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Happy and close, but sad and effective?

Affective influences on relationship judgments and behaviors

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1. Introduction

Affect is a defining feature of social relationships, and affective reactions often constitute the primary dimension in the way we react to other people (Fitness & Strongman, 1991; Forgas, 2002; Leary, 2000; Zajonc, 2000). Although the last two decades saw something like an 'affective revolution' in psychological research (see also Forgas, 2002; 2006), we are still a long way from fully understanding the age-old puzzle about the relationship between the rational and the emotional aspects of human nature (Hilgard, 1980). Nowhere is this link more important than in understanding relationship processes. This chapter seeks to review some recent lines of evidence suggesting that mild affective states or moods can have a significant influence on both the content, and the process of how people think and behave in their personal relationships.

We shall begin with a brief overview of the historical background of research on affect and relationships and theories relevant to understanding this link. We shall then describe a number of converging empirical research programs demonstrating affective influences on thinking and behaviour in relationships. This work may be readily subdivided into two complementary orientations: (1) demonstrations of affect congruence, showing that affective states color the way people perceive and evaluate their relationships in a mood-congruent manner. (2) A second line of studies explores affective influences in information processing strategies, showing that affect is also closely involved in how people process relationship-relevant information. Negative mood in particular often triggers a more systematic, accommodative processing style that results in more effective and more successful judgments and behaviors in relationships.

1.1 Affect and relationships

The key role of affect in the way people think about and cognitively represent social relationships has been illustrated by a number of early studies. For example, in a series of studies we have found (Forgas, 1979; 1982) that peoples' implicit representations about common, recurring social encounters were largely determined by their feelings about these events, rather than the

objective features of the encounters. Affective reactions such as anxiety, confidence, feelings of intimacy, pleasure or discomfort were critical in defining implicit representations of interactions with others. Similar conclusions were reached several decades ago by Pervin (1976), who argued that what is striking is the extent to which interpersonal situations are "described in terms of affects (e.g. threatening, warm, interesting, dull, tense, calm, rejecting) and organized in terms of similarity of affects aroused by them" (p.471). Thus, reactions to interpersonal experiences seem to be predominantly determined by affective responses.

Affect seems to define not only perceptions of interpersonal encounters, but also the way relationship scripts are perceived. Human social relationships characteristically conform to shared, culturally established patterns, and individuals from a given culture normally share an implicit cognitive representation of the range of relationship types practiced in their milieu. In one study (Forgas & Dobosz, 1980), a representative range of relationship scripts was elicited in a free response study, and a second sample of subjects from the same milieu - university students - was then asked to make similarity judgments between the relationship scripts. Their responses were used as input to an individual differences multidimensional scaling analysis. Results showed three evaluative dimensions as defining the relationship space, (a) social desirability, (b) love and commitment, and (c) sexuality, again confirming the important role of feelings in perceptions of relationships types.

Affect also has a dynamic influence on how social information – including information about relationships – is selected, interpreted, processed and remembered (Bower, 1981; Forgas, 1995a, 2001, 2002). Such 'affect infusion' effects were initially explained in terms of either psychodynamic, or conditioning, associationist principles. Psychoanalytic theories assumed that affect has a dynamic, invasive quality and can 'take over' judgments unless adequate psychological resources are deployed to control these impulses (Feshbach & Singer, 1958). Conditioning and associationist theories provided an alternative account, suggesting that previously 'neutral'

concepts can become affectively loaded as a result of incidental associations with affect-eliciting stimuli. According to radical behaviorists such as Watson, all affective reactions acquired throughout life – including affective evaluations of the self - are the product of such a cumulative pattern of associations.

The conditioning metaphor was specifically applied to social relationships by Byrne and Clore (1970) and Clore and Byrne (1974), who suggested that affective states triggered by unrelated events can become 'attached' to previously neutral responses towards partners. For example, an aversive environment can produce a negative affective reaction that can spontaneously become associated with a previously neutral partner encountered in this setting (Clore & Byrne, 1974). Unlike earlier psychoanalytic or associationist explanations, contemporary cognitive theories focus on the information processing mechanisms that allow affective states to influence both the content, and the processes of thinking and judgments, as we shall see below.

1.2 Cognitive mechanisms of affect congruence in relationship judgments

Memory based processes. The associative network model by Bower (1981) proposed that affect and cognition are integrally linked within an associative network of mental representations. An affective state should thus selectively and automatically prime related thoughts and ideas that are more likely to be used in constructive cognitive tasks – for example, tasks that involve the perception and evaluation of one's partner or relationship. In several experiments, Bower (1981) found that social thinking is indeed subject to such an affect-congruent bias. For example, people who were induced to feel good (or bad) were likely to selectively remember positive (or negative) details of their childhood and their social activities during the preceding weeks, consistent with the predicted selective recall of affect-congruent information. The selective priming of affect-congruent information should in turn produce a mood congruent bias in the way social evaluations and judgments are constructed, as we shall see below (Forgas, 2002).

Such affect priming is subject to important boundary conditions (Bower & Forgas, 2001; Eich & Macauley, 2000; Forgas, 1995a). Affect congruity is more likely when the affective state is strong, salient and self-relevant, and when the task involves the constructive generation and elaboration of information, rather than the simple reproduction of stored details. Thus, mood effects are most reliably found when the information is rich, complex and involving as is typically the case with relationship judgments (Forgas, 1994, 1999a,b; Sedikides, 1995).

Misattribution mechanisms. An alternative theory by Schwarz and Clore (1983) argued that "rather than computing a judgment on the basis of recalled features of a target, individuals may... ask themselves: 'How do I feel about it? /and/ in doing so, they may mistake feelings due to a pre-existing state as a reaction to the target" (Schwarz, 1990, p. 529). This ‘how-do-I-feel-about-it’ heuristic suggests that affect influences relationship judgments because of an inferential error: people misread their prevailing affective states as informative of their evaluations of their partners or relationships. This theory is similar to earlier conditioning models by Clore and Byrne (1974), also positing an incidental and subconscious link between affect and unrelated responses. Research now suggests that people only seem to rely on affect as a heuristic cue when they are unfamiliar with the task, have no prior evaluations to fall back on, their personal involvement is low, and have insufficient cognitive resources or motivation to compute a more thorough response (Forgas, 2006). Relationship judgments are rarely like this. Although affect-as-information may influence quick, superficial judgments (Forgas & Moylan, 1987; Schwarz & Clore, 1983), it is unlikely that relationship judgments would be based on such a superficial and truncated judgmental strategy.

1.3 Affective influences on information processing strategies.

Affect can influence not only the content of thinking (influencing what people think), but also the process of cognition, that is, *how* people think. It was first thought positive affect simply leads to more lazy, heuristic and more superficial processing strategies, whereas negative affect triggers a more effortful, systematic, analytic and vigilant processing style (Clark & Isen, 1982; Schwarz,

1990), due to motivational differences between happy and sad individuals. According to the mood-maintenance hypothesis (Clark & Isen, 1982), those in a positive mood avoid effortful thinking to maintain this pleasant state. In contrast, those in negative mood might engage in vigilant, effortful processing as an adaptive response to improve an aversive state. Others such as Schwarz (1990) and Wegener and Petty (1994) offered a kind of functionalist 'cognitive tuning' account, suggesting that positive and negative affect have a signalling/tuning function, informing the person of whether a relaxed, effort minimizing (in positive affect) or a vigilant, effortful (negative affect) processing style is appropriate.

More recent theories however suggest a more subtle pattern (Bless & Fiedler, 2006; Bless, 2001; Fiedler, 2001). According to this view, the evolutionary significance of affective states is not simply to influence processing effort, but to trigger qualitatively different processing styles. Thus, positive affect recruits a more assimilative, schema-based, top-down processing style, as pre-existing knowledge guides information processing. In contrast, negative affect produces a more accommodative, bottom-up and externally focused processing strategy where attention to situational information drives thinking (Bless, 2001; Fiedler, 2001). These processing styles can be equally vigilant and effortful, yet produce qualitatively different outcomes. Much has been written about the beneficial effects of positive affect (Ciarrochi, Forgas & Mayer, 2006; Forgas, 1998). Much less is known about the adaptive advantages of dysphoria. Several experiments reported below suggest that negative affect improves performance on tasks that require detailed attention to new, external information, and may lead to more successful and adaptive relationship behaviors.

Towards an integration: The Affect Infusion Model. An integrative theory, the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995a; 2002) predicts that affect infusion should only occur in circumstances that promote an open, constructive processing style (Fiedler, 1991; 1995b). The AIM thus assumes that (a) the extent and nature of affect infusion should be dependent on the kind of processing strategy that is used, and (b) that all things being equal, people should use the least

effortful and simplest processing strategy capable of producing a response. The model identifies four alternative processing strategies: direct access, motivated, heuristic, and substantive processing, that differ in terms of two basic dimensions: the degree of effort exerted in seeking a solution, and the degree of openness and constructiveness of the information search strategy. The combination of these two processing features, quantity (effort), and quality (openness) produces four distinct processing styles (Fiedler, 2001): substantive processing (high effort/open, constructive), motivated processing (high effort/closed), heuristic processing (low effort/open, constructive), and direct access processing (low effort/closed).

The first two of these strategies, direct access and motivated processing, involve highly targeted and predetermined patterns of information search and selection, strategies that limit the scope for incidental affect infusion. According to the model, mood congruence and affect infusion are only likely when constructive processing is used, such as substantive or heuristic processing (see also Fiedler, 1991, 2001). The AIM also specifies a range of contextual variables related to the task, the person, and the situation that jointly influence processing choices. An important feature of the AIM is that it recognizes that affect itself can also influence processing choices. The key prediction of the AIM is the absence of affect infusion when direct access or motivated processing is used, and the presence of affect infusion during heuristic and substantive processing. The implications of this model have now been supported in a number of the experiments as we shall see below.

2. Happy and satisfied? Affect congruence in relationship judgments

There are thus good theoretical reasons why fluctuating affective states can play an important role in relationship judgments and behaviors. Relationships contain an extremely rich array of information about both positive and negative experiences. Affective states may have a particularly strong influence on relationship judgments that recruit constructive, substantive processing (Forgas, 1995a, 2001; Sedikides, 1995).

2.1 Affective influences on perceiving others. Perhaps the most fundamental relationship judgment in everyday life is the way we interpret a partner's observed, ongoing social behaviours. As the meaning of social actions is often inherently ambiguous and equivocal (Heider, 1958), mood may selectively influence the interpretations we place on observed behaviours due to affect-priming effects. This prediction was first tested by inducing happy or sad affect in participants, who were then shown a videotape of their own social interactions with a partner from the previous day (Forgas, Bower and Krantz, 1984). Participants were then asked to make a series of rapid, on-line judgments evaluating the observed behaviours of their partners as well as themselves.

There were significant affective distortions on these judgments. Happy subjects saw far more positive skilled behaviors than negative unskilled behaviors both in themselves and in their partners than did sad subjects. In contrast, observers who received no mood manipulation showed no such differences. These results establish that affect can have a fundamental influence on how people evaluate relationship behaviors, even when objective, videotaped evidence is readily available. These effects seem to occur because affect priming influences the kinds of interpretations and associations that people rely on to interpret intrinsically ambiguous social behaviors. For example, a smile that is seen as 'friendly' in a good mood could be judged as 'awkward' or 'condescending' when the observer experiences negative affect. Talking about a recent trip by a partner may be seen as 'clever' or 'poised' when in good mood but might appear 'boring' or 'pretentious' when the observer is in a bad mood. It seems reasonable to assume that everyday relationship judgments made without the benefit of objective videotaped evidence may be even more affect sensitive than were judgments of videotaped encounters in our study.

In further studies (Forgas & Bower, 1987) we asked subjects to form impressions about other persons presented on a computer screen. Results showed that people spent more time reading and encoding mood-congruent information, providing direct evidence that affect exerts a mood-congruent influence on encoding strategies. Just as in our study happy subjects spent longer

focussing on the positive characteristics of another person, partners in a close relationship may well be subject to the same kind of affective bias. This pattern is generally consistent with the predictions of the mood-priming model, which assumes that the superior activation and availability of mood-related constructs should be reflected in slower and more detailed encoding of mood-consistent information. This occurs because by "spreading activation, a dominant emotion will enhance the availability of emotion-congruent interpretations and salience of congruent stimulus materials for learning." (Bower, 1981, p.451). A richer associative base in turn may lead to the slower and more detailed processing of mood-consistent details in a learning task (Craik & Tulving, 1975).

2.2 Affective influences on relationship evaluations. Thus, positive affect may improve, and negative affect impair the way people see their partners and personal relationships (Forgas, 2002). This was confirmed in a study of mood effects on relationship judgments, when we asked people who received positive or negative mood induction to directly evaluate their real-life initimate relationships (Forgas, Levinger & Moylan, 1994). Two experiments found a significant mood-congruent influence on relationship judgments: temporarily happy persons felt more content and satisfied with their relationships and partners, but sad persons felt more dissatisfied. Intuitively one might predict weaker mood effects as the longevity and familiarity of a relationship increases. In terms of the AIM however, we expected and found undiminished mood effects even in long-term relationships, as long-term relationships provide partners with a particularly rich and varied range of both positive and negative experiences. Mood can thus play a critical role in selectively priming the kinds of details happy and sad people selectively recall and base their judgments on (Forgas et al., 1994).

2.3 Affect and attributions for relationship conflicts. The way people explain conflicts has important consequences for the success and longevity of their relationships. In a series of experiments, we asked participants who were induced to feel good or bad to make causal attributions for recent happy and conflict events in their current intimate relationships (Forgas,

1994, Exp. 1). Results showed significant mood congruence, with more self-blaming and pessimistic attributions by sad subjects than by happy subjects. In the next study attributions for simple vs. complex relationship conflicts were compared (Forgas, 1994, Exp. 2). Again, sad persons produced more negative, pessimistic attributions, identifying more internal, stable and global causes for their conflicts than did happy subjects.

Surprisingly, these mood effects were much greater on explanations for serious rather than simple conflicts that required more substantive processing. A further experiment measuring processing latencies (Forgas, 1994, Exp. 3) confirmed that even with real, self-nominated relationship conflicts, mood influenced attributions Further, attributions of responsibility for serious relationship conflicts (to do with sex, finances, etc.) were much more influenced by the partners' prevailing mood state than were attributions about minor points of conflict (eg. what channel to watch, which film to see, etc.). Consistent with the AIM, greater mood effects were associated with longer processing latencies, and it is this extended processing recruited by serious conflicts that produced increased mood congruence in the resulting judgments. Thus affect is likely to infuse even highly involving relationship judgments, as long as open, constructive thinking is required, and explaining difficult, intractable relationship problems in our lives may be even <u>more</u> influenced by temporary moods than are simple snap judgments about simple, unproblematic issues (Forgas, 1994).

<u>2.4 Motivational effects: elimination of affect congruence in relationship decisions</u>. The Affect Infusion Model also predicts that affect congruence may be eliminated or reversed when people have reason to adopt a motivated processing style, and negative affect itself may be crucial in triggering motivated processing in relationship decisions. Schachter (1959) was among the first to show that anxious or frightened people selectively prefer the company of others in a similar predicament, in an apparent motivated effort to control negative affect. Other evidence also suggests that people prefer to interact with partners who are in a matching rather than different mood (Locke & Horowitz, 1990). In a further exploration of mood-induced motivated processing in

relationship decisions, happy or sad persons were asked to select a partner either for themselves, or for another person. As expected, the combination of sad mood and a self-relevant task led to a highly motivated processing strategy, as people selectively looked for and found a rewarding companion (Forgas, 1989, 1991, Exp. 1). In later work, descriptions about potential partners were provided on a series of information cards (Forgas, 1991, Exp. 2), or on a computer file, allowing the step-by-step analysis of each person's decision path and reaction latencies in selecting a partner (Forgas, 1991, Exp. 3). Those in a sad mood when making a self-relevant choice again selectively searched for and found rewarding partners, reached such decisions faster, but studied motivationally relevant details at greater length, and remembered them better later on. As predicted by the AIM, there was no evidence for affect congruence in these motivated judgments. In summary, affect seems to have a strong mood-congruent influence on many relationship judgments, but only when open and constructive processing is used, and there are no motivational forces influencing the outcome.

2.5 Affective influences on strategic communication and self disclosure. Self-disclosure is one of the most important influences on relationship progression. The ability to disclose intimate information about ourselves is an essential skill in establishing intimate relationships, and is also critical to mental health and social adjustment (Forgas, 1985). Inappropriate self-disclosure can lead to adverse evaluations by others, and ultimately, relationship breakdown and social isolation.

Does temporary mood influence people’s self-disclosure strategies? Recent studies suggest that affect has a significant influence on verbal communication in interpersonal tasks that are characterised by psychological ambiguity. For example, positive mood tends to prime a more optimistic, confident, direct requesting style, and negative mood leads to more cautious, polite requests (Forgas, 1999a, b). Further, mood effects on verbal requests are much stronger when the request situation is demanding and difficult, and thus requires more extensive, substantive processing. Even in a realistic face-to-face encounter, those in a negative mood were more polite, hesitant, and delayed making their requests much longer than did control, or happy persons.

Affective states were found to play an important role in elaborately planned interpersonal encounters such as bargaining and negotiating encounters (Forgas, 1998a). People in a positive mood formed more positive and optimistic attitudes about the bargaining task, and used more optimistic, cooperative and integrative negotiating strategies. These findings suggest that slight changes in affect may influence the way people communicate in their social relationships.

In other experiments, we explored the effects of mood on self-disclosure strategies (Forgas, 2007). People feeling good or bad after watching affectively charged videotapes were asked to indicate the order in which they would feel comfortable disclosing increasingly intimate information about themselves to a partner. We found a significant tendency for happy people to select more intimate topics to disclose than did sad people. Of course, these effects occurred in a highly artificial, simulated context, so in a subsequent experiment we asked participants to interact with another person in a neighbouring room through a computer keyboard. In fact, the computer was pre-programmed to respond in standard ways that indicated either consistently high or low levels of self disclosure. Results again showed that individuals induced to feel good preferred more intimate disclosure, but only when the partner was also disclosing either consistently, or increasingly intimate information. Positive mood did not increase the intimacy of self-disclosure when the partner was not disclosing. Happy persons also formed more positive impressions of the 'partner' consistent with the predicted overall mood-congruent pattern (Forgas, 2001).

Why do these effects occur? When facing an unpredictable social encounter, people need to rely on constructive processing to guide their interpersonal strategies. Affect can selectively prime more affect-congruent thoughts and associations, ultimately influencing strategic decisions about self-disclosure. Happy persons disclose more because they form more confident and optimistic impressions and behavioural strategies. However, these mood effects disappear when the interaction partner does not match disclosure intimacy. Self-disclosure is a risky process; whether we undertake it depends on a constructive assessment of the situation. Affectively primed optimism

or pessimism influences the outcome as is the case when people formulate interpersonal requests, or plan and execute negotiations (Forgas, 1998b,c; 1999a,b).

3. The processing consequences of affect: When sad is better than happy

In addition to producing affect congruence, affective states can also influence the way information is processed. Although much attention has been paid to the beneficial consequences of positive affect, suggesting that feeling good promotes creativity, flexibility, cooperation, integrative thinking, relationship satisfaction and a host of other desirable outcomes (Ciarrochi et al., 2006; Forgas, 1994; 2002), this is only part of the story. In this section we shall see that negative affect may also produce desirable and beneficial consequences. Even though negative affect is clearly bothersome and provides no hedonic benefit, it remains one of the most enduring and common affective states (Ciarrochi, Forgas & Mayer, 2006). We have argued recently that negative affect sometimes operates as a signal spontaneously triggering more detailed and accommodative thinking strategies that appear to be highly adaptive to the requirements of demanding social situations (Forgas, 2007). For example, negative affect produces a thinking style that helps reduce certain judgmental biases (Forgas, 1998c), and promotes more successful social influence strategies (Forgas, in press).

3.1 Negative affect reduces judgmental errors . Interpreting the behavior of our partners is often subject to the fundamental attribution error (FAE) or correspondence bias, when people see intentionality and internal causation despite evidence for the influence of situational forces (Gilbert & Malone, 1995). The FAE occurs because people pay disproportionate attention to salient and conspicuous information - the actor - and fail to process information about situational constraints (Gilbert, 1991). If the detailed processing of situational information is facilitated, for example, by a negative mood, the incidence of the FAE should be reduced (Forgas, 1998c). In one experiment, happy or sad participants read and made attributions about the writer of an essay advocating a popular or unpopular position (for or against nuclear testing) which they were told was either

assigned, or was freely chosen, using the procedure pioneered by Jones and Harris (1967). Happy mood increased, and sad mood reduced the incidence of the FAE, consistent with the more attentive thinking style recruited by negative affect. Similar effects can also occur in real life. In a field study, participants who were feeling good or bad after seeing happy or sad movies read and make attributions about the writers of popular and unpopular essays arguing for, or against recycling (cf. Forgas & Moylan, 1987). Once again, negative mood reduced the FAE.

Are these effects indeed due to the more attentive processing of situational information in negative mood? To test this, happy or sad participants made attributions based on freely chosen or coerced essays advocating popular or unpopular positions (for or against environmentalism; Forgas, 1998c, Exp. 3). Once again, negative mood significantly reduced the incidence of the FAE, especially when the essays advocated unpopular positions. Recall memory data confirmed that those in a negative mood remembered significantly more information than did others, consistent with the predicted association between mood and the more attentive processing of the stimulus information. Thus, mild negative affect improved judgmental accuracy and reduced the incidence of the fundamental attribution error, both in laboratory and in real-life settings. These effects are consistent with the suggested evolutionary benefits of negative affect in recruiting more accommodative processing styles.

3.2 Mood effects on interpersonal accuracy How do we know if the information we receive from our partner is accurate? Accepting invalid information as true (false positives, excessive gullibility) can be just as dangerous as rejecting information that is valid (false negatives, excessive scepticism). Credibility judgments can be crucial in relationships. Accepting or rejecting interpersonal messages that are by their very nature ambiguous and not open to objective validation may be subject to affect-induced differences in information processing style. Negative moods might produce more critical and sceptical judgments, while happy people may accept interpersonal messages at ‘face value’, as genuine and trustworthy. In one experiment, we asked happy and sad

participants to judge the genuineness of people displaying positive, neutral and negative facial expressions. As predicted, those in a negative mood were significantly less likely to accept facial expressions as genuine than those in the neutral or happy condition. Curiously, happy participants were more confident in their judgment about the genuineness of the facial expressions than were the other groups. In another study instead of positive and negative facial displays, the six basic emotions were used as targets (i.e. anger, fear, disgust, happiness, surprise and sadness). Once again, negative mood reduced, and positive mood increased people's tendency to accept the facial displays as genuine, consistent with the more attentive and accommodative processing style associated with negative moods.

In another study we asked happy or sad participants to accept or reject the videotaped statements of people who were interrogated after a staged theft, and were either guilty, or not guilty (East & Forgas, 2007). Those in a positive mood were more likely to accept deceptive statements as truthful. Sad participants made significantly more guilty judgments, and were significantly better at correctly detecting deception. Negative affect thus produced a significant advantage at accurately distinguishing truths from lies in the observed interviews. A signal detection analysis also confirmed that sad judges were more accurate in detecting deception (identifying guilty targets as guilty) than were neutral or happy judges, consistent with the predicted mood-induced processing differences.

3.3 The benefits of negative affect for strategic behaviors in relationships Could negative affect also improve interpersonal communication strategies, such as the production of persuasive messages? It was expected that accommodative processing promoted by negative affect should produce more concrete and factual thinking and result in the production of superior persuasive messages. In one experiment (Forgas, in press, Exp. 1), participants received an audiovisual mood induction, and were then asked to produce persuasive arguments for or against an increase in student fees, and Aboriginal land rights. Those in a negative mood produced arguments that were of

significantly higher quality and more persuasive and concrete than those produced by happy participants. A mediational analysis showed that it was mood-induced variations in argument concreteness that influenced argument quality. In a further experiment, happy or sad participants produced persuasive arguments for or against Australia becoming a republic, and for or against a radical right-wing party. Sad mood again resulted in higher quality and more persuasive arguments, consistent with the prediction that negative mood should promote a more careful, systematic, bottom-up processing style (Bless, 2001; Bless & Fiedler, 2006; Fiedler, 2001; Forgas, 2002).

Were the arguments produced by sad participants indeed more effective in persuading a person? To test this, in experiment 3 the arguments produced by happy or sad participants earlier were presented to a naïve audience of undergraduate students. Observed changes in attitudes against a baseline measure taken earlier showed that arguments written by negative mood participants in Experiments 1 and 2 were actually significantly more successful in producing a real change in attitudes than were arguments produced by happy participants.

Finally, in experiment 4 persuasive attempts by happy and sad people were directed at a 'partner' to volunteer for a boring experiment using email exchanges (Forgas, in press). The motivation to be persuasive was also manipulated by offering some of them a significant reward if successful (movie passes). Mood again had a significant effect on argument quality: people in a negative mood produced higher quality persuasive arguments than did the neutral group, who in turn did better than the positive group. However, the offer of a reward reduced mood effects on argument quality, confirming a key prediction of the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995a, 2002), that mood effects on information processing – and subsequent social influence strategies – are strongest in the absence of motivated processing. A mediational analysis again confirmed that negative mood induced more accommodative thinking, and more concrete and specific arguments, as predicted.

This series of experiments thus confirms that persuasive arguments produced in negative mood are not only of higher quality as judged by raters, but are also significantly more effective in producing genuine attitude change in people. However, when motivation to be effective is already high, mood effects tend to diminish, as predicted by the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 2002). These results are consistent with other studies suggesting that negative affect typically promotes a more concrete, accommodative processing style (Forgas, 1998c; Forgas et al., 2005) that produces direct benefits when it comes to the effective use of social influence strategies, such as the production of persuasive arguments. This finding may have interesting applied implications for managing successful relationships and resolving personal conflicts, tasks that also involve a great deal of persuasive communication, often in situations that are affectively charged (Fletcher, 2002). It is an intriguing possibility that mild negative affect may actual promote a more concrete, accommodative and ultimately, more successful communication style in intimate relationships.

Summary and Conclusions

The evidence outlined in this chapter suggests that affect has an important and multifaceted influence on thinking and behaviour in relationships (Bradbury & Fincham, 1987). We saw that affective reactions play a crucial role in the organization and implicit representation of social encounters and relationship types. Affect was also found to have a significant mood congruent influence on social judgments and interpersonal decisions and attributions in relationships. Finally, affective influences on information processing strategies can have important consequences on how people process relationship relevant information.

Close relationships are characterized by the richness and variability of the shared knowledge between the partners, and frequently, the same event or behavior is understood and interpreted by the partners very differently, despite their extensive shared knowledge of each other and the context (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991). It is very richness and elaborateness of relationship information that makes mood effects particularly likely, as even a minor selective priming of positive and negative

memory-based information may have large consequences for what is remembered and used in forming a judgment. This is a phenomenon often observed in marriage counselling, and one of its underlying causes may well be the different feelings elicited by the same situation in two different people.

The studies outlined here indicate that affective states also have a potentially crucial influence on information storage and retrieval, and on social judgments, decisions and attributions. Critical decisions and judgments about a relationship or one's partner are more likely to be lenient and positive when a person is in a positive mood state, and more likely to be negative or critical when the judge is in a dysphoric mood. These affect infusion effects influence not only relationship evaluation and judgments but also impact on strategic interpersonal behaviors such as self-disclosure. Several of the experiments described here found that affect can influence the way people monitor and interpret their social encounters, the way they formulate and respond to requests, the way they plan and execute strategic negotiations, and the way they communicate intimate information about themselves (Forgas, 1998a,b 1999a,b). In contrast, as predicted by the AIM, affect infusion tends to be absent whenever a social cognitive task is performed using a highly motivated strategy. The processing effects of negative mood described here seem particularly intriguing, since these studies suggest that mild dysphoria could actually improve cognitive strategies and even result in superior interpersonal strategies (Forgas, in press).

Although much has been discovered about the information processing and representational functions of affective states in relationships, not enough of this evidence has so far come from research directly concerned with close relationships. This is all the more unfortunate as close relationships are particularly promising as an ecologically valid research domain concerning the links between affect and cognition. Given the growing sophistication of the theories and methods now employed in research looking at the interface of affect and cognition, the time seems ripe to apply these strategies to the investigation of the role of affect in real-life personal relationships.

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