Mood and Self-Efficacy: Impact of Joy and Sadness on Perceived Capabilities

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We examined the impact of happy and sad moods on efficacy judgments concerning a variety of activities. The mood was induced by having hypnotized subjects recall and revive their feelings about a romantic success or failure. Changes in efficacy that these memories induced were not restricted to the romantic domain but were also seen on interpersonal, athletic, and other activities remote from romance. The results suggested that emotional states have widespread impact on judgments by making mood-congruent thoughts more available. Implications for self-efficacy theory and practical applications are discussed.

Do people feel more competent when they are happy than when they are sad? Certainly when we consider our own experience, we would answer affirmatively. When we are sufficiently elated, we feel able to achieve our highest ambitions. On the other hand, when we are feeling low, failure seems inevitable.

Clinical observations also support an effect of moods on perceived capabilities. People in a manic phase often have inflated estimations of their own abilities and attempt to live out their grandiose delusions. Depressed people...
are notorious for their self-critical, negative opinions of themselves (Beck, 1967, 1976). Research on generalized self-appraisals is consistent with these introspections and clinical evidence. When people are sad, they have lower self-esteem than when they feel happy (Amrhein, Salovey, & Rosenhan, 1982; Kazdin & Bryan, 1971; Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1980). However, global self-appraisals have little correspondence with behavior (Bandura, 1977), so that these influences have little practical utility.

In contrast, judgments of self-efficacy regarding specific activities (Bandura, 1977) generally predict those specific performances accurately (Bandura, 1977; Bandura & Adams, 1977; Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977; Bandura, Adams, Hardy, & Howells, 1980; Bandura & Cervone, in press; Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Often self-efficacy judgments predict achievement even more closely than does past performance of the activity (Bandura et al., 1980; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Williams, Dooseman, & Kleifield, 1983). Self-efficacy judgments achieve their significance because people who have high self-efficacy about an activity are more likely to enter situations where the activity may occur and they will attempt more difficult variations of the task (Bandura, 1981). They also persist in their attempts for longer periods and expend more effort (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Brown & Inouye, 1978; Collins, 1981; Schunk, 1981). Furthermore, emotional arousal that might interfere with performance is much less when efficacy is high than when it is low (Bandura, Reese, & Adams, 1982). Thus, effects of moods on self-efficacy may have substantial practical importance.

Emotional arousal has always had a significant place in self-efficacy theory, although in early discussions it was described simply as one more source of information about performance (Bandura, 1977, p. 198). For example, assessment of your anxiety when contemplating a dinner speech provides some information about how well you will perform it. But we will argue for a much greater role for emotion in efficacy judgments. We hypothesize that emotions act like a filter through which people view efficacy information, determining which items of information become available and salient, and which frameworks people use to interpret and evaluate these selected data.

Support for our stronger claim comes from considering the nature of efficacy information in light of current knowledge about the impact of emotions on memory (see Bower, 1981). Performances on most activities show significant variability over time. Making foul shots in basketball, for example, is dependent not only on skill but on attention, luck, and effort invested on a particular occasion. Beyond the inherently probabilistic nature of the process, outcomes may vary due to systematic factors such as task demands and situational constraints that fluctuate over time. For instance, assertive behavior may be more difficult with some people or issues than with others, and the presence of observers may also affect performance. Since both per-