



When Being Sad Improves Memory Accuracy: The Role of Mood in Inadvertent Plagiarism

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Abstract

Inadvertent plagiarism was investigated in participants who had been induced into a happy or sad mood either before encoding or before retrieval of items generated in a puzzle task. Results indicate that participants in a sad mood made fewer memory errors in which they claimed as their own an idea generated by another source than did those in a happy mood. However, this effect occurred only when mood was induced before encoding.

Background

Mood and Memory

Negative mood has been shown to increase the accuracy of memory.¹ The *affect-as-information hypothesis*² maintains that individuals' moods provide them with information about how to interpret a given situation. Individuals in happy moods are more likely to rely on general knowledge structures that have been activated and to process information more globally whereas individuals in sad moods are more likely to focus on information specific to the situation at-hand. The item-specific focus of individuals in sad moods is thought to result in more accurate memory than that of individuals in happy moods.

Inadvertent Plagiarism

Inadvertent plagiarism represents a memory error that occurs when one claims as one's own an idea generated by someone else.³ In this way, it is a failure to accurately monitor source (i.e., who-said-what).^{4, 5}

References

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Method

Participants:

80 University of Virginia undergraduate students

Design:

2 (Mood Group: Happy vs. Sad) x 2 (Mood Induction: Before Encoding vs. Before Retrieval), between-participants

Sample Puzzle



Procedure:

Participants took turns with a computer player generating solutions to six Boggle-type puzzles⁶ in the Initial Generation (IG) phase. Then, in the Recall-Own task, participants recalled the solutions they had provided for each puzzle during Initial Generation.

Participants were induced into a happy or sad mood by writing about a happy or sad personal event for 10 minutes either before Initial Generation (Before Encoding conditions) or before Recall-Own (Before Retrieval conditions).

Response Types in Recall-Own Task

- Correct:** An item that the participant submitted during IG and claimed was his own.
- Partner-Plagiarism:** An item that the computer submitted during IG but that the participant claimed as his own.
- New Error:** An item that neither the computer nor the participant submitted during IG but that the participant claimed as his own.

Partner-Plagiarisms represent who-said-what errors.

Predictions

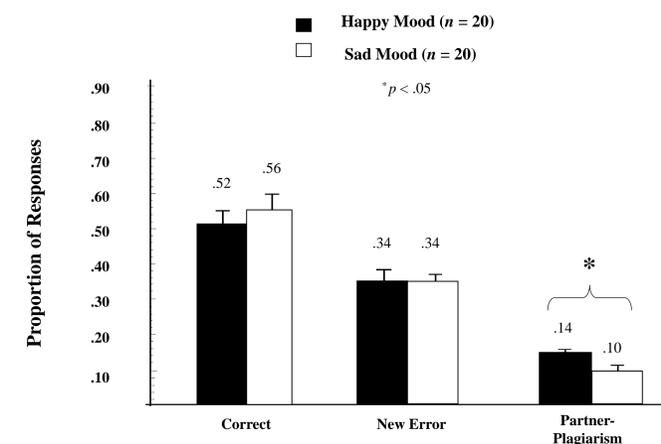
The *affect-as-information hypothesis* predicts that sad mood results in more local, item-specific processing than does happy mood, which should lead to fewer source monitoring errors for participants induced into sad mood. Therefore, partner-plagiarism errors in the Recall-Own task were expected to be lower for participants in the sad mood group than for those in the happy mood group.

Further, if mood affects the encoding processes involved in source monitoring, then mood should affect partner-plagiarism errors when mood is induced *before* Initial Generation but not when mood is induced *after* Initial Generation. By contrast, if mood affects retrieval processes, then mood should affect partner-plagiarism errors when mood is induced *after* Initial Generation but not when mood is induced *before* Initial Generation.

Results

As predicted by the *affect-as-information hypothesis*, compared to those in a happy mood, those in a sad mood showed a lower proportion of partner-plagiarism errors. However, this *only* occurred when mood was induced before encoding. Mood groups did not differ in their proportions of correct responses or new errors.

Before Encoding



Before Retrieval



Conclusions

Compared to happy mood, sad mood leads to a decrease in source memory errors when mood is induced before encoding, but not when mood is induced before retrieval. This is consistent with the notion that affect is used as information about how to interpret situations and that positive affect is taken as a cue to continue using currently available, global strategies.