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Locomotion and assessment: self-regulation and subjective well-being

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Abstract

Kruglanski et al. (2000) demonstrated that active engagement of two self-regulatory modes, locomotion and assessment, was optimal for performance in the achievement context. However, much is unclear about the relationship between these two self-regulatory modes and subjective well-being. The present study ($N = 143$) tested for possible interaction effects of the two modes on depressive moods and life satisfaction. Results suggested that high involvement of both modes was not associated with subjective well-being. Instead, individuals who were high in locomotion but low in assessment appeared the most adjusted. This suggested that the interactive effects of the two self-regulatory modes differed in implications across performance- and affective-related outcomes.

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1. Introduction

A recent theory of self-regulation (Kruglanski et al., 2000) proposes that two distinct self-regulatory modes, locomotion and assessment, underlie most goal-directed activity. According to Kruglanski and colleagues, locomotion refers to the commitment of one's personal resources to initiate and maintain any goal-directed activity, moving actively from state to state, often overcoming possible distractions and difficulties in the process. Assessment, on the other hand,

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forms the evaluative part of self-regulation concerned with comparing relative quality of entities or states (i.e., goals or means) with alternatives. Hence, self-regulation comprises of comparing and selecting among alternative desired end-states and the means of achieving these end-states, as well as maintaining movement from current states to desired states. Kruglanski et al. further suggest that stemming from the independence of these two self-regulatory modes, it is possible that some individuals are high on both locomotion and assessment, or low on both, or high on one and low on the other. Interestingly, they propose that for optimal self-regulation to occur, one should be high on both locomotion and assessment. Individuals who are high in both self-regulatory modes appear to engage in a constant focus of self-evaluation, at the same time committing psychological resources to maintain goal-direct behavior, in order to reduce discrepancies between present states and desired end-states to achieve desired goals and performance. Kruglanski et al.'s claim was supported in two studies where students high on both self-regulatory modes were more likely to achieve higher grade point averages (study 7) and soldiers high on both modes were more likely to complete an elite military course successfully (study 8); than those who scored high on only one or on neither mode. In sum, it appears that optimal performance is the likely outcome when individuals are high on both locomotion and assessment dimensions, but not the other combinations.

As far as we can ascertain, not much is known about possible interactive effects of locomotion and assessment on subjective well-being, and no research has been done to address this issue. As locomotion involves a forward sense of progress toward one's objectives, high locomotors tend to be characterized by positive affect, higher self-esteem, optimism, and less depression (Kruglanski et al., 2000; study 5). Conversely, assessment presents a focus in self-evaluation, and such evaluations may serve to draw attention to the discrepancies between one's actual state and the desired state (Higgins, 1987). As a result, high assessors may be more prone to negative affect, lower self-esteem and optimism, and higher depression (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997; Kruglanski et al., 2000; study 5). How these seemingly contradictory affective states will be manifested if both (or either one, or neither) modes of self-regulation within an individual are dominant is still unknown. It is likely that the pattern of interaction, if any, will be different for what is obtained when the criterion is performance related.

In this present study, we explore possible interactive effects of locomotion and assessment on indexes of subjective well-being, namely depression and life satisfaction. Consistent with theories of self-focused attention (e.g., Ingram, 1990; Mor & Winquist, 2002), high assessors, being attentive to self-discrepancies, were found to exhibit greater levels of negative affect including depression (Kruglanski et al., 2000; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987). Carver and Scheier (1998) further proposed that individuals experience negative affect not only through the assessment of discrepancy between their current and desired selves but also the rate of progress toward reducing this discrepancy. Hence, we postulate that high assessors lacking in locomotion may experience more pronounced depressive moods, because while focused on their deficiencies, they are also handicapped to do anything about these deficiencies or progress toward addressing them is slow. The other combinations of locomotion and assessment are unlikely to contribute to depressive moods. For example, low locomotors who are also low assessors may not experience many depressive moods because though they may not be progressing, the lack of critical self-evaluation may minimize highlighting the deficiencies and thus buffer such individuals against depressive moods.

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