983, 2007). Because use of feelings as information depends on implicit (mis)attributions about where the feelings came from, it should be possible to eliminate feelings-as-information effects by drawing attention to a judgment-incidental source of the feelings. Indeed, a classic way of showing that feelings elicited by an initial event affect later judgments about a completely different topic is to ask people how the initial event made them feel (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Doing so apparently clarifies that the later judgment topic is not what caused their initial feelings. This removes or even slightly reverses the effect of the feelings on later judgments, most likely through correction or

overcorrection for their otherwise biasing effect (e.g., Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006).

Many affective and non-affective feelings can affect judgments (e.g., Clore, 1992; Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Central to the current research is the experience of how well one's imagined strategies of goal pursuit fit and sustain the self-regulatory orientation of a goal one has in mind; i.e., regulatory fit. Higgins (e.g., 2005, p. 209) has proposed that when there is regulatory fit, people "feel right" about what they are doing, and that this "feeling-right" experience can transfer over to subsequent, irrelevant judgments. This experience of regulatory fit is not strongly affective (Higgins, 2006); mood, for example, does not account for regulatory-fit effects on judgments (Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Cesario et al., 2004; Forster, Higgins & Idson, 1998; Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden 2003; Hong & Lee, 2008; Shah, Higgins & Friedman, 1998; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). Rather, the feeling-right experience appears to be a motivational feeling that is associated with engagement strength (Higgins, 2005; 2006); indeed, it appears to enhance engagement with ideas that happen to be in mind at the time. Although the feeling-right experience can come from and affect judgments of the activities that caused it (a topic to which we return in the general discussion), we focused the current research on effects of judgment-incidental experiences of regulatory fit/nonfit on trust.

Initial events could produce feeling-right experiences that exert subtle influences on later trust of an acquaintance more often than people are aware.[1] In part, this is because people often may lack the motivation or ability to engage in careful, systematic processing – deficits which should enhance the likelihood of unintentional use of feelings as information for later judgments (e.g., Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; Forgas, 1995; 2001). Additionally, it seems likely that people

may not be aware enough of how the feeling-right experience relates to the fit between goal orientation and strategies of goal pursuit for them to notice and/or make accurate attributions about it. For example, if a teacher casually asks a student about a skill student should not let deteriorate over winter vacation, then asks for a few strategies the student could use to make sure everything goes right with that, the student probably can respond without much of a second thought. The student also probably is unaware of how the requested "eager" strategies do not fit the "prevention" orientation of the requested goal. If this is so, she will not be able to accurately label, make clear attributions about, or perhaps even consciously notice the vague sense of wrongness this conversation leaves her with. As a result, she can misattribute this feeling of wrongness to what she imagines about an acquaintance behaving in a trustworthy way when the acquaintance asks to copy her notes a few minutes later; because what she imagines seems to feel wrong, it reduces her likelihood of trusting the acquaintance.

Interpersonal interactions such as this kind of student-teacher conversation may have inspired what has become the most common procedure for varying regulatory fit/nonfit separately from thoughts about the targets of judgment (e.g., Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004; Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Hong & Lee, 2008; Vaughn, Hesse, Petkova, & Trudeau, in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). According to regulatory fit theory (e.g., Higgins, 2000; 2005), when people consider things they ideally would like to gain, they feel most right about eager strategies of goal pursuit – like making sure everything goes well – because these strategies fit and sustain these promotion-oriented goals best. When people consider things they believe they should not lose, they feel more right about vigilant strategies of goal pursuit – like avoiding anything that could go badly – because these strategies fit and sustain these prevention-oriented goals best. To vary feelings associated with regulatory fit that

could carry over to influence later judgments, researchers often ask participants to list two promotion-related goals (e.g., things participants ideally would like to gain or improve on) or prevention-related goals (e.g., things participants believe they should not lose or let deteriorate) and to provide either five eager strategies or five vigilant strategies for each (Cesario et al., 2004; Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Hong & Lee, 2008; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). Regulatory fit conditions pair promotion goals with eager strategies or prevention goals with vigilant strategies, and regulatory nonfit conditions pair prevention goals with eager strategies or promotion goals with vigilant strategies. This experimental procedure is very brief (on average, participants take about three minutes to do this task and tend to write about five words per goal or strategy). It also does not appear to create a noticeably strong state of promotion or prevention focus; no research using this kind of manipulation appears to have found main effects for promotion versus prevention focus (Hong & Lee, 2008; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006).

This task nonetheless produces reliable regulatory-fit effects on subsequent judgments; in past research, these have included judgments related to the rightness or wrongness of one's reactions to a later persuasive communication (Cesario et al., 2004), the rightness or wrongness of assumptions that one's later judgments are unbiased (Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006), the rightness or wrongness of the imagined events in a later narrative (Vaughn et al., in press), and the rightness or wrongness of later decisions to stop or to continue working on a task (Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006). Additionally, and consistent with use of feelings as information, asking how right an initial regulatory-fit task makes one feel is very effective at eliminating or even reversing regulatory-fit effects on later judgments (Cesario et al., 2004; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006), even though people appear not to

be practiced or noticeably good at carefully scaling and accurately reporting how right their *own* strategies for working toward a particular goal make them feel (cf. Cesario & Higgins, 2008).

We used this procedure to examine whether judgment-incidental experiences of regulatory fit or nonfit could affect judgments of how much to trust another person, or how trustworthy the other person's behavior might be. In the context of a questionnaire containing pages with different, mostly unrelated topics, participants first identified someone they knew and answered a few questions about their relationship with this person, knowing that they would later answer questions about him or her. On the next page they completed the regulatory fit manipulation, and on a subsequent page they answered questions about how much they would trust the earlier-identified person in various circumstances (the trust inventory from Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). In Experiment 1, we examined whether, compared to regulatory nonfit, regulatory fit would exert a more positive influence on judgments of trust and to see whether this expected effect would be stronger for judgments of acquaintances than for judgments of individuals participants knew well. In Experiment 2, our goals were to replicate the expected effect on trust of acquaintances and to examine whether we could eliminate it by asking some participants how right they felt when doing the regulatory-fit task. Consistent with prior research using this kind of regulatory fit manipulation, we did not expect there to be a main effect of regulatory focus in either study.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and Design

One hundred ten students participating in the study for extra credit in their psychology courses were randomly assigned to Regulatory Focus Goal (promotion vs. prevention) X

Regulatory Fit (fitting vs. nonfitting strategies) X Relationship (knows well vs. acquaintance) conditions. We excluded the data from twelve students who did not follow directions: four did not name a target person, three in the *acquaintance* condition named someone they knew well and/or to whom they were strongly romantically attracted (above the midpoint of the relevant scales described below, which were anchored at *not at all…* and *extremely…*), four in the *knows well* condition named someone they reported not knowing well (at or below the midpoint of the relevant scale), and one did not do the regulatory fit task. Additionally, to ensure maximum comparability between participants in the different target relationship conditions, we excluded the five participants in the *knows well* condition who reported high romantic interest in the person they identified (above the midpoint of the relevant scale).[2] The final sample included 93 participants (23 male, 2 who did not report a gender). There were no significant gender effects.

Procedure

We conducted sessions of 1-10 people in a computer lab, with at least one computer separating each person from the next. Participants learned that they would be doing a Web questionnaire containing pages with different, mostly unrelated topics; this questionnaire would take them about half an hour to do. We asked them to work through the pages of the questionnaire in order, and the completion times recorded for each page indicated that participants complied with these instructions.

Identification and initial ratings of the target of judgment. On the first page of the Web questionnaire, we asked participants to bring to mind the name of an acquaintance or someone they knew well. In the *acquaintance* condition, we asked participants to "Think of a person who you have a class with, who you don't talk with much but whose name you know. This would be someone you feel pretty neutral about and in whom you don't have a romantic interest. Write

down this person's first name. Please *do not* write down this person's last name." In the *knows well* condition, we asked participants to "Think of a student [at this institution] who you know very well. This could be someone you feel positive or negative about. Write down this person's first name. Please *do not* write down this person's last name." After identifying this person, participants rated how well they knew him or her, how much they liked him or her, and how much romantic interest they had in him or her, using scales anchored at 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*extremely well/very much/a great deal*). At the bottom of this page, participants read that we would ask them more about this person later in the questionnaire.

Manipulation of Judgment-Incidental Regulatory Fit and Regulatory Focus of Goals. On the next page of the Web questionnaire participants completed the regulatory focus and regulatory fit manipulations. We called this page of our questionnaire "What You Ideally Would Like to Gain or Improve on" (or "What You Believe You Should Not Lose or Let Deteriorate"). Participants read a brief introduction stating that on this page we were learning about "beliefs, skills, and/or extracurricular activities you ideally would like to gain or improve on [believe you should not lose or let deteriorate]," and they answered two questions about their year in college and their age. Then they completed a brief manipulation of regulatory focus and regulatory fit almost identical to that used in previous research (Cesario et al., 2004; Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Hong & Lee, 2008; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). Participants in the promotion goal conditions brought to mind two things they would ideally like to gain or improve on, while participants in the prevention goal conditions brought to mind two things they believed they should not lose or let deteriorate. We also asked participants to list five strategies for pursuing each goal. The promotion fit condition paired promotion goals with eager strategies (that "you could use *to make sure everything goes right"*), whereas the

prevention fit condition paired prevention goals with vigilant strategies (that "you could use *to avoid anything that could go wrong"*). The promotion nonfit condition paired promotion goals with vigilant strategies, whereas the prevention nonfit condition paired prevention goals with eager strategies.

Filler task. Between the regulatory fit manipulation and the trust measure, participants did a short filler task titled "Consumer Preferences." In this task they reported their favorite brand of toothpaste, shampoo, fast food, and soft drinks, and why they preferred it (price, quality or other). The purpose of this task was to reduce discounting of feelings of regulatory fit when making the trust judgments on the following page (e.g., Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006; Vaughn & Weary, 2003; also see Martin, Ward, Achee, & Wyer, 1993; McFarland, White, & Newth, 2003).

Trust inventory. On the next page, called "Person Perception," participants read that we would like them to consider how they would feel about and behave toward the person they identified earlier in different, mundane situations. They also read that this was the last page on which we would ask them about this person. To ensure that they answered questions about the person they had identified earlier, we asked them to write this person's first name again. Then they completed Dunn and Schweitzer's (2005) trust inventory. This 10-item measure is based on Johnson-George and Swap's (1982) Specific Interpersonal Trust Scale and assesses expectations of trustworthiness and intentions to trust the person they named. There are items, for example, about the perceived likelihood of this person meeting agreed-upon deadlines and of the respondent giving the person an important letter to mail after s/he mentions that s/he is stopping by the post office. Scale items are anchored by 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (v*ery much*), which are averaged after appropriate reverse-scoring (Cronbach's alpha in this study was .91).

Afterward, participants completed materials for investigations unrelated to the current research. On the last page they provided demographic information. Finally, they were thanked and debriefed.

Results

Knowledge, liking, and romantic interest

Participants reported knowing and liking people they knew well (knowing $M = 5.93$, $SD = 0.88$; liking $M = 5.79$, $SD = 1.32$) more than acquaintances (knowing $M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.13$; liking $M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.20$); knowing $t(91) = 16.03$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.33$; liking $t(91) = 5.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.20$. There was no significant difference between the *knows well* and *acquaintance* groups in their very low romantic interest in the target (knows well $M = 1.19$, $SD = 0.82$; acquaintance $M = 1.14$, $SD = 0.53$); $t(91) = 0.32$, $p > .18$, $d = 0.07$.

Trust

A Regulatory Focus of Goals X Regulatory Fit X Relationship ANOVA revealed a main effect for the type of relationship on trust, $F(1, 85) = 25.47$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.04$; unsurprisingly, participants reported trusting individuals they knew well ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.18$) more than acquaintances ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.98$). Additionally, it revealed the expected Regulatory Fit X Relationship interaction $F(1, 85) = 4.02$, $p = .05$ (see Figure 1). Planned contrasts explored this interaction. Among participants in the *acquaintance* conditions, those who earlier had experienced regulatory fit reported more trust ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.94$) than those who earlier had experienced regulatory nonfit ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.91$), $t(48) = 2.58$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.73$. Among participants in the *knows well* conditions, trust did not differ significantly between those who had experienced regulatory fit ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.25$) and those who had experienced regulatory

nonfit (M = 5.74, SD = 1.10), $t(41) = -0.61$, $p = .55$, $d = .19$. No other effects approached significance (all ps > .19).

Discussion

This experiment is the first to show that, compared to an experience of nonfit, an experience of regulatory fit in a brief, initial event can enhance later judgments of trust. Importantly, this effect was stronger for judgments of acquaintances than of people who participants knew well. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that, if people have fewer previously-formed judgments about the trustworthiness of an acquaintance than of someone they know well, they should tend to simplify what otherwise could be a complex judgment by implicitly or explicitly asking themselves how they feel about trusting their acquaintance.

Experiment 2

A time-honored way of demonstrating use of judgment-incidental feelings as information is to activate a subjective experience in an initial task, and then lead some participants to attribute their feelings to that (actual) source rather than to a subsequent, irrelevant judgment task (e.g., Clore, 1992; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). If people use their judgment-incidental feelings as information because they are confused about the source of those feelings, then reducing source confusion should reduce the effect of the feelings on the later judgments. This is what we set out to do in Experiment 2. The procedure of this study was identical to Experiment 1, except that we asked all participants about an acquaintance and we drew some participants' attention to how right the regulatory focus/fit task made them feel (e.g., Cesario et al., 2004). We expected participants who had experienced regulatory fit to report more trust of their acquaintance than those who had experienced regulatory nonfit, but only when we did not draw their attention to

the earlier task as a source of feelings of rightness. This pattern of results would be consistent with use of feelings of rightness/wrongness as information for judgments about trust.

Method

Participants and Design

Eighty-six undergraduate students participated in the study for extra credit in their psychology courses. They were randomly assigned to Regulatory Focus of Goals (prevention vs. promotion) X Regulatory Fit (fitting vs. nonfitting strategies) X Attention (attention drawn to how right the regulatory fit task felt vs. no attention) conditions. We excluded data from six people for not following instructions: five identified and answered questions about people who they knew well instead of acquaintances (above the midpoint of the relevant scale, which was anchored at *not at all well* and *extremely well*), and one did not do the filler task. This resulted in a final sample of 80 students (22 male). There were no significant gender effects.

Procedure

Students participated in sessions of 1-6 people in a computer lab, with at least one empty seat separating each student from the next. The procedure was almost identical to that in Experiment 1, except we asked all participants about an acquaintance and we varied whether we drew participants' attention to how right the regulatory focus/fit task made them feel. In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the trust inventory was .88.

Attention manipulation. At the end of the Web page containing the regulatory fit manipulation, we directed some people's attention to the regulatory fit task as a source of feelings of rightness by using instructions based on those developed by Cesario et al. (2004; also see Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). The students randomly assigned to the *attention* condition read, "Thinking about using the right

strategies for pursuing a goal can make people 'feel right' about those strategies. Please indicate how much you 'feel right' about the strategies you came up with." The scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). People in the *no attention* condition did not receive this question.

Results

Knowledge, liking, and romantic interest

Overall, participants reported not knowing their acquaintance well (M = 2.29, SD = 0.86). Additionally, they reported liking their acquaintance moderately well (M = 4.04, SD = 1.18), and having very little romantic interest in their acquaintance (M = 1.26, SD = 0.71).

Trust

A Regulatory Focus of Goals X Regulatory Fit X Attention ANOVA revealed the predicted Regulatory Fit X Attention effect on trust, $F(1, 72) = 5.91$, $p = .02$ (see Figure 2). Planned contrasts explored this interaction. Among *no attention* participants (who did not receive the question about how right the regulatory focus/fit task made them feel), those who listed regulatory fitting strategies reported more trust (M = 4.86, SD = 1.09) than those who listed regulatory nonfitting ones (M = 4.10, SD = 1.14); $t(37) = 2.12$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.68$. Among *attention* participants, trust did not differ significantly between those who listed regulatory fitting goals (M = 4.25, SD = 0.93) and those who listed nonfitting goals (M = 4.45, SD = 1.11); $t(39) = -0.62$, $p = .54$, $d = .19$.

Additionally, the ANOVA revealed an unexpected main effect for the regulatory focus of goals, $F(1, 72) = 5.53$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.46$. Participants who had listed two prevention goals reported trusting their acquaintance more (M = 4.63, SD = 1.04) than those who had listed two promotion goals (M = 4.13, SD = 1.09). This main effect was surprising because in previous research using this kind of procedure there have been no main effects for the regulatory focus of

requested goals (Hong & Lee, 2008; Vaughn et al., in press, Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). Additionally, the direction of this main effect is the opposite of what we would expect if participants in the prevention goal condition really became more prevention-focused overall (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008). It seemed more likely that the participants randomly assigned to prevention conditions initially happened to have named acquaintances they liked somewhat better and trusted somewhat more. If so, controlling for how much participants initially reported liking their acquaintance should substantially weaken this main effect. To test this hypothesis, we carried out a Regulatory Focus of Goals X Regulatory Fit X Attention ANCOVA with liking of the acquaintance as the covariate. This analysis revealed a significant relationship with the covariate, $F(1, 71) = 9.45$, $p = .003$, and a significant Regulatory Fit X Attention interaction, $F(1, 71) = 4.36$, $p = .04$, but no longer a significant main effect for the regulatory focus of goals, $F(1, 71) = 2.73$, $p > .10$, $d = 0.23$. It appears, then, that this main effect may have been due to chance.

Discussion

As expected, when we did not draw participants' attention to the judgment-incidental, regulatory-fit task as a source of feelings of rightness, participants who experienced regulatory fit reported trusting an earlier-identified acquaintance more than those who experienced regulatory nonfit. Additionally, drawing participants' attention to the regulatory-fit task as a source of these feelings eliminated these effects, apparently through clarifying that something other than the acquaintance caused the feelings. These findings provide support for the hypothesis that, compared to feelings of wrongness from regulatory nonfit, feelings of rightness from regulatory fit can enhance judgments of trust.

General Discussion

When people do not yet know each other well, small contextual factors could have important effects on judgments of trust. These factors could include feelings resulting from a brief, initial event – even an event that has nothing to do with the person being judged. To simplify what otherwise could be a complex judgment about how much to trust someone they barely know, people may implicitly or explicitly ask themselves "How do I feel about trusting this person?" Feelings of rightness that seem relevant - and that do not appear to have been caused by something else - could inform these judgments (e.g., Clore, 1992; Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Importantly, however, such incidental feelings should have a less powerful effect on judgments of trust regarding close relationship partners, about whom people are more likely to have relevant information they can bring to mind (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005).

Two experiments provided support for these hypotheses. Using an experimental procedure from prior research on regulatory fit (Cesario et al., 2004; Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Hong & Lee, 2008; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006), we found that participants who experienced regulatory fit in an initial, brief event subsequently judged an acquaintance to be more trustworthy than did participants who initially experienced regulatory nonfit. As expected, this effect was stronger for judgments of acquaintances than of people the participants knew well. Additionally, and supporting the hypothesis that this is a feelings-as-information effect, we found that drawing participants' attention to the regulatory-fit task as a source of feelings of rightness eliminated this effect on judgments of acquaintances (e.g., Cesario et al., 2004; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). Doing so apparently clarified that the acquaintance was not the source of such feelings, rendering the feelings irrelevant to the later judgments.

These findings extend implications of research on how other judgment-incidental experiences can affect interpersonal trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Although much research has addressed factors that affect trust in existing personal and professional relationships (e.g., Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kramer, 1999; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Simpson, 2007), very little research has addressed how basic, *social-judgment* processes can affect trust – especially trust of people one barely knows. Dunn and Schweitzer's (2005) research is an exception, and it was an inspiration for the current studies. It showed that judgment-incidental positive and negative emotions can affect later judgments of trust – particularly trust of an acquaintance – as long as people do not attribute the feelings to something other than the acquaintance. It also found that this effect differs very much according to secondary appraisals of internal or external causation associated with various emotions. For example, although guilt and anger are both negative emotions, the anger-related secondary appraisal of other-person causation appears to let anger be used as information for judgments of trust; the guilt-related secondary appraisal of self-causation appears not to allow guilt to affect trust. Our research extends these findings by showing that effects of judgment-incidental experiences on trust are not limited to particular emotions, or even to subjective experiences with a strong affective component.

Additionally, our findings contribute to basic research on regulatory fit by providing support to the proposal that regulatory fit enhances engagement with ideas that happen to be in mind at the time (e.g., Higgins, 2005, 2006); in this case, the idea of trusting the acquaintance (provided by the trust inventory items). Furthermore, the current research suggests that this effect occurs through a feelings-as-information process (e.g., Cesario et al., 2004; Vaughn et al., in press; Vaughn, Malik, et al., 2006; Vaughn, O'Rourke, et al., 2006). This research also adds an

important boundary condition to incidental regulatory-fit effects (i.e., effects of regulatory-fit experiences not resulting from the topic of judgment): people's relationship to or familiarity with the target of judgment. In general, the more knowledge people have about a target of judgment and/or the more motivated they are to arrive at particular judgments about the target, the less likely effects of incidental regulatory fit may be (for relevant research on other feelings, see Forgas, 1995, 2001; Schwarz & Vaughn, 2002). Future research should examine this hypothesis regarding judgments and targets other than the ones we examined here.

Our experimental manipulations of regulatory fit were brief, as was the likely duration of their effects on subsequent judgments. A limitation of the current research is that it did not address possible cumulative effects of incidental regulatory fit on judgments of trust. Future researchers may be able to examine such effects in real-world contexts. For example, educational psychologists interested in helping teachers to foster trust among incoming students may suggest interventions that apply an understanding of regulatory fit to how teachers design and describe assignments. Beyond the likely positive effects of regulatory fit on students' engagement with the assignments themselves (e.g., Forster et al., 1998; Freitas et al., 2002; Shah et al., 1998; Spiegel et al., 2004), lingering feelings from experiences of regulatory fit in a classroom could exert cumulative effects on judgments of trust between students – as long as teachers do not point out to students that this could be happening. As another example, consider people who have sought out a support group because they are looking for a new social network to provide support around a certain issue: they need to make quick judgments about whether or not to trust these new acquaintances enough to become closer and disclose personal information. If the support group facilitator asked participants to list their goals for the group (e.g., "I want to talk about creating healthy relationships") and asked about strategies they plan to use within the

group to attain these goals, it seems that it would be fairly easy to frame this exercise in a regulatory-fitting manner (i.e., ask what they would like to gain from participating in the group, and how they would ensure that this goes well). Doing so could create a lingering feeling-right experience that could transfer to the idea of opening up to their fellow group members. Given the many contexts in which snap judgments of new people could be a qualifying factor in decisions about whether to become closer, possible real-world applications of the current research are quite varied. We look forward to future research that explores such applications.

Another important limitation of the current research is that its applications to other settings and populations remain to be examined. Our participants were predominantly White, middle-class college students at a regional university/comprehensive college in the northeastern United States, over half of whom were first-year students. It is not clear how well our findings would generalize to a more ethnically or economically diverse sample, to people in another geographic region, or to people who are not currently students. We believe that our current results may apply most broadly in populations where many people are developing new social networks, as most of the students in our study were. For example, it is normal for people in the military – where trust is essential - to need to develop new social networks when they are assigned a permanent change of station, which typically happens about once every three years. Could training commanders to frame activities in regulatory-fitting rather than nonfitting ways have important incidental effects on interpersonal trust, especially if cumulated over time and considering the large number of people serving in the military? A related demographic limitation of our study is that all of our students were enrolled in psychology courses; many were psychology majors. We wonder whether results would be stronger or weaker among people who might not be as psychologically minded; psychology majors might be relatively attuned to their

feelings and likely to use them as information for judgments, but also might be more likely to correct or overcorrect for the effects of feelings they no longer consider relevant to a judgment.

A third limitation is that we examined only the effects of a judgment-*incidental* source of regulatory fit on interpersonal trust. An important question remaining from this research is whether regulatory fit could, under various circumstances, affect judgments of how much to trust a close relationship partner. We believe it could if the experiences of regulatory fit result from events occurring within a relationship. In this case, the regulatory fit experience, being integral to the functioning of the relationship itself, may reflect fairly stable ongoing patterns of fit or nonfit between partners who know each other well. (For example, if roommates have different self-regulatory strategies for pursuing the same goal – e.g., for keeping up a shared living space – they might tend to perceive each others' strategies as wrong; they also may be able to recall specific times when behaviors associated with their roommate's nonfitting regulatory focus seemed to impede their progress toward their own goals.) If so, it would be the content of the relationship that is fitting or not fitting, which could affect judgments through consideration of this content rather than through a feelings-as-information process. Even if feelings of rightness or wrongness are strongly involved in such regulatory fit/nonfit effects, these effects may not be strongly influenced by (mis)attribution manipulations – in fact, drawing attention to the source of these feelings (the relationship dynamics) may enhance rather than diminish the impact of relationship-integral regulatory fit on trust of the partner. These considerations were beyond the scope of the current research, but we look forward to forthcoming work by other laboratories that addresses these and related issues (e.g., Rusbult & Righetti, 2008).

A final limitation is that we only examined one kind of regulatory fit, namely the fit between the prevention or promotion focus of goals and the vigilance or eagerness of strategies

for pursuing the goals. Regulatory fit can happen in other ways as well. For example, it can occur between individuals' chronic tendency toward promotion or prevention and the strategies afforded in a given situation; it also can occur between the strategic orientations of certain personality traits and the regulatory focus of goals (e.g., Vaughn, Baumann, & Klemann, 2008). Additionally, fit effects can occur with other motivational orientations, such as tendencies to move from state to state versus to make comparisons (Avnet & Higgins, 2003), or orientations associated with perceiving that a task is meant to be important versus that is meant to be fun (Bianco, Higgins, & Klem, 2003). Various kinds of fit experiences could influence interpersonal trust differently, and may do so in different ways depending on whether the experience is incidental or integral to the relationship in question.

In conclusion, the current research contributes to research literatures on trust, regulatory fit, and use of feelings as information through integrating and extending implications of each body of research to the others. We found that, especially when people do not yet know each other well, even a brief, initial experience of regulatory fit or nonfit can enhance or diminish subsequent judgments of trust as long as people can (implicitly) attribute feelings from that experience to thoughts about trusting the other person. The duration of this manipulation was short and the likely duration of its effects was also short. However, incidental regulatory-fit effects on judgments of trust could have cumulative effects on trust and relationship development. We look forward to future research that explores these and other possibilities.

References

Avnet, T., & Higgins, E. T. (2003). Locomotion, assessment, and regulatory fit: Value transfer from "how" to "what." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 39*, 525-530.

Bianco, A. T., Higgins, E. T., & Klem, A. (2003). How "fun/importance" fit impacts performance: Relating implicit theories to instructions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29,* 1091-1103.

Camacho, C. J., Higgins, E. T., & Luger, L. (2003). Moral value transfer from regulatory fit: What feels right *is* right and what feels wrong *is* wrong. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 498-510.

Cesario, J., Grant, H., & Higgins, E. T. (2004). Regulatory fit and persuasion: Transfer from "feeling right." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 86,* 388-404.

Cesario, J., & Higgins, E. T. (2008). Making message recipients "feel right": How nonverbal cues can increase persuasion. *Psychological Science, 19*, 415-420.

Clore, G. L. (1992). Cognitive phenomenology: Feelings and the construction of judgment. In L. L. Martin & A. Tesser (Eds.), *The construction of social judgment* (pp. 133-163). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Dunn, J. R., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2005). Feeling and believing: The influence of emotion on trust. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88,* 736-748.

Forgas, J. P. (1995). Emotion in social judgments: Review and a new affect infusion model (AIM). *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 39-66.

Forgas, J. P. (2001). The affect infusion model (AIM): An integrative theory of mood effects on cognition and judgment. In L. L. Martin & G. L. Clore (Eds.), *Theories of mood and cognition: A user's guidebook* (pp. 99-134). Mahwah, NJ: Elbaum.

Forster, J., Higgins, E. T., & Idson, L. C. (1998). Approach and avoidance strength during goal attainment: Regulatory focus and the "goal looms larger" effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*, 1115-1131.

Freitas, A. L., & Higgins, E. T. (2002). Enjoying goal-directed action: The role of regulatory fit. *Psychological Science, 13*, 1-6.

Freitas, A. L., Liberman, N., & Higgins, E. T. (2002). Regulatory fit and resisting temptation during goal pursuit. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 38*, 291-298.

Gambetta, D. (1988). Can we trust trust? In D. Gambetta (Ed.), *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations* (pp. 213-238). New York: Basil Blackwell.

Higgins, E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. *American Psychologist, 52*, 1280-1300.

Higgins, E. T. (1998). The aboutness principle: A pervasive influence on human inference. *Social Cognition, 16*, 173-198.

Higgins, E. T. (2000). Making a good decision: Value from fit. *American Psychologist, 55*, 1217-1230.

Higgins, E. T. (2005). Value from regulatory fit. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*, 209-213.

Higgins, E. T. (2006). Value from hedonic experience *and* engagement. *Psychological Review, 113*, 439-460.

Higgins, E. T., Idson, L. C., Freitas, A. L., Spiegel, S., & Molden, D. C. (2003). Transfer of value from fit. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*, 1140-1153.

Holmes, J. G., & Rempel, J. K. (1989). Trust in close relationships. In G. Hendrick (Ed.), *Close relationships* (pp. 187-220). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hong, J., & Lee, A. Y. (2008). Be fit and be strong: Mastering self-regulation through regulatory fit. *Journal of Consumer Research, 34*, 682-695.

Johnson-George, C. & Swap, W. C. (1982). Measurement of specific interpersonal trust: Construction and validation of a scale to assess trust in a specific other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 43*, 1306-1317.

Kramer, R. M. (1999). Trust and distrust in organizations: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions. *Annual Review of Psychology, 50*, 569-598.

Martin, L. L., Ward, D. W., Achee, J. W., & Wyer, R. S. (1993). Mood as input: People have to interpret the motivational implications of their moods. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64*, 317-326.

Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review, 20*, 709-734.

McFarland, C., White, K., & Newth, S. (2003). Mood acknowledgement and correction for the mood-congruency bias in social judgment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 39*, 483-491.

Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., & Collins, N. L. (2006). Optimizing assurance: The risk regulation system in relationships. *Psychological Bulletin, 132*, 641-666.

Murray, S. L., Derrick, J. L., Leder, S., & Holmes, J. G. (2008). Balancing connectedness and self-protection goals in close relationships: A levels-of-processing perspective on risk regulation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 429-459.

Nisbett, R. E., & Wilson, T. D. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review, 84*, 231-259.

Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Academy of Management Review, 23*, 393-404.

Rusbult, C., & Righetti, F. (February, 2008). Interpersonal regulatory fit and the Michelangelo phenomenon. Symposium presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Albuquerque, NM.

Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. (1983). Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 513-523.

Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (2007). Feelings and phenomenal experiences. In A. W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (2nd ed., pp. 385-407). New York: Guilford.

Schwarz, N. & Vaughn, L. A. (2002). The availability heuristic revisited: Ease of recall and content of recall as distinct sources of information. In T. Gilovich, D. Griffin, & D. Kahneman (Eds.), *Current perspectives on judgment under uncertainty* (2nd ed, pp. 103-119). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Shah, J., Higgins, E. T., & Friedman, R. S. (1998). Performance incentives and means: How regulatory focus influences goal attainment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*, 285-293.

Simpson, J. A. (2007). Foundations of interpersonal trust. In A. W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (2nd ed., pp. 587-607). New York: Guilford.

Spiegel, S., Grant-Pillow, H., & Higgins, E. T. (2004). How regulatory fit enhances motivational strength during goal pursuit. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 34*, 39-54.

Vaughn, L. A., Baumann, J., & Klemann, C. (2008). Openness to Experience and regulatory focus: Evidence of motivation from fit. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42,* 886-894.

Vaughn, L. A., Hesse, S. J., Petkova, Z., & Trudeau, L. (in press). "This story is right on": The impact of regulatory fit on narrative engagement and persuasion. *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

Vaughn, L. A., Malik, J., Schwartz, S., Petkova, Z., & Trudeau, L. (2006). Regulatory fit as input for stop rules. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 91,* 601-611.

Vaughn, L. A., O'Rourke, T., Schwartz, S., Malik, J., Petkova, Z., & Trudeau, L. (2006). When two wrongs can make a right: Regulatory nonfit, bias, and correction of judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 42,* 654-661.

Vaughn, L. A., & Weary, G. (2003). Causal uncertainty and correction of judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 39,* 516-524.

Weigel, D., & Murray, C. (2000). The paradox of stability and change in relationships: What does chaos theory offer for the study of relationships? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17,* 425-449.

Williamson, O. E. (1993). Calculativeness, trust, and economic organization. *Journal of Law and Economics, 36,* 453-486.

Author Note

Leigh Ann Vaughn, Audrey R. Harkness, and Emily K. Clark, Department of Psychology, Ithaca College. We thank Melissa Ball, Ellen Gagne, Tanesia Harris, Shamika Jackson, Elizabeth June, Rebecca Meltzer Lyon, Melahat Ozses, Rebecca Ramirez, Lisa Schlessinger, and Gregory Spirer for help with materials development, data collection, and posters about this research. We also thank John Luginsland and two anonymous reviewers for feedback about an earlier version of the manuscript.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Leigh Ann Vaughn, Department of Psychology, 1119 Williams Hall, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY, 14850-7290. E-mail may be sent to lvaughn@ithaca.edu.

Footnotes

[1] Exactly how often this process affects judgments of trust in everyday life is a question the current research was not designed to resolve. Indeed, we doubt that a diary study - if attempted - would provide much reliable information about the processes by which feelings may affect judgments of trust. Although people appear to be very good at reporting the products of their mental information-processing systems, they appear not to have much introspective access to the ways in which they actually arrive at their judgments (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Future researchers who wish to document the exact frequency of this – or any other –social judgment process in everyday life would do well to bear in mind research suggesting the likelihood of actually being able to accomplish this goal (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

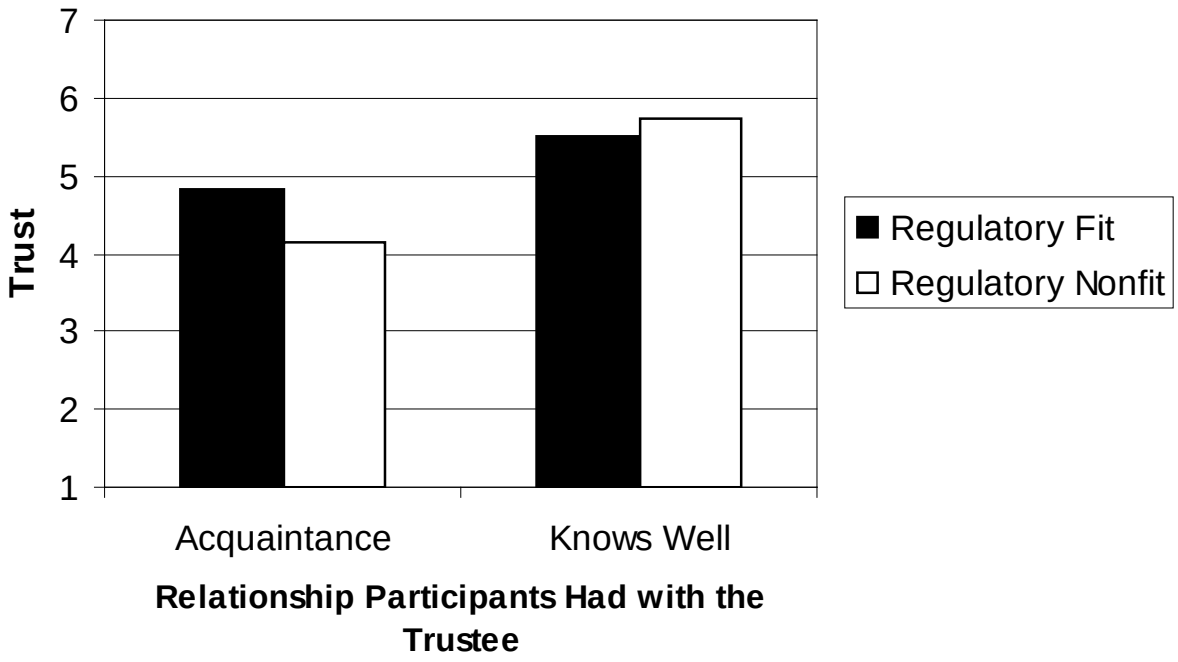
[2] Results were almost identical when we included the five participants in the *knows well* condition who reported strong romantic interest in the person they named. For example, there were no significant gender effects. Additionally, although the *knows well* and *acquaintance* groups differed significantly in reported romantic interest in the target (M = 1.73, SD = 1.81, versus M = 1.14, SD = 0.53; with equal variances not assumed, $t(54.87) = -2.17$, $p = .03$, d = 0.45), there were almost identical differences in knowledge of the target ($t(96) = -17.02$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.44$) and liking of the target ($t(96) = -6.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.31$). Moreover, a Regulatory Focus of Goals X Regulatory Fit X Relationship ANOVA with trust as the dependent variable revealed the same relationship main effect, $F(1, 90) = 33.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.14$; and the same interaction effect $F(1, 90) = 6.16$, $p = .02$; no other effects were significant, ps > .18. Among participants in the *acquaintance* conditions, those who experienced regulatory fit reported more trust (M = 4.83, SD = 0.94) than those who experienced regulatory nonfit (M = 4.15, SD = 0.91); $t(48) = -2.58$, $p = .01$, $d = 0.73$. Among participants in the *knows well* conditions, the regulatory

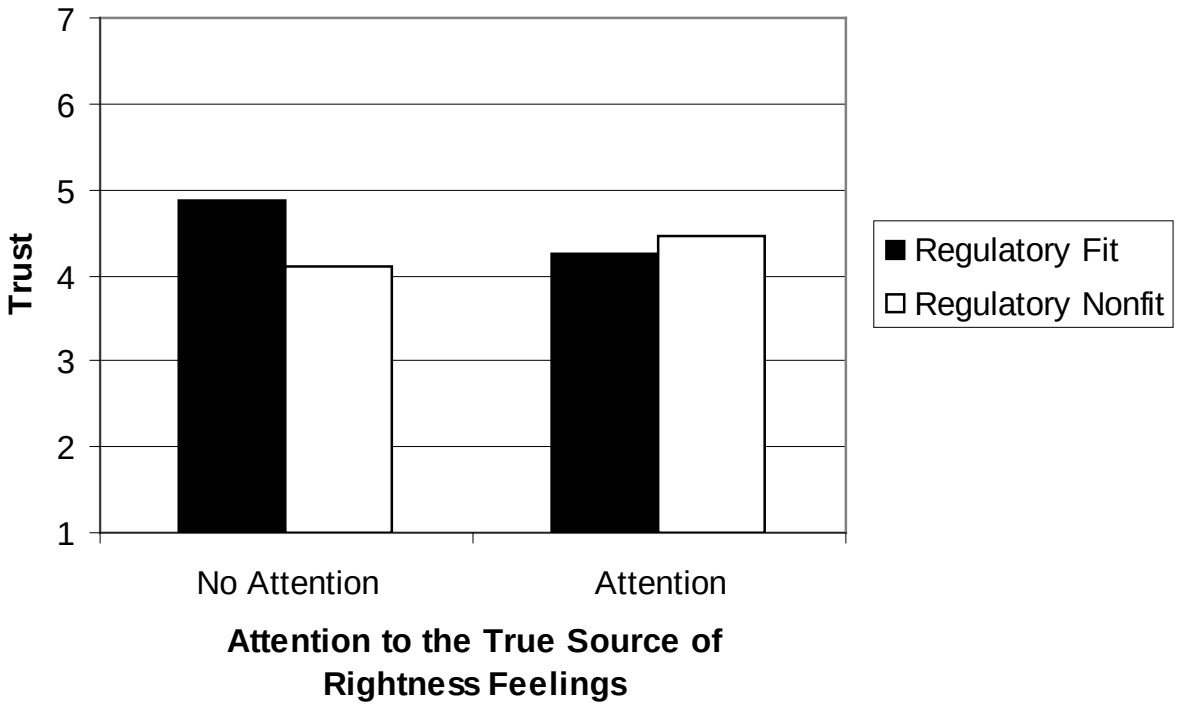
fit effect was much weaker; trust did not differ significantly between those who experienced regulatory fit (M = 5.53, SD = 1.23) and those who experienced regulatory nonfit (M = 5.93, SD = 1.08); $t(46) = 1.18$, $p = .24$, $d = 0.34$.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Trust as a function of regulatory fit condition and relationship with the trustee, Experiment 1.

Figure 2. Trust as a function of regulatory fit condition and attention condition, Experiment 2.


7
6
5
4
3
2
1
Trust
Regulatory Fit
Regulatory Nonfit
Acquaintance
Knows Well
Relationship Participants Had with the Trustee


7
6
5
4
3
2
1
Trust
No Attention
Attention
Attention to the True Source of Rightness Feelings
Regulatory Fit
Regulatory Nonfit