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Incongruent effects of sad mood on self-conception valence: it's a matter of time

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Abstract

A new hypothesis is proposed to account for the relation between sad mood and self-conception valence, the first, congruency; then, incongruency' hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, sad mood initially influences the valence of open-ended self-descriptions in a mood-congruent fashion, but after a short period of time self-descriptions become mood-incongruent. Subjects were placed into a sad, neutral, or happy mood state, and were subsequently asked to freely describe themselves in writing. The results were consistent with the hypothesis. Sad mood affected the valence of the first half of self-descriptions in a congruent manner, but affected the valence of the second half of self-descriptions in an incongruent manner. That is, with the passage of time sad mood led to increasingly positive self-descriptions (i.e. equally positive as neutral mood did). Implications of the findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Self-perception processes occur often times under the influence of mood states. How do mood states affect the ways in which people judge, remember, or describe them-selves? More specifically, how does *sad* (as opposed to neutral and happy) mood affect the valence (i.e. negativity–positivity) of judged, remembered, or described self-conceptions? Two broad empirical generalizations offer some guidance to this question; the mood congruency hypothesis and the mood incongruency hypothesis.

The mood congruency hypothesis

According to the mood-congruency hypothesis, sad mood colours self-conceptions negatively. A mood congruency effect is predicted by several theoretical models.

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These models differ in terms of the postulated mechanism through which the mood congruency effect is obtained. The models can be classified broadly as cognitive or motivational. The most well-known and empirically supported'" *cognitive* models are the mood-priming or network models (Bower, 1981, 1991; Clark and Isen, 1982; Isen 1984). According to these models, sad mood primes and thus renders accessible in memory self-relevant information that is valuatively congruent with the mood (i.e. negative). This information, in turn, forms the basis for subsequent (and similarly-valenced) retrieval or judgments of self-conceptions. *Motivational* models (Mischel, Coates and Raskoff, 1968; Mischel, Ebbesen and Zeiss, 1976) capitalize on the assumption that humans are motivated to maintain their current affective state. Mood induces a global sense of sadness that humans maintain through judging or retrieving self-conceptions in a valuatively congruent manner.

The mood incongruency hypothesis

The relation between mood and self-conception valence can also be stated in terms of the mood-incongruency hypothesis[3] (Clark and Isen, 1982; Forgas, 1991; Isen, 1984). This motivationally-oriented formulation proposes that people in a sad mood will attempt to exit their aversive mood state through regulatory strategies, such as positive thinking, self-reward, rationalization, or external distraction (Frijda, 1986; Morris and Reilly, 1987; Scheler, and Carver, 1982). These strategies will result in increased positivity of self-conceptions.

Mood effects on self-conception valence as a function of time delay: first, congruency; then incongruency

One potential weakness of tests of the mood congruency versus mood incongruency hypothesis (see Sedikides (1922a) for a review) is their lack of attention to time delay. Dependent measures (e.g. judgments of self-relevant attributes, expectancies about future own behaviour, autobiographical recall) are typically collected once, that is, immediately following the mood induction procedure. Alterations in self-conception valence are not typically examined as a function of time delay.

A serious consideration of the time delay factor invites new challenges to the form and empirical testing of the mood-congruency *vis-a-vis* mood-incongruency

' Other cognitive models propose that mood-congruency effects are either due to the information embedded in mood manipulations (rather than mood *per se)* acting as a prime (Riskind, 1983), or to subjects' compliant and conscious efforts to maintain and even boost their mood (Blaney, 1986). However, these models have not been empirically supported (Parrott, 1991).

s Two other models, the mood-as-information view (Schwarz and Clore, 1988) and the multiprocess model (Forgas, 1992), are not presented in depth here, because they are tangential to the purposes of this research. These models predict interactive effects of mood states and stimulus complexity, and thus presuppose manipulation of the complexity of the stimulus field, something that the reported research did not accomplish.

' Two other hypotheses, the mood repair and negative state relief (Carlson and Miller, 1987) hypotheses, make similar predictions with the mood-incongruency hypothesis. Nevertheless, the term mood incongruency was preferred. Whereas the mood repair and negative state relief hypotheses propose regulatory processes for the purpose of modifying the displeasing mood, the mood incongruency hypothesis proposes regulatory processes that aim at altering either the sad mood or the negativ e self-conceptions that predominate at the time (See section Mood effects on self-conception valence as a function of time delay: first congruency; then, Incongruency).

controversy. Imagine a case where subjects are induced into a sad mood state and are subsequently asked to openly describe themselves over a relatively extended time period. I propose that, in this case, sad mood is likely to exert initially congruent effects on self-description valence, followed by incongruent effects. This scenario will be labelled the `first, congruency; then, incongruency' hypothesis.

How could a `first, congruency; then, incongruency' scenario be accounted for? At least two explanations are plausible. One explanation asserts that sad mood primes negative self-conceptions, which figure in subjects' negative overt self-descriptions. However, with the passage of time, subjects become aware of a mood-induced bias in their self-descriptions, and engage in mood-regulation. Mood-regulation entails subjects attempting to terminate their unpleasant mood state and entering into a happier mood by `resetting' the evidential base on which the self-descriptions were based, leading to an increase in the positivity of self-descriptions. Alternatively, with the passage of time subjects may engage in self-regulation. The negative self-descriptions will reach a `critical mass', after which subjects become motivated to pursue a cognitive contrast strategy (reminiscent of Martin, 1986), namely to access self-descriptions that contrast the previously accessed ones. This strategy will be fuelled by the self-enhancement motive (Sedikides, 1993a; Taylor and Brown, 1988) and will result in a switch-over from negative to positive self-descriptions.

Another explanation of the `first, congruency; then, incongruency' scenario states that sad-mood subjects become overwhelmed and energy depleted due to the shocking effects of sad mood (Sedikides, 1992, p. 278) and are consequently unable in the short run to engage in cognitive strategies (e.g. mood regulation or self-regulation) that would alter their mood. Hence, their self-descriptions are inevitably at the mercy of the valuative influence of mood and thus mood congruent. However, as time goes by, subjects will overcome their initial shock, regain their energy, and manage to cope with the situation by becoming involved in either mood-management or self-regulatory strategies. The result will be increasingly positive self-descriptions.

In summary, the `first, congruency; then, incongruency' hypothesis proposes that sad-mood subjects will begin describing themselves in a mood-congruent manner, but will progressively describe themselves as positively as neutral-mood subjects do *(weak rendition* of the hypothesis) or even as happy-mood subjects do *(strong rendition* of the hypothesis). Thus, there will be more positive self-descriptions in the second half of subjects' protocols than in the first half. The `first, congruency; then, incongruency' hypothesis was tested in the present experiment.

PILOT STUDY

It is crucial for the purposes of this investigation to establish the time interval in which the induced mood states are maintained, so that a mood decay explanation of the obtained findings can be ruled out. This time interval should then be allotted to subjects for the self-description task. I conducted a pilot study to accomplish this objective.

The pilot study involved 48 University of Wisconsin introductory psychology students who participated in exchange for extra course credit. Subjects were first induced into a state of sad, neutral, or happy mood (for more details, see sections The mood induction task and Procedure). Next, subjects completed two assignments. Specifi-

cally, they were asked to locate the names of famous psychologists hidden in a letter matrix for 4 min, and to write down as many of the United States as possible for another 2 min. Half of the subjects filled out three 9-point mood-assessing scales (sad versus happy, depressed versus elated, gloomy versus content) upon completion of the first assignment (i.e. 4 min after the mood induction procedure), and the other half of the subjects filled out the three scales upon completion of the second assignment (i.e. 6 min after the mood induction procedure).

Mood was sustained for 4 min following its induction, $F(2,21) = 8.28$, $p < 0.002$. Orthogonal contrasts revealed that sad-mood subjects ($M = 4.54$) reported feeling significantly sadder than either neutral-mood subjects ($M = 5.92$), $p < 0.008$, or happy-mood subjects ($M = 6.38$), $p < 0.001$. Neutral-mood subjects reported feeling less happy than happy-mood subjects, but not significantly so, $p < 0.34$. Mood was also sustained for 6 min after its induction, $F(2,21) = 4.93$, $p < 0.018$. Orthogonal contrasts showed that sad-mood subjects ($M = 5.00$) reported feeling sadder than neutral-mood subjects ($M = 5.71$), although non-significantly so ($p < 0.15$), and sadder than happy-mood subjects ($M = 6.50$), $p < 0.005$. Neutral-mood subjects reported feeling less happy than happy-mood subjects, but not significantly so, $p < 0.11$. Moreover, the interaction between mood and time delay (4 min versus 6 min) was not significant, $F(2,42) = 0.50$, $p < 0.61$. The non-significance of the interaction is anticipated by the claim that mood was sustained for 6 min following its induction.

METHOD

Subjects and experimental design

Subjects were 180 University of Wisconsin undergraduates, who received extra introductory psychology credit for their participation. Subjects were run individually and assigned randomly to the experimental conditions. The experiment involved a 3 (mood: sad, neutral, happy) x2 (rating order: valence ratings first, importance ratings first) x2 (self-description order: self-description valence ratings for first half versus second half) mixed-design, with the last factor being within-subjects.

The mood induction task

The mood induction task involved a two-step guided imagery procedure. **In** each step, subjects were asked to imagine a sad, neutral, or happy event for 2 min, and then write about this event for 3 min. The sad events involved imagining a friend being burned in a fire and dying. The neutral events involved imagining a friend watching the evening news on television and riding a bus. Finally, the happy events involved imagining a friend winning a free cruise to the Carribbean islands and winning $1 000 000 in the state lottery. A common thread in all mood-inducing events was that attentional focus was both other-directed (thinking about another person rather than the self as the target of the event) and outward (thinking about another person's rather than one's own thoughts and feelings). (See Carlson and Miller (1987) for the relevant distinction.) This precaution was deemed necessary in light of findings that self-directed and inward attentional focus is likely to elicit sad mood in indivi-

duals possessing chronically negative self-conceptions (Sedikides, 1992b). The precaution reduced the possibility of confounding the effects of mood with the effects of the mood induction task *per se (i.e.* attentional focus on the self).

Procedure

The procedure was designed to disguise the relation between the mood induction task and the dependent measures, because awareness of this relation on the part of subjects can eliminate, diminish, or alter the effects of mood (e.g. Berkowitz and Troccolli, 1990; Strack, Schwarz and Gschneidinger, 1985). Two experimenters, a woman and a man, tested each subject. The experimenters were dressed in different clothing styles (former versus casual), and used booklets with differently coloured pages (green versus white). Experimenter A announced to subjects that the study was concerned with perception and proceeded to ask subjects a favour. Experimenter A introduced experimenter B as a student whose honours thesis was concerned with people's ability for imaginative thinking. Experimenter A asked subjects to donate `only a few minutes' to participating in experimenter **B's** study. All subjects agreed to participate. Experimenter **B's** study was actually the mood induction task. After mood was induced, subjects (a) rated the two-step imagination task for easiness of imagining (1 =extremely difficult to imagine, 9 =extremely easy to imagine), (b) indicated how they felt on three 9-point scales: sad–happy, depressed–elated, and gloomy–content (1 anchored `sad', `depressed', and `gloomy', whereas 9 anchored `happy', `elated' and `content'), and (c) rated the two-step imagination task for easiness of comprehension (1 =extremely difficult to comprehend, 9 =extremely easy to comprehend). Next, experimenter A took over, administered a booklet containing 40 blank half-pages, and asked subjects to `tell us about yourself'. Subjects were instructed to list any self-referential thoughts that crossed their mind, to place only one self-description per page, and not to turn back to previous pages. Subjects were allotted 6 min (a time interval that was decided on the basis of the pilot study) for the self-description task.

When the allotted 6 min expired, subjects were occupied with three unrelated assignments for 13 min. The assignments were finding the names of favour psychologists hidden in a letter matrix (5 min), writing down as many of the United States as possible (3 min), and listing the capitals of the 50 United States (5 min). The purpose of this battery of assignments was to increase the probability that the effects of mood be dissipated before the impending rating tasks. Next, subjects rated each self-description for valence (1 = extremely negative, 9 = extremely positive) and importance (1 = extremely unimportant, 9 = extremely important). Half of the subjects rated the self-descriptions for valence first, whereas the other half of subjects rated the self-descriptions for importance first. In order to encourage the independence of the rating tasks, subjects (1) rated the self-descriptions in separate booklets for valence versus importance, and (2) the two rating tasks were separated by 3 min of involvement in an unrelated assignment (locating the names of past United States presidents which were scattered in a matrix of letters). Next, subjects were verbally probed for suspicion. No subject suspected the relation between the mood induction task and self-description task. Finally, subjects read two pages of comics, were thoroughly debriefed, and offered a Hershey's chocolate kiss as a `thanks' gesture (which proved to be a fairly potent smile inducer).

RESULTS

Mood manipulation check

Subjects' responses to the three mood-assessing scales were highly intercorrelated (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77). Responses were subsequently averaged and entered in an analysis of variance (ANOVA), with mood as the only factor. The mood induction task was effective, $F(2, 177) = 47.02$, $p < 0.0001$. Orthogonal contrasts ($p < 0.0001$) indicated that subjects in the sad mood condition reported feeling sadder ($M = 4.32$) than subjects in the neutral mood condition ($M = 5.17$), who in turn reported feeling less happy than subjects in the happy mood condition ($M = 6.01$). Further-more, subjects found the three tasks equally easy to imagine, $F(2, 177) = 1.57$, $p < 0.21$, and comprehend, $F(2, 177) = 0.91$, $p < 0.41$.

Valence of self-descriptions

I formed two valence indices (pertaining to the two halves of self-descriptions) for each subject by dividing the sum of valence ratings by the number of self-descriptions. These indices were entered in an ANOVA involving mood and rating order as between-subjects factors, and self-description order as a within-subjects factor.

The `first, congruency; then, incongruency' formulation predicts a mood-congruency effect in the first half of subjects' self-descriptions, but a mood-incongruency effect in the second half. Before going any further, I will state the predictions of the mood-congruency and mood-incongruency hypotheses.

For the mood-congruency hypothesis to be supported, sad mood should elicit (1) significantly more negative self-description ratings than neutral mood, (2) significantly more negative self-description ratings than happy mood, and (3) significantly more negative self-description ratings than neutral and happy moods combined. Thus, sad mood was contrasted against (1) neutral mood, (2) happy mood, and (3) neutral/happy moods combined. On the other hand, for the mood-incongruency hypothesis to be supported, (1) sad mood should evoke at least equally valenced (if not more positive) self-description ratings as neutral mood, and (2) sad and happy moods combined should elicit more positive self-description ratings than neutral mood. Consequently, sad/happy moods combined were contrasted against neutral mood.

The first, congruency; then, incongruency' hypothesis is tested by the interaction between mood and self-description order. This interaction was significant, $F(2, 174) = 14.94$, $p < 0.0001$ (Figure 1). To evaluate the interaction, I conducted separate ANOVAs for each half. Mood-congruency effects were apparent in the first half of self-descriptions, mood main effect $F(2, 174) = 62.48$, $p < 0.0001$. Orthogonal contrasts showed that sad-mood subjects described themselves more negatively than either neutral-mood subjects, $p < 0.0001$, or happy-mood subjects, $p < 0.0001$. (Neutral-mood subjects described themselves less positively than happy-mood subjects, $p < 0.0001$.) In addition, sad-mood subjects described themselves more negatively than neutral-mood/happy-mood subjects combined, $p < 0.0001$. Finally, sad-mood/happy-mood subjects did not describe themselves more positively than neutral-mood subjects, $p < 0.84$, thus failing to support the mood-incongruency hypothesis.

Mood congruency effects were also evident in the second half of self-descriptions,

mood main effect $F(2, 174) = 19.31$, $p < 0.0001$. Specifically, sad-mood subjects described themselves more negatively than happy-mood subjects, $p < 0.0001$, and less positively than neutral-mood/happy-mood subjects combined, $p < 0.0001$. (Neutral-mood subjects described themselves less positively than happy-mood subjects, $p < 0.0001$.) However, mood-incongruency effects were *also* present. First, sad-mood subjects did not describe themselves more negatively than neutral-mood subjects, $p < 0.45$. Most importantly, sad-mood/happy-mood subjects described themselves more positively than neutral-mood subjects, $p < 0.016$. The above results are consis tent with the *weak rendition* of the `first, congruency; the

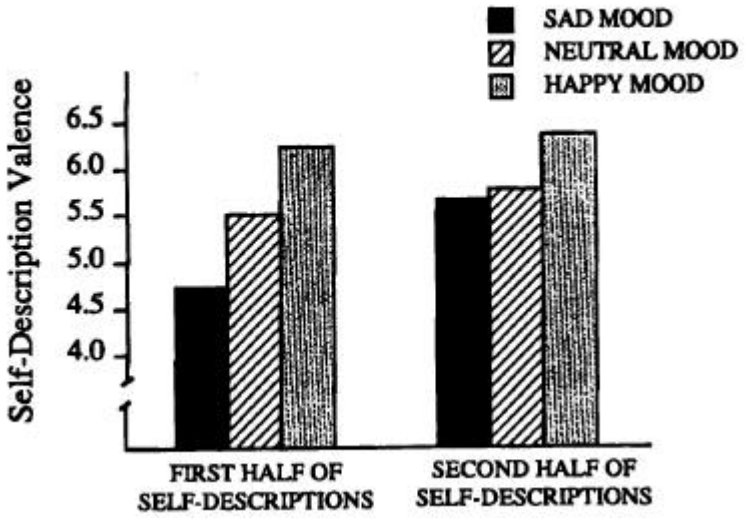

Figure 1. Effects of mood on the valence of self-descriptions: first half versus second half

The self-description order main effect was significant, $F(1, 174) = 48.46$, $p < 0.0001$, indicating that the positivity of self-descriptions was higher in the second half $(M = 5.93)$ compared to the first half $(M = 5.48)$. The mood main effect was also significant, $F(2, 174) = 58.42$, $p < 0.0001$, and consistent with a mood-congruency interpretation. Specifically, sad-mood subjects described themselves more negatively $(M = 5.19)$ than either neutral-mood subjects $(M = 5.63)$, $p < 0.0001$, or happy-mood subjects $(M = 6.30)$, $p < 0.0001$. (Neutral-mood subjects described themselves less positively than happy-mood subjects, $p < 0.0001$.) Sad-mood subjects described themselves more negatively than neutral-mood/happy-mood subjects combined, $p < 0.0001$. Finally, sad-mood/happy-mood subjects did not describe themselves more positively than neutral-mood subjects, $p < 0.22$.

Considering alternative hypothesis

The evidence for mood-incongruency in the second half of self-descriptions implies that sad-mood subjects became engaged in either mood-regulatory or self-regulatory

strategies (i.e. listing positive self-descriptions). However, an alternative explanation may also be plausible. I will refer to this as the *limited sets*[4] explanation. According to this explanation, people have only a limited set of negative, neutral, and positive self-conceptions. In the case of sad subjects, sad mood acted as a prime thus leading them to access and output negative self-conceptions. With the passage of time, how-ever, subjects depleted the limited set of negative self-conceptions and subsequently turned to neutral or positive ones.

The limited sets explanation has trouble accounting for the second-half findings pertaining to happy-mood and neutral-mood subjects. According to this explanation, happy-mood subjects would deplete their positive self-conceptions at some point during the self-description task and would then turn to neutral or negative ones. However, the self-conceptions of happy-mood subjects remained equally positive in the second half as they were in the first half. Similarly, the self-conceptions of neutral-mood subjects remained consistently neutral in both the first and second halves.

Another version of the limited sets explanation, the *limited negative set* explanation, advocates that the self-concept of most people (Taylor and Brown, 1988), and especially college students, is positive. Stated otherwise, the subjects' self-concept contains many more positive than negative self-conceptions. Thus, sad-mood subjects exhausted quickly their repertoire of negative self-conceptions (which was primed by mood) and subsequently turned to their neutral or positive ones. In contrast, happy-mood subjects had a relatively large supply of positive self-conceptions and output them consistently throughout the self-description task.

This version of the limited set hypothesis is logically controversial. Sad-mood subjects generated an average of 16 self-descriptions (see section Number of self-descriptions generated, below). As a rough approximation, the first eight self-descriptions were slightly negative (M = 4.71, see Figure 1), whereas the remaining self-descriptions were neutral or slightly positive (M = 5.66). So, this version of the limited set explanation would ascertain that subjects' *slightly* negative self-conceptions were limited to eight, a rather implausible assertion. People can arguably generate or *construct* more than eight slightly negative self-conceptions. Additionally, the limited negative set explanation fails to satisfactorily account for the consistently neutral self-descriptions of neutral-mood subjects; that is, this explanation would predict that the self-descriptions of neutral-mood subjects would turn positive after a while.

The `first, congruency; then, incongruency' formulation proposes the operation of motivational processes (i.e. mood-regulation or self-regulation), and correlational analyses are consistent with this proposal. The within-subjects correlation between valence and importance ratings was significant, $r(178) = 0.28$, $p < 0.0001$[5]. How-ever, between-subjects correlations manifested a revealing pattern. It was only under the influence of sad mood that the correlation between valence and importance ratings

[4] Judgmental latencies can also help distinguish between motivational and cognitive explanations (Forgas, 1991). For example, motivational processing would lead to a reduction in judgmental latencies, whereas cognitive processing would lead to an increase in judgmental latencies in the second half of self-descriptions.

[5] Consistently with this correlation, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVAs) on the valence ratings using importance ratings as the covariate yielded a mood main effect, $F(2, 173) = 52.94$, $p < 0.0001$. Also, the separate ANCOVAs for the first and second half of self-descriptions were significant: for the first half, $F(2, 173) = 61.20$, $p < 0.0001$; for the second half, $F(2, 173) = 17.72$, $p < 0.0001$.

was significant, $r(58) = 0.36$, $p < 0.005$ (for neutral mood, $r(58) = 0.18$, $p < 0.17$; for happy mood, $r(58) = 0.19$, $p < 0.15$). That is, only sad-mood subjects generated either negative *and* unimportant self-descriptions or positive *and* important self-descriptions.

Most interestingly, the above correlational pattern changed as a function of self-description order. With regard to the first half of self-descriptions, the correlations were not significant: for sad mood, $r(58) = -0.02$, $p < 0.86$; for neutral mood, $r(58) = -0.01$, $p < 0.91$; and for happy mood, $r(58) = 0.10$, $p < 0.47$. However, the picture was different with regard to the second-half correlations: for sad mood, $r(58) = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$; for neutral mood, $r(58) = 0.19$, $p < 0.14$; and for happy mood, $r(58) = 0.29$, $p < 0.026$. The *limited sets* and *limited negative set* hypotheses would have difficulty explaining why *both* sad-mood and happy-mood subjects accessed *both* positive and important (or negative and unimportant) self conceptions in the second half of the self-description task. In contrast, the motivationally-based `first, congruency; then, incongruency' formulation would postulate that sad-mood subjects managed their mood or countered their previously negative self-descriptions by reaffirming the positivity and importance of their self-conceptions, whereas happy-mood subjects maintained their mood by increasing the importance of their positive self-conceptions.

The between-subjects correlations examined separately for first versus second half refute two other versions of the limited sets explanation. One version states that sad-mood subjects gave their important negative self-conceptions early in the sequence, and were consequently left with unimportant negative and important positive self-conceptions for the second half. Another version states that neutral-mood and happy-mood subjects listed their important positive self-conceptions earlier in the sequence, whereas the important positive self-conceptions were delayed by the accessibility of negative thoughts as far as sad-mood subjects were concerned. The two versions are refuted by the finding that the correlation between valence and importance was not significant for the first half of *all subjects'* self-descriptions. Thus, on the balance of probabilities, the `first-congruency; then, incongruency' formulation appears to fit best the obtained results.

Importance of self-descriptions

Does mood affect the importance of self-descriptions? To explore this question I formed two importance indices for each half and each subject by dividing the sum of the importance ratings by the number of self-descriptions. I then entered these indices in an ANOVA involving mood and rating order as between-subjects factors, and self-description order as a within-subjects factor.

The mood main effect was significant, $F(2, 174) = 3.21$, $p < 0.043$. Tukey HSD tests revealed that sad-mood subjects rated their self-descriptions as marginally less important $(M = 5.59)$ than either neutral-mood subjects $(M = 5.77)$, $p < 0.07$, or happy-mood subjects $(M = 5.76)$, $p < 0.075$. Neutral-mood subjects rated their self-descriptions as equally important as happy-mood subjects, $p < 0.99$.

However, this pattern of results did not hold when valence ratings were covaried out in an ANCOVA, mood main effect $F(2, 173) = 1.32$, $p < 0.27$. Further, the interaction involving mood and self-description order was not significant, $F(2, 174) = 0.93$, $p < 0.40$. The interaction failed to reach significance even after covarying

out valence ratings, $F(2, 173) = 1.14$, $p < 0.32$. Mood did not appear to have influenced the importance of self-descriptions independently of valence.

Number of self-descriptions generated

Did mood affect the number of self-descriptions generated? The mood main effect was significant, $F(2, 177) = 8.14$, $p < 0.0001$. Tukey HSD tests indicated that sad-mood subjects generated more self-descriptions ($M = 16.10$) than either neutral-mood subjects ($M = 14.05$), $p < 0.0001$, or happy-mood subjects ($M = 14.90$), $p < 0.049$. The self-descriptions neutral-mood subjects generated did not significantly differ from the self-descriptions that happy-mood subjects generated, $p < 0.22$. These results are consistent with recent findings indicating that sad mood (but not neutral or happy mood) induces self-focused attention (Sedikides, 1992c; Wood, Saltzberg and Goldsamt, 1990; for a different view, see Salovey, 1992).

DISCUSSION

Most of past research examining the consequences of sad mood on the valence of autobiographical recall has found mood-congruency effects (e.g. Berkowitz, 1987, Experiment 2; Bower, 1981, Experiments 1 and 2; Bullington, 1990; Mathews and Bradley, 1983; Natale and Hantas, 1982; Salovey and Singer, 1989, Experiments 2 and 3; Snyder and White, 1982, Experiment 1; Teasdale, Taylor and Fogarty, 1981). The present investigation is both consistent and inconsistent with past findings. It is consistent because it obtained quite powerful mood-congruency effects. It is inconsistent, because it obtained mood-incongruency effects in the midst of mood-congruency. Whether sad mood affects self-conception valence in a congruent or incongruent manner is a matter of time: initially accessed self-conceptions are coloured in a mood-congruent fashion, but subsequent self-conceptions tend to be coloured in a mood-incongruent fashion.

Why did this investigation produce mood-incongruency effects? This investigation differs from past research in at least two ways. First, the investigation examined the valence of the second half of self-conceptions separately from the first half. It is likely that mood incongruency effects were present in the second half of self-conceptions with regard to past research, but these effects were obscured due to collapsing across the two halves. Second, the investigation was concerned with open-ended descriptions of the self rather than autobiographical recall. Open-ended self-descriptions tap aspects of the present self, whereas autobiographical recall taps aspects of the past self. Thus, mood may affect the present self quite differently than the past self. This raises the possibility that the present self is represented in memory differently than the past self, a possibility that is worthy of empirical scrutiny.

In fact, the latter possibility may explain in part the discrepancy between the present results and results obtained by Parrott and Sabini (1990, Experiments 3 and 4). Subjects in these experiments reported autobiographical memories, with the first memory being mood-incongruent. At the same time, though, the Parrott and Sabini experiments differed in several additional respects form the current investigation. That is, their experiments assessed three memories (instead of open-ended

self-descriptions provided in 6 min), induced mood through a music induction task (instead of a guided imagery task), used unipolar (instead of bipolar) scales to measure self-conception valence, and did not include neutral mood. Future research ought to consider these differences in an effort to reconcile the discrepant results.

The findings of the current investigation are seemingly at odds with findings reported by Sedikides (1993). In that article, I obtained mood congruency effects for peripheral self-conceptions, but *no* mood effects whatsoever for central self-conceptions. However, in the present investigation mood affected the valence of important self-conceptions as much as it affected the valence of unimportant self-conceptions. How can this inconsistency be resolved? First, I (Sedikides, 1993) operationalized centrality in terms of *both* high personal importance and high self-descriptiveness. The present experiment was not concerned with the degree of self-descriptiveness of self-conceptions. Second, subjects in the present experiment generated self-conceptions that were relatively low in importance. Thus, the present experimental procedures appear to have evoked mostly peripheral self-conceptions.

How exactly does sad mood impact on self-conception valence? In the Introduction of this article, I stated two forms of the `first, congruency; then, incongruency'. The first form proposed an initial mood-priming effect, followed by regulatory strategies. The second form proposed an initial mood `shock' effect, also followed by regulatory strategies. Exploring the plausibility of these two forms should be a priority issue for future research. Additionally, what is the nature of the obtained mood-incongruency effects? Two processes were discussed: mood-regulation and self-regulation. Examination of the relative impact of each process or clarification of the circumstances under which each is most likely to operate also deserves to be in the agenda of researchers in this area.

In conclusion, this investigation's support for the weak rendition of the `first, congruency; then, incongruency' hypothesis (i.e. sad mood leads to an increase in the positivity of the second-half of self-descriptions) poses additional constraints on previously reported omnipresent mood-congruency effects on self-conception valence (Sedikides, 1992a). Mood-congruency effects may not be as general as previously thought.

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