

Mood acknowledgment and correction for the mood-congruency bias in social judgment

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Abstract

Past research has revealed a mood-congruency bias wherein people evaluate other individuals more positively when they are experiencing good moods than when they are experiencing bad moods. At times, however, people may attempt to prevent their transient mood states from biasing their evaluations of other people. It was proposed that the capacity to attend openly to one's moods is an important precursor to such mood correction efforts. Two studies supported this hypothesis. People who were encouraged to attend to their feelings (Study 1), as well as people who are naturally inclined to acknowledge their feelings (Study 2), were more likely than their counterparts to prevent their positive and negative moods from biasing their judgments of a target person.

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Imagine this scenario: Shortly after receiving the news that her pet had died, a professor interviewed a job candidate and made a recommendation regarding his suitability for the job. Considerable research on the mood-congruency effect (e.g., Forgas, 2000, 2001; Schwarz & Clore, 1996) suggests that the sadness prompted by this loss might lead the professor to evaluate the applicant's potential less favorably than she would otherwise. Mood-congruency effects may not be inevitable, however. The professor's acknowledgment of her negative mood might lead her to counteract the potentially biasing effect of her feelings. Our research examined the role that an individual's ability to openly acknowledge his or her moods may play in the mood correction process. Specifically, are people less likely to reveal the mood-congruency bias when they are encouraged to focus on their feelings? Do individual differences in such abilities predict the degree of mood-congruent bias that occurs? Before addressing these questions, we outline previous research on how moods

affect social judgments as well as pertinent recent models of correction processes.

Correction for extraneous irrelevant influences on social judgments

An extensive literature supports the notion that people experiencing positive moods are more likely than those experiencing negative moods to view the world through "rose-colored glasses." Many studies have revealed a "mood-congruency effect" in social judgments wherein people evaluate others more favorably when they are in a good mood than when they are in a bad mood. Research indicates that moods may automatically prime mood-congruent thoughts that are then used in impression formation or they may be used in a heuristic fashion to aid people in estimating how they feel about a person (e.g., Forgas, 1995; Schwarz & Clore, 1996).

Although people's moods may often activate mood-congruent constructs that taint their evaluations of other people, individuals may at times attempt to prevent mood-related bias. This possibility is consistent

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with research indicating that people make efforts to ensure that their judgments are untainted by other potentially biasing factors (e.g., Martin & Achee, 1992; Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Stapel, Martin, & Schwarz, 1998; Wegener & Petty, 1997; Wilson & Brekke, 1994). People are often confronted with situations in which extraneous contextual factors unrelated to a target of judgment might have an effect on the thoughts and feelings that they have in the presence of the target. According to recent theorists (e.g., Wegener & Petty, 1997; Wilson & Brekke, 1994), people are more likely to correct for such factors when they are (a) aware of the potentially biasing influence of a contextual factor (i.e., possess a theory regarding its likely effect), (b) motivated to adjust for the extraneous factor (i.e., are concerned about judgmental accuracy), and (c) capable of engaging in correction (e.g., possess the cognitive or emotional skills necessary for correction, knowledge of strategies, and sufficient cognitive resources).

Although these theorists and others (e.g., Branscombe & Cohen, 1991) have suggested that mood may be a contextual factor that people are motivated to correct for when evaluating other people, there has been relatively little research examining the circumstances that prompt such mood correction. The extant literature indicates that people are more likely to correct for the biasing effect of moods on their judgments of others when they have the ability to process target information efficiently (Ottati & Isbell, 1996) and when they are motivated to think carefully about targets (Isbell & Wyer, 1999). Related work using judgment tasks other than person perception suggests, additionally, that people are more likely to correct for their moods when they are inclined to think extensively about judgments (i.e., DeSteno, Petty, Wegener, & Rucker, 2000) and when they are alerted to potential non-target causes of moods (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1996).¹

Mood acknowledgment and correction for mood-related bias

Our research seeks to expand upon this prior work by examining whether mood acknowledgment (i.e., the

capacity to focus on, attend to, or monitor moods; e.g., Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995; Swinkels & Giuliano, 1995) may engender mood correction in social judgments. We were led to consider the potential role of mood acknowledgment after examining the literature regarding how moods influence memory (e.g., Bower & Forgas, 2001). Like research on moods and social judgments, research on the mood-memory link has typically revealed mood-congruency (more negative memories among people experiencing more negative moods); however, this effect can be eliminated or reversed when specific needs or motivations are activated. In particular, the motivation to repair negative moods may prompt people to recruit positive memories (e.g., Parrott & Sabini, 1990).

Although this work on mood-incongruent memory has focused on the motivation to repair moods, rather than the motivation to correct for mood-related bias, we believe that it has important implications for understanding mood correction. Mood repair and mood correction can both be conceived of as forms of mood regulation (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000), and accordingly, may be influenced by similar factors. Recent research by McFarland and Buehler (1997, 1998) revealing that the ability to acknowledge one's feelings is an important determinant of memory-based mood repair seems particularly relevant to understanding mood correction. These authors proposed that mood regulation typically involves a two-stage process in which people first openly acknowledge their feelings and then invoke affect-regulatory strategies. Their results supported this proposal: People who were naturally inclined, or temporarily encouraged, to acknowledge their feelings were more likely than their less attentive counterparts to respond to negative moods by invoking a self-regulatory recall strategy (i.e., recruiting positive autobiographical memories). Based on this work, we propose that mood acknowledgment may also be an important precursor to mood regulation efforts involving mood correction. That is, it is plausible that people who are naturally inclined, or temporarily encouraged, to attend openly to their feelings will be more likely than their counterparts to correct for the biasing influence of their moods. If people are inattentive to feelings, mood correction should be preempted. Two studies were conducted to test this reasoning.

We should note that in a recent chapter appearing after we conducted our studies, Berkowitz, Jaffee, Jo, and Troccoli (2000) proposed similarly that this research examining mood-incongruent recall has implications for understanding mood correction. Like us, they assessed whether mood awareness decreases mood-congruency. Although their research offered some intriguing preliminary support for the role of mood awareness, the findings were not definitive. The results were based primarily on internal analyses and there was no evidence

¹ We use the expression "mood correction" in a broad sense to refer to the processes by which people either prevent or eliminate mood-related bias in their judgments. This usage is consistent with that of several prominent models of mental correction (see Strack, 1992; Wegener & Petty, 1997; Wilson & Brekke, 1994). These theorists have noted that correction for bias may occur at the pre-judgment phase (i.e., people may theorize that moods could bias judgments and engage in "preemptive correction" [e.g., by ignoring their moods; by avoiding biasing stimuli; by neutralizing moods]) or at the post-judgment stage (e.g., people may form a preliminary impression and then adjust it to remove the presumed mood-related bias). Thus, people can "correct for bias" by avoiding bias altogether or by adjusting preliminary judgments.

presented indicating that a significant experimental effect of mood is eliminated when people become focused on moods. Moreover, in some studies, the self-focus induction inadvertently manipulated both attention to moods and mood positivity. As well, the correction pattern observed might reflect self-presentational concerns (see Berkowitz & Troccoli, 1990). Our two studies extend these earlier findings by (a) using a fully experimental paradigm to examine the role of self-focus (Study 1), (b) using a self-focus induction that is unconfounded with mood positivity (see McFarland & Buehler, 1998), and (c) using strong assurances of anonymity to eliminate self-presentational concerns.²

Study 1

Participants were exposed to a negative or positive mood induction, and were either encouraged to focus on their feelings or distracted from their feelings prior to evaluating two target persons. The mood-congruency bias was expected to occur only among distracted participants. Those encouraged to focus on their moods were expected to correct for the biasing effect of mood and render unbiased judgments.

At first glance, the hypothesis that focusing individuals on their feelings will attenuate the mood-congruency bias may seem similar to proposals derived from the mood-as-information framework (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1996). According to this theory, people use their current mood as a reflection of their feelings about a target, and the mood-congruency bias occurs when people misattribute feelings that are actually created by extraneous factors to the target object. Thus, if people are made more aware of non-target factors that might be affecting their mood, they should not reveal mood-congruency. Numerous studies support this model: focusing people on alternative causes of mood eliminates the mood-congruency bias (e.g., Gasper & Clore, 2000; Keltner, Locke, & Audrain, 1993; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). The distinction between our study and this previous work can best be understood if one considers the

distinction between two constructs: focusing on the *causes* of one's feelings, and focusing on the feelings *per se* (Siemer & Reisenzein, 1998). Although these two forms of focusing may often occur simultaneously (e.g., a person might think about the true cause of his mood and hence attend more to his feelings), they could occur quite independently. For example, an individual may not know the cause of her sadness, but nonetheless focus intently on her feelings. Conversely, a person may be highly aware of the cause of his feelings, but spend little time attending to them. Our studies tested whether increased attention to mood *itself*, with awareness of the true *cause* of one's mood held constant, leads to a reduction in the mood-congruency bias. Thus, unlike previous studies in which people's awareness of the true cause of mood was manipulated while holding constant attention to feelings (i.e., studies testing the mood-as-information model; e.g., Keltner et al., 1993), our study involved manipulating degree of focused attention to feelings while holding constant awareness of the cause of mood. To confirm that our mood focusing manipulation varied level of attention to feelings without simultaneously varying level of awareness of the cause of feelings, we included a pilot study (see Method).

Method

Participants. The participants in the main study were 96 undergraduates (61 females; 35 males) from the SFU participant pool.

Procedure. Participants received a cover story indicating that the researchers were examining "how personality affects imagery, cognitive style, and social judgments." Accordingly, they were to complete an anonymous questionnaire assessing these qualities. The order of the measures was varied to manipulate whether participants were focused on their moods prior to the judgment task.

Manipulation of mood and attention to mood. All participants first completed a "visual imagery" task designed to manipulate mood. They visualized and described either an unpleasant or pleasant event from the last year. Next, participants were either focused on their moods or distracted from their moods (see McFarland & Buehler, 1998). In the *focused* condition, participants were encouraged to acknowledge their moods by selecting 4 mood adjectives from a list of 17 adjectives (8 positive, 8 negative, "no change") to describe their current feelings (relative to their pre-imagery feelings). Instead of the mood focus exercise, participants in the *distracted* condition performed a "cognitive style" task intended to distract them from their moods (i.e., generating shorter words from longer words).

Dependent measures. All participants then evaluated two target persons. Allegedly, the target information provided was based on interviews obtained in another

² As noted earlier, correction depends not only on ability factors, but also on the motivation to be accurate and the possession of a theory of bias. Thus, our prediction that mood acknowledgment (i.e., an ability factor) will increase mood correction rests on the underlying assumption that the typical individual believes that moods may bias person judgments and is motivated to avoid such bias. To validate this assumption, we asked 184 undergraduates from Simon Fraser University (SFU) to indicate (a) how much their moods produced by extraneous factors would influence their judgments of others assuming they did nothing to prevent it (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *a great deal*) ($M = 6.59$), and (b) how much they would strive to use strategies to prevent their mood from influencing their evaluations ($M = 6.80$). Both means differed significantly from the scale midpoint (5) (both t s, $p < .0001$); thus, the average participant believes that moods can bias interpersonal judgments and is motivated to avoid bias.

study. For the first target, participants were presented with 11 ambiguous behaviors (e.g., “Susan stated that she gave the best presentation”), and selected the trait label that best applied (e.g., 1 = primarily conceited; 11 = primarily self-confident). The labels varied from extremely negative to extremely positive. The remaining 10 dimensions were: reckless–adventurous, aloof–independent, stubborn–persistent, nosy–curious, obsessive–efficient, paranoid–careful, dishonest–helpful, aggressive–assertive, selfish–fearful, and stingy–thrifty. Participants also provided general impressions on 7 scales ranging from 1 to 9: very disliked–very likable, very poorly adjusted–very well adjusted, very unfriendly–very friendly, very hard to work with–very good to work with, very incompetent–very competent, very unintelligent–very intelligent, and not at all self-confident–very self-confident. Participants then read a paragraph description of the second target, rated him on the same 7 general scales, and completed the remaining tasks.

Pilot study. To confirm that the focusing manipulation varied level of attention to feelings without simultaneously varying either level of awareness of the cause of mood or mood positivity, 64 students were exposed to the mood and focusing manipulations. Immediately thereafter, they (a) indicated the major cause of their current mood (open-ended assessment), (b) indicated the degree to which they thought the imagery task was a major contributor to their mood (1 = *not a contributor*; 9 = *strong contributor*), and (c) rated mood positivity (1 = *extremely negative*; 9 = *extremely positive*). Analyses revealed no significant effects of the focusing variable on these items. Focused participants were as likely (41%) as distracted participants (30%) to spontaneously mention that the imagery task was a cause of their moods, $\chi^2(1, N = 64) = .89, p = .35$. In addition, focused participants did not report that the imagery task contributed more to their feelings ($M = 5.03$) than did distracted participants ($M = 4.27$), $F(1, 60) = 1.84, p = .20$. Also, although the mood manipulation effectively altered moods ($F(1, 60) = 23.34, p < .001$, Cohen’s $f = .62$),³ the focusing induction did not affect mood positivity (main and interaction effects, $ps > .15$). To confirm the effectiveness of the focusing manipulation, 33 additional students received the mood and focusing manipulations, and indicated how much they were “paying close attention to” their moods. As expected, focused participants reported greater attentiveness ($M = 6.31$) than distracted participants ($M = 4.76$), $F(1, 29) = 6.32, p < .02, f = .46$. In sum, it appears that the focusing induction varied attention to mood

without simultaneously varying either awareness of the cause of mood or mood positivity.

Results and discussion

We predicted that only participants who were distracted from their moods would reveal a mood-congruency effect in judgment. A 2 (mood type) \times 2 (attention to moods) ANOVA performed on a positivity index (the average of the 25 target ratings, $\alpha = .79$) revealed a significant interaction that supported the prediction, $F(1, 92) = 4.49, p < .01, f = .23$ (see Table 1). Whereas distracted participants revealed significant mood-congruency, $t(92) = 3.68, p < .001, d = .77$, focused participants did not, $t < 1, p = .36$. In sum, people encouraged to openly acknowledge their feelings were better able to avoid the mood-congruency bias.

Study 2

Study 2 constitutes a systematic replication of Study 1. Our goal was to use different operationalizations of mood and mood acknowledgment to obtain converging evidence that mood acknowledgment is a determinant of mood correction. In lieu of the imagery task, we used bogus performance feedback to manipulate mood, and in lieu of manipulating focused attention to moods, we measured individual differences that reflect general inclinations to openly acknowledge moods. Participants high or low on mood acknowledgment were randomly assigned to a negative or positive mood induction, and then evaluated a target person. We predicted that only participants who are generally inattentive to their feelings would reveal a mood-congruency bias. In contrast, those inclined to attend to their feelings should be prompted to prevent mood-related bias. To confirm that

Table 1
Mean impressions of target persons as a function of type of mood and attention to mood (Study 1)

Type of mood	Attention to mood		
	Focused on mood	Distracted from mood	
Negative mood	<i>M</i>	6.04 _a	5.68 _b
	<i>N</i>	24	26
	<i>SD</i>	.74	.68
Positive mood	<i>M</i>	5.86 _a	6.38 _c
	<i>N</i>	21	25
	<i>SD</i>	.75	.64

Note. Higher scores indicate more positive impressions. Within rows and columns, means with different subscripts differ significantly according to planned contrasts, with one exception: Within the negative mood condition, the difference between the means of the focused and distracted groups was marginally significant, $p < .10$.

³ Cohen’s f and f^2 are related measures of effect size that are reflective of the ratio of systematic variability to error variability. The former measure is recommended for use in the ANOVA context and the latter measure is recommended for use in the regression context (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, 1988).

greater mood acknowledgment was not related to greater awareness of the *cause* of mood, we again included a pilot study.

Method

Participants. The participants in the main study were 64 undergraduates (37 females; 27 males) from the SFU participant pool.

Procedure. The study was described as assessing “how personality relates to verbal competence and impression formation.” Accordingly, participants would complete a personality survey, followed by a verbal competence test and an impression formation task. They were assured of anonymity on the impression task and personality survey.

Mood acknowledgment measures. The personality survey included two measures of mood acknowledgment. The first measure was the Attention subscale of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Salovey et al., 1995) which assesses openness to attending to feelings (e.g., “I don’t pay much attention to my moods”). The second measure was the Mood Monitoring subscale of the Mood Awareness Scale (Swinkels & Giuliano, 1995) which assesses monitoring and evaluation of feelings (e.g., “I find myself thinking about my mood during the day”).

We included other subscales for exploratory purposes (i.e., the Clarity and Repair subscales of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale and the Mood Labeling subscale of the Mood Awareness Scale). Clarity and Labeling items reflect the ability to identify particular feelings, and Repair items reflect the inclination to improve moods. Although these variables may at times predict mood correction, we did not expect them to play a role here because: (a) moods elicited by feedback should be easily identified, and (b) there was little opportunity for participants to use mood repair as a correction strategy. Finally, we included the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979). Depression correlates somewhat positively with mood acknowledgment and was used as a covariate (see Salovey et al., 1995).

Mood manipulation. The verbal competence test was portrayed as a highly valid assessment of an important intellectual ability. The test involved four trials in which participants generated shorter words from longer words. After the test, the experimenter informed participants either that their score was at the 88th percentile (positive mood) or the 20th percentile (negative mood).

Dependent measures. For the impression formation task, participants viewed a videotape of a woman completing an experimental task and then evaluated her on the same 18 dimensions used in Study 1 to rate the first target.

Pilot study. Seventy-four undergraduates received the mood manipulation and then completed the same 4 measures used in the previous pilot study (i.e., the measures of mood positivity, attention to mood, and

perceived causes of mood). Four pairs of regressions (each pair using, as predictors, one of the two centered mood acknowledgment indexes, mood type (dummy coded), and the pertinent interaction term) confirmed that there were no effects for the mood acknowledgment variables on the measures reflecting perceived causes of mood or mood positivity (all F s < 1, ps > .30). As predicted, however, persons higher on mood acknowledgment reported greater focused attention to feelings (i.e., the mood acknowledgment effect was significant in both regressions [attention analysis: $b = 1.07$, $F(1, 70) = 5.86$, $p < .01$, $f^2 = .09$; monitoring analysis: $b = 1.12$, $F(1, 70) = 10.36$, $p < .01$, $f^2 = .15$]). Additionally, the mood manipulation effectively altered moods (i.e., the mood type effect was significant in both regressions [attention analysis: $b = 1.15$, $F(1, 70) = 11.49$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = .17$; monitoring analysis: $b = 1.18$, $F(1, 70) = 11.56$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = .18$]). Thus, although persons higher in mood acknowledgment reported attending more to their post-feedback feelings, they did not report greater awareness of the cause of their feelings or different moods.

Results and discussion

Creation of indexes. We averaged the target ratings to create an impression positivity index ($\alpha = .81$). Indexes reflecting averages for each individual difference measure were also calculated (all α s > .70).

The impact of mood type and mood acknowledgment on evaluation. We predicted that people who are generally inclined to openly acknowledge their feelings would be less likely than their counterparts to reveal mood-congruent evaluations. Accordingly, we performed a pair of regression analyses on the impression index, each using as predictors one of the centered mood acknowledgment indexes (either attention or monitoring), mood type, and the pertinent interaction term (see Aiken & West, 1991). These analyses revealed significant interactions that supported the prediction ([attention \times mood type $b = -.76$; $F(1, 60) = 6.84$, $p < .01$; $f^2 = .12$][monitoring \times mood type $b = -.66$; $F(1, 60) = 6.79$, $p < .01$; $f^2 = .11$]). A significant mood-congruency effect was obtained only among persons lower in mood acknowledgment (i.e., those lower on attention or monitoring; see Figs. 1 and 2).

Subsidiary analyses. We also conducted two regression analyses similar to those described above except that depression, labeling, clarity, and repair, were added as covariates. The original interaction effects were maintained when these variables were controlled (both interaction F s, $ps < .05$); thus, the primary results are not attributable to these factors that covary with mood acknowledgment. Additional regressions confirmed that none of these alternative individual differences interacted with mood type to affect judgments (all F s < 1, $ps > .40$).

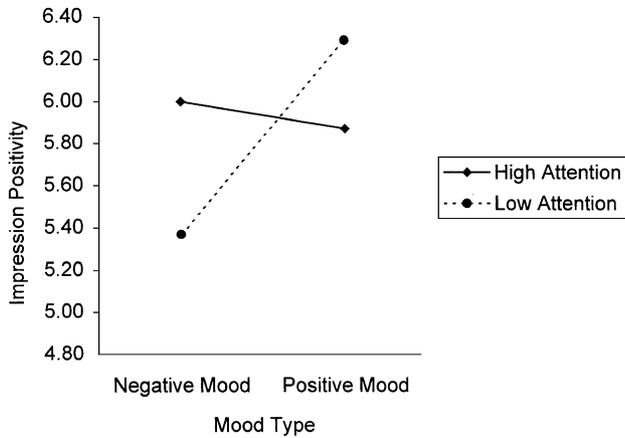


Fig. 1. Interaction effect of mood type and mood attention on impression positivity (Study 2). Lines represent the effect of mood type for persons one standard deviation unit above and below the mean on the mood attention subscale, respectively. Higher values indicate more positive impressions. The mood type effect (i.e., simple slope) was significant only for participants lower on mood attention ($b = .93$; $F(1, 60) = 10.62$, $p < .01$, $f^2 = .18$).

General discussion

Considerable past research has confirmed that our impressions of others are often affected by our transient emotional states: Other people seem friendlier, happier, and more talented when we are in a happy mood rather than a sad mood. However, people’s evaluations may not always be biased in a mood-congruent manner. Our studies confirmed that when people are temporarily focused on their feelings, or are naturally inclined to acknowledge their feelings, they are better able than their less attentive counterparts to

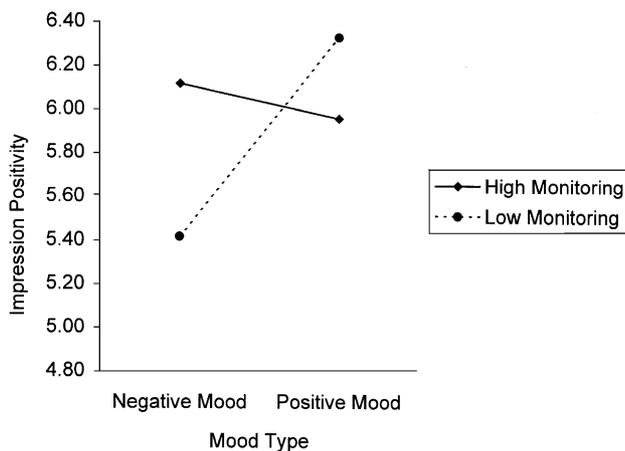


Fig. 2. Interaction effect of mood type and mood monitoring on impression positivity (Study 2). Lines represent the effect of mood type for persons one standard deviation unit above and below the mean on the mood monitoring subscale, respectively. Higher values indicate more positive impressions. The mood type effect (i.e., simple slope) was significant only for participants lower on mood monitoring ($b = .91$; $F(1, 60) = 9.65$, $p < .01$, $f^2 = .15$).

correct for the biasing influence of mood on their interpersonal evaluations.

Alternative accounts

These findings offer converging support for the role of mood acknowledgment in determining mood correction because various alternative accounts were addressed. First, our findings cannot be readily explained by variables that might most plausibly be confounded with mood acknowledgment. In Study 2, variables reflecting the capacity to acknowledge moods predicted mood correction even when several qualities related to mood were controlled. Moreover, in Study 1, attention to moods was manipulated rather than measured and thus all potentially confounding individual differences were controlled.

Second, it is unlikely that our findings can be explained by an attributional account wherein more focused participants reveal reduced mood-congruency because they are more aware of the true cause of mood. Pilot study participants who were temporarily focused on their moods, as well as those who generally attend to their moods, reported being just as aware of the primary cause of their moods as their less attentive counterparts; nonetheless, persons who were attentive to moods were more likely to avoid mood-congruent judgments. Thus, our preferred interpretation of the findings is that increased attention to feelings, while holding constant the level of awareness of the primary cause of mood, engenders mood correction.

It should be noted, however, that proponents of the mood-as-information model might argue that the results from pilot study participants do not reflect the actual levels of awareness of participants in Studies 1 and 2 because the former participants were asked directly about the causes of mood. Perhaps in the absence of such questions, persons lower in mood acknowledgment are less aware of the cause of mood (and hence more likely to misattribute mood). We acknowledge that this is a possibility that cannot be entirely ruled out. We believe, however, that there are several arguments to support the view that the pilot study results (revealing equal awareness of the cause of mood across levels of mood acknowledgment) may accurately reflect the awareness levels of participants in the main studies, and that therefore, the primary results may reflect differential attention to moods.

First, our pilot study results for Study 2 indicated that bogus performance feedback was a highly salient cause of mood—the majority of participants (57%), regardless of mood acknowledgement, attributed moods to the feedback. Forgas (1995) has argued that because performance feedback is typically a particularly salient cause of mood for most participants, mood-congruency effects obtained using this induction are unlikely to re-

sult from a misattribution process. The results of Study 2 are thus not easily explained by the mood-as-information framework. Second, in both pilot studies, we obtained a completely open-ended measure of participants' perceptions of the causes of mood. This measure was presented first, on a separate page, and it did not include any wording that would alert participants to the mood induction task as a cause of mood. Given this format, it seems unlikely that less focused persons were prompted by the question to actively consider the mood induction task as the primary cause of their mood (i.e., they were free to report any potential causes). Moreover, if the true cause of mood (the mood induction task) was indeed more accessible to focused persons, as it should have been if they had just attributed their moods to the task, they should have been more likely than less focused persons to spontaneously identify the mood induction as the primary cause of mood (e.g., Higgins, 1996). However, focused persons were as likely as less focused persons to spontaneously attribute their mood to the mood induction task, implying that this cause was equally accessible for these two groups. Third, in Study 2, the pilot study results were consistent with past research indicating that mood acknowledgment tendencies are not linked to a greater inclination to spontaneously identify the true causes of emotion or to endorse various attributions for moods (Gasper & Clore, 2000; Gohm & Clore, 2000). Thus, it is not unreasonable to attribute the effects of these variables to variations in general attentiveness to feelings rather than to differences in causal attributions. Finally, self-reports of perceived causes of mood have been used successfully in past research as manipulation checks on the salience of particular causes of mood (Schwarz & Clore, 1983); accordingly, there is reason to believe that if the cause of mood was indeed more salient to focused participants, the self-report measure would have been sufficiently sensitive to detect this increased salience.

Although, for these reasons, we do not prefer the attributional account as an explanation for our findings, we do not wish to imply that attributions are unimportant in determining mood correction. To the contrary, as noted earlier, numerous studies have demonstrated that the attribution of moods to non-target causes reduces the mood-congruency bias (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1996). Our work extends the previous literature by demonstrating that, when attributions are held constant, greater attention to moods increases correction efforts. Thus, mood correction can be prompted, independently, by both attributions for moods and attention to moods.

Boundary conditions

Although our results indicated that people who were able to acknowledge their feelings were better able to

prevent their moods from influencing their evaluations, people high in mood acknowledgment may not always generate judgments that are untainted by moods. Under conditions where people believe that it would be appropriate to use their moods as a basis for judgment, those higher in mood acknowledgment may actually reveal heightened mood-congruency (see Gasper & Clore, 2000). There may even be circumstances under which greater attention to moods engenders a heightened mood-*incongruency* bias. When people high in mood attention attempt to correct for their moods by adjusting their initial impressions to “subtract out” mood-related bias, they may calibrate their adjustments imperfectly and “go overboard” in their correction efforts (e.g., DeSteno et al., 2000; Ottati & Isbell, 1996).

Underlying mechanisms

Our results supported our primary prediction that attention to moods engenders less biased social judgments. There are two major ways through which attentive persons may have arrived at unbiased judgments. First, they may have engaged in “preemptive or pre-judgment” correction strategies (Wegener & Petty, 1997) such as reminding themselves to be objective, or ignoring moods and focusing intently on the target's qualities. Alternatively, they may have used “post-judgment” correction strategies such as subtracting mood-related bias from their first impressions to yield adjusted final impressions. Although one might be tempted to speculate that attentive individuals eliminated bias in a preemptive manner (because their final judgments yielded a null effect for mood rather than mood-incongruency), the pattern of mood effects obtained does not necessarily imply the use of a particular strategy (Strack, 1992). For example, a null effect for mood could result from preemptive correction (before making a judgment, people might actively try to ignore or set aside their moods) or post-judgment correction (after forming a biased first impression, people might use a well-calibrated theory of bias to remove the influence of mood). Future research is needed to examine the particular mood correction strategies used by persons who acknowledge their moods. It would also be informative to explore whether the correction they reveal derives from a relatively effortful controlled process that is inhibited when they experience a load on their cognitive resources (e.g., Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988).

Conclusion

In closing, we note the implications of our findings for the emerging literature on “emotional intelligence” (e.g., Salovey, Hsee, & Mayer, 1993). A central proposition of this framework is that the capacity to attend to one's feelings may be a critical prerequisite for effective mood regulation (e.g., Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Our

findings supported this viewpoint: The capacity to openly acknowledge one's feelings appears to engender "emotionally intelligent" interpersonal judgments.

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