Background

"Does the world look worse while we are in a bad mood?"

For decades, researchers have speculated about various ways in which mood influences our perceptions and judgments of others.

- **Mood-congruent effect**: assimilating effect of mood - the valence of the mood matches the valence of general attitudes toward targets.
- **Mood-incongruent effect** or attenuated mood-congruency: functional effect of mood - the valence of the mood mismatch the valence of general attitudes toward targets.

There are various theoretical accounts for the processes in which mood congruency and mood-incongruency occur.

- **Mood-as-priming account** (Bower, 1981): affects states prime valence congruent memories and thoughts by facilitating the speed of encoding, the likelihood of retrieval, and the selection of affectively congruent stimuli.
- **Mood-as-information account** (Schwarz & Clore, 1983): affective states are used as information to interpret the world when states are not explained away and the situation requires explanations.
- **Cognitive tuning account** (Schwarz, 1990): affects states signal the state of the environment and adjust information processing style. Negative mood signals a "problematic" situation, fostering an analytic, bottom-up processing style with attention to details. Positive mood signals "benign" situation, allowing less effortful, top-down processing style with exploration of novel/risky options for action.
- **Social tuning account** (Lambert, Khan, Lickel, & Fricker, 1997): Sad moods increase sensitivity to adverse social consequences, preventing socially undesirable judgments and actions.
- **Mood-repair account** (Isem, 1987): People self-regulate their mood. Negative mood states direct one's attention to positive information and away from negative information in order to better one's mood.

- **Affect infusion Model** (Forgas, 1995) affect infusion (i.e., mood congruency) is more likely when judgments are open and require substantive processing of the information such as selection and integration of novel information about the target, in contrast to when judgments are heuristic (retrieving existing evaluations or stereotypes) or accompanied with a specific goal (e.g., accuracy concern).

Present meta-analysis examined moderators for mood-congruent effects and degrees to which their boundary conditions are compatible with these theoretical accounts.

Method

**Literature Search**

PsycInfo (1967-2011) with search terms: negative affect, negative mood, depressed mood, sadness, mood, or affect, and social judgment, stereotypes, judgments, or person perceptions. Backwards literature search and thorough review of reference lists of key reviews were also conducted.

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

- Must be a published experiment which manipulated sadness or negative mood as an 'incident' affect unrelated to the judgment targets.
- Must include a judgment of a person other than self as a dependent measure.
- Must not have had manipulated anger or irritation.

**Meta-analytic Sample**

96 independent samples across 55 independent studies were included, consisting of a total of 5,133 participants with the average sample size of 48.97 of which 61% were females and a median publication year of 1994.5.

**Effect Sizes**

- Cohen's $d = \bar{y}_x - \bar{y}_y$ (negative affect condition) - $\bar{y}_x$ (control condition: neutral or happy) $s$ (pooled estimate of standard deviation)
- The inverse variance weights were used to adjust parameter estimates

**Results**

An overall mood-congruent effect was observed (fixed: $d = 0.18, Z = 6.51, p < .0001, CI = 0.61 - 0.43$; random: $d = 0.19, Z = 3.26, p = .0011, CI = 0.68 - 0.30$).

**Discussion**

Mood congruent effects were attenuated when:

- Awareness of induced sadness was presumably high wherein the mood manipulation check was right before the social judgment, one pays an attention to the induced sadness, sadness was self-relevant and involved, and intensity of sadness was very high.

- Compatible with Mood-as-information account

- Information about judgment target(s) was presumably absent wherein the target description was lengthy.

- Compatible with Mood-as-information account

- X Incompatible with Affect Infusion Model

- Social desirability was likely a concern wherein the valence of judgment - affective was negative and the target was an individual rather than a social category.

- Compatible with Social Tuning account

- Sadness is self-relevant and judgment target(s) were positive (e.g., friendly).

- Compatible with Mood Repair account

**References**


