

Sample Reaction Paper

All of the readings this week deal with emotions and their influence on our perceptions and judgments. Even though I've been interested in emotional research for awhile, this is the first time that I've had an opportunity to read empirical studies that examine the phenomenon. The Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Susser article was particularly interesting because it combined emotional theories with stereotypic judgments, another topic that I am inherently interested in. The article was also a great example of the methodological process and theory development and testing, something we have been focusing on all semester in class.

Based on Macrae's stereotype rebound article that we read, I was thinking that stereotype suppression might be an alternate explanation for Bodenhausen's findings. Bodenhausen et al. showed that happy individuals made more stereotypical judgments than neutral mood individuals. Experiment 2 showed that these stereotypical judgments occurred even when the happy participants were not cognitively distracted. Perhaps the feeling of happiness suppresses all other negative thoughts, including stereotyping. Our neutral emotion state is one in which we are aware of both our negative and positive thoughts. A state of happiness suppresses negative thoughts, including stereotyping and elevates our mood. When negative thoughts are brought back into our consciousness, like being asked to make a judgment call, then these thoughts are more negative than usual. This is evidence by the fact that Bodenhausen et al.'s participants in a happy mood rated stereotyped targets more negatively than the non-stereotyped targets. This was not seen in the neutral group because their negative thoughts had not been suppressed via a feeling of happiness. Therefore their negative judgments did not rebound and subsequently the stereotyped and non-stereotyped individuals were rated equally. Experiment 4 can also be

explained along this line of logic. Participants who were held accountable for their judgments were less stereotypic than those who were not accountable in the happy condition. The fact that participants were going to be held accountable made their processing conscious and more effortful. They may have become aware of their rebound effect and tempered their judgments. If Macrae's participants would have been told that they were going to have to explain their paragraphs about the skinhead or explain why they chose to sit in the seat they did, I'm sure their stereotypic reactions would have been tempered as well.

I was also intrigued by the Sinclair, Mark, & Clore article and how it related to Bodenhausen et al. Both articles demonstrated how participants in happy moods rely on automatic processes or mental heuristics when interpreting information or making a judgment. Sinclair et al. demonstrated how happy people are influenced the same by strong and weak persuasive arguments. However, unhappy people engage in more effortful processing and therefore more influenced by stronger arguments and discount weaker ones. Unlike Bodenhausen et al., Sinclair et al. showed that when participants are aware of the cause of their mood, the effects of mood disappear and the argument quality affects attitude. It would be interesting to take this paradigm and apply it to a stereotype judgment situation like in Bodenhausen et al. What if Bodenhausen's participants had been made aware of the fact that their recall experience had influenced their mood? It seems likely that the effect of happiness on participant's ratings would be attenuated. There should be no differences between the neutral mood condition and the happy mood conditions on stereotypical judgment ratings. The participants should be come aware of the external influences on their emotion and therefore could not use their mood to cue their processing (automatic vs. conscious).

I am also a little confused about the influence of negative emotions on stereotypic judgments. Both Sinclair et al. and Bodenhausen et al. suggests that happy people use more automatic mechanisms in processing information. On the other hand, unhappy people engage in more motivated an conscious thinking because they are, let's say not at an ideal goal state or their rate of movement towards a goals state is not ideal, in the terminology of last week's authors. Why then do unhappy people and happy individuals both make stereotypic judgments? If unhappy people are engaging in effortful processing shouldn't they realize that they are stereotyping and be more likely to not make stereotypic judgment, in a Devine-like interpretation? Bodenhausen appears to be saying that happy people will make stereotypical judgments because they are using heuristic cues and also people in negative mood will make stereotypical judgments because they are more deeply processing environmental cues. The two statements are contradictory. Would motivational accountability also attenuated stereotypical judgments in people with negative affect as well? This also seems like a good follow-up study.