




Fear, Anxiety, and Construal Level:

Does Anxiety Expand Scope?

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Why anxiety and fear?

Joseph LeDoux (2016):

”Humans are anxiety-machines [...]

One of our greatest talents is the ability to anticipate the future.

Anxiety is the price we pay for that ability [...] Because that’s what anxiety is, an imagination of a future that hasn’t happened but that you are worried about.”



Photo by Engin Akyurt (Unsplash)

Why anxiety and fear?

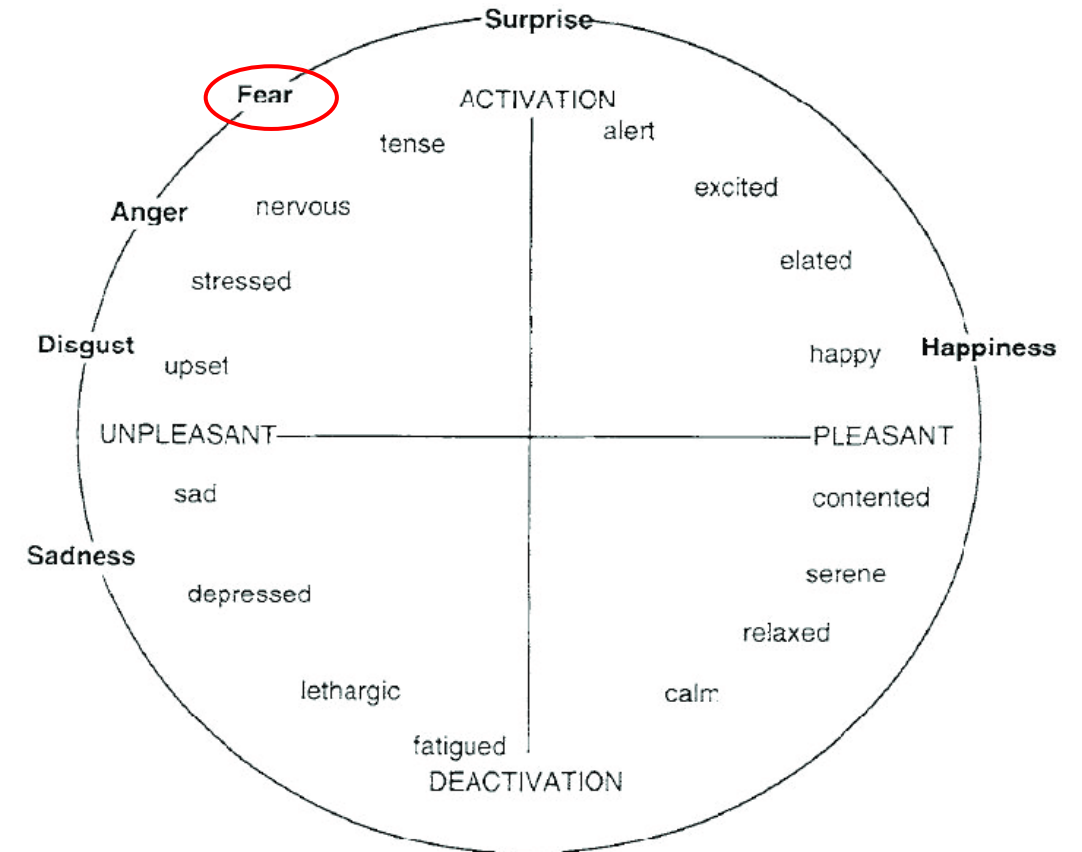
- Interest across multiple domains:
 - organizational behavior
(e.g., Kiewitz et al., 2016; Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Lebel, 2016, 2017).
 - judgment and decision making
(e.g., Kligyte et al., 2013; Lee & Andrade, 2015; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Maner & Gerend, 2007; Tiedens & Linton, 2001).
- Decreases risk taking and optimism
(Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Wake et al., 2020).
- Loss aversion (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).



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Fear = Anxiety?

- Fear and anxiety typically treated as interchangeable constructs.
- Both are negative and high in arousal.
- Share the underlying appraisals of uncertainty and control (Lerner & Keltner, 2001).



Fear ≠ Anxiety (Öhman, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2010, 2021)

- Fear → immediate and identifiable threat.
- Anxiety → distant and ambiguous threat.



Photo by Paolo Nicoletto (Unsplash)

Connections with distance and abstraction

- Sadness shifts to anxiety over temporal and spatial distance (Doré et al., 2015).
- Abstract processing reduces fear (Bornstein et al., 2020) but increases anxiety (Doré et al., 2015).



Photo by Alice Hampson (Unsplash)

Connections with distance and abstraction

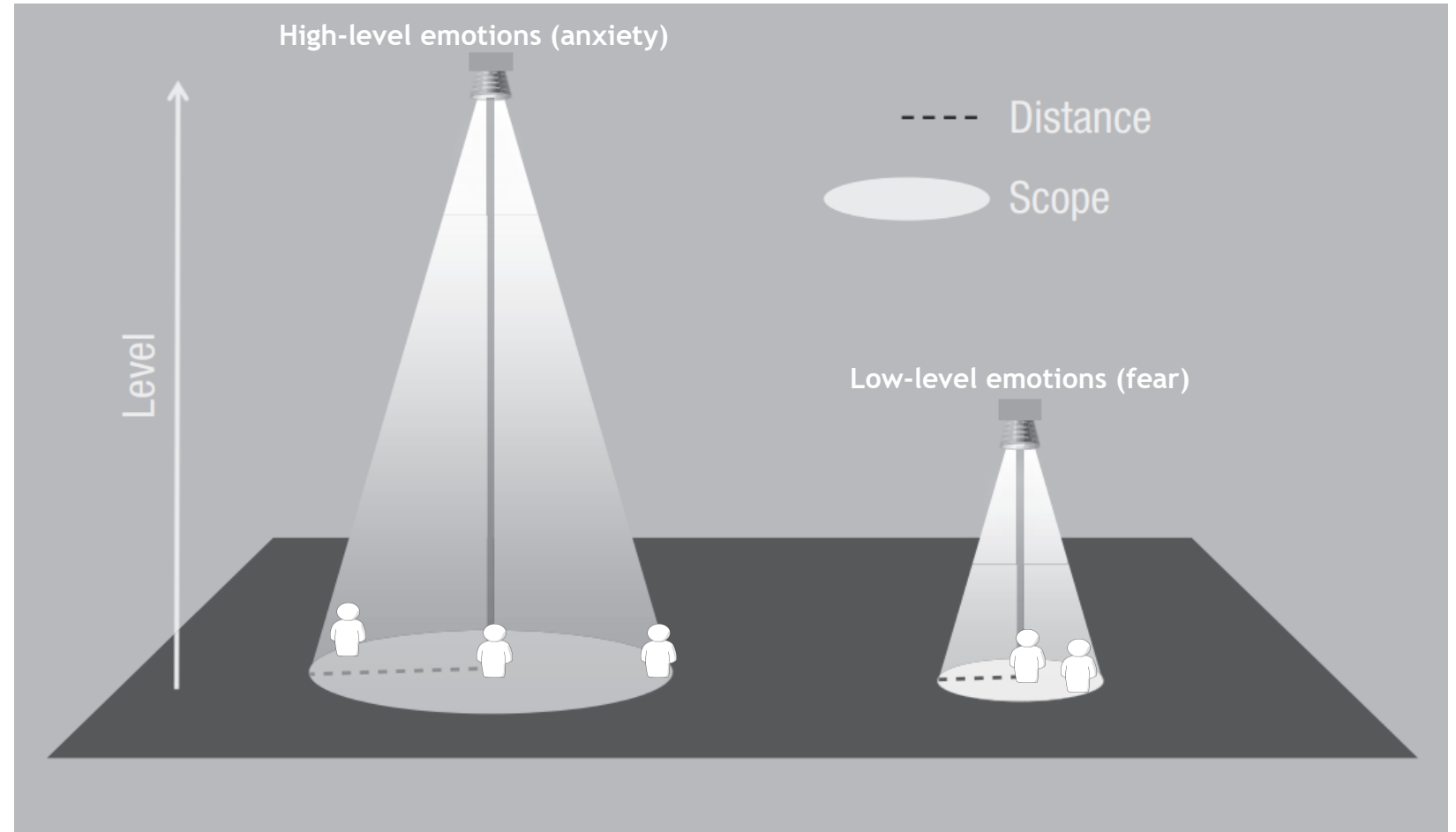
- Common assumption is that psychological distance reduces the intensity of emotions (e.g., van Boven et al., 2010).
- However, some emotions necessitate distancing.
- Psychological distance reduces the intensity of “low-level” emotions but increases the intensity of “high-level emotions” (Agerström et al., 2012; Katzir & Eyal, 2013; Trope & Liberman, 2010).



Photo by Alice Hampson (Unsplash)

Scope of threat

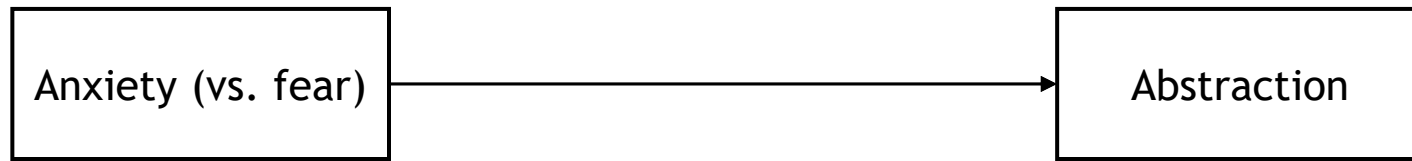
“Whereas fear will elicit reactions to dangers nearby, anxiety will elicit reactions to dangers farther away. By extension, fear should also promote a stronger orientation toward the near future and events that are probable, whereas anxiety should promote a stronger orientation toward the distant future and events that are more hypothetical.” (Trope et al., 2021, p. 213)



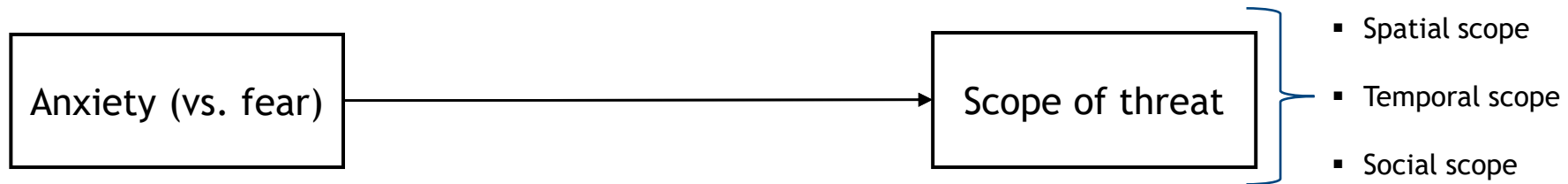
Adapted from Trope et al. (2021)

Proposed study

1



2



Anxiety → abstraction?

Although most of the time people feel safe, sometimes they may experience fear **[anxiety]**. People experience fear **[anxiety]** when they are exposed to a threat is clear **[unclear]** and visible **[not visible]**. For example, a physical injury, an encounter with a scary animal, a natural disaster, violence, or a dangerous medical procedure **[apprehension of a future job interview, public presentation, or an exam]**.

Take a few moments to imagine an event that would
cause you to experience intense fear **[anxiety]**.

Anxiety → abstraction?

To what extent did you think about...

(concrete construal)

“the specific characteristics of the event—what exactly happened, how it happened, where it happened, what were the sights?”

(abstract construal)

“the broad meaning of the event and its long-term implications—why it happened, what were the implications of the event?”

- + coding of essays to measure the extent to which they focus on concrete vs abstract aspects of the event.

Adapted from Moran et al., (2019)

Anxiety → temporal scope?

How distant or close in time is the threat?

- Within the same day
- Between tomorrow and a week
- Between a week and a month
- Between a month and six months
- Between six months and a year
- Between a year and five years
- More than five year

Anxiety → social scope?

The threat may have caused you think about yourself and/or other people. How socially close or distant are they?

- Myself
- The person closest to me/significant other
- Close family/friends
- Distant family/friends
- Colleagues/Coworkers/Acquaintances
- People in my community
- Strangers

Anxiety → spatial scope?

How far away from your current location is the threat?

- My immediate location
- My neighborhood
- My town/city/state
- Other towns/cities/states
- My country
- Other countries
- The world

Anxiety → hypotheticality?

How likely versus unlikely is the threat that you reflected on?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Moderately likely
- Neutral
- Moderately unlikely
- Very unlikely
- Extremely unlikely

Thank you!

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