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On Being Cool and Collected: Mood Regulation in Anticipation of Social Interaction

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This study examined the influence of anticipated social interaction on the regulation of moods. Study 1 induced happy and sad moods through exposure to music. All participants expected to perform a 2nd, unrelated experimental task either by themselves or with another participant. Participants who expected to do the task alone subsequently selected positive and negative news stories equally, but those who expected to interact preferred stories containing material incongruent with their mood. Study 2 confirmed this outcome, but showed it was confined primarily to anticipation of interaction with partners who are expected to be in neutral or good moods themselves. In Study 3, participants whose mood was not manipulated reduced self-exposure to cheerful or depressing videos when they expected to interact with another.

> The secret of life is never to have an emotion that is unbecoming.—Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*

There is something uniquely private about emotion. A good or bad mood can provide the context for an engaging personal reverie when we are by ourselves, and we simply allow the mood to carry our minds wherever it leads. It is easy to get caught up in the moment and feel the emotion to the extreme. This luxury is snatched away abruptly, however, when we find ourselves facing the prospect of social interaction. Our prior emotions will likely be irrelevant to new interactions, and may even disrupt them, so we quickly attempt to pull ourselves together and get composed to meet people. We may not only try to overcome a dour mood to meet others, we may even attempt to squelch a giddy moment in anticipation of the calm exterior we hope to present. For social purposes, we try to be cool and collected.

This research examined the possibility that mood regulation can be prompted by the anticipation of social interaction and may to some extent depend on the characteristics of the situation. Such mood regulation can be expected on the basis of the general proposition that people engage in many forms of mental control for social purposes (e.g., Wegner & Erber, 1993); people seem to suppress some thoughts, emotions, or desires and concentrate in turn on others as a way of preparing themselves for self-presentation and social interaction. Our prediction follows even more specifically from the idea that social interaction imposes constraints on both emotional expression (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Goffman, 1963) and emotional experience (Hochschild, 1979, 1983, 1990; Lyman & Scott, 1968; Thoits, 1990).

To understand the social sources of mood regulation, it is important to begin with mood regulation per se. The current wisdom on the topic is very straightforward: If people do try to influence their moods, one obvious target is the bad mood. This observation has been captured in theories of mood regulation that focus primarily on mood itself as the motivation for regulation attempts (Clark & Isen, 1982; Klinger, 1982; Zillman, 1988). In this view, people are assumed to be motivated to avoiding bad moods and to approach good ones in a unidirectional effort to achieve a pleasurable state of mind.

This perspective suggests that people might be helpful to others in some circumstances because they hope to feel good as a result (e.g., Isen & Simmonds, 1978). People may be helpful in other circumstances to escape feeling bad (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Cialdini, Kenrick, & Baumann, 1982). People may boast in some settings and be modest in others in the hopes that good moods will be achieved (Baumgardner, Kaufman, & Levy, 1989). The pursuit of positivity probably does account for a wide array of instances of mood control, just as pleasure seeking seems to underlie a broad range of human behavior. Taylor (1991) reported that research evidence for seeking good moods and avoiding bad moods is commonplace, but that evidence for the opposing tendency is unavailable.

Despite the apparent absence of research findings that would run counter to this hedonic view of mood regulation, there are a number of reasons that cast doubt on its pervasiveness. For example, the finding that people are more likely to help when they are in a bad mood may not be due to their desire to make themselves feel better. Instead it appears that the observed link between bad

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mood and helping may be a result of a shift in attentional focus and increased objective self-awareness brought on by the presence of a victim (Carlson & Miller, 1987). Furthermore, it has been suggested that people fail to achieve their goal of a good mood because, for example, they lack the energy to try (Clark & Isen, 1982), they fail to execute effective strategies (Wenzlaff, Wegner, & Roper, 1988), they become involved in tasks that absorb their mood (Erber & Tesser, 1992), they do not have access to mood-relevant stimuli they might implement in their quest (Wegner, 1989; Zillman, 1988), or they adopt personal interpretations of what is pleasurable that depart from the more popular vision of good mood (e.g., Beck, 1976).

Apart from failing to achieve a good mood despite the best of intentions, there may be circumstances in which people forsake their pursuit of happiness at least temporarily. People may sometimes elect to modify their moods not just in response to perceptions of what is positive, but in response to perceptions of what is appropriate or fitting in light of possible constraints on their emotional experience. This suggestion begins to account for instances in which people are not primarily motivated to seek a good mood. Seeking out an appropriate mood means happiness when that is appropriate, and this will often be the case. When feeling good is not appropriate, however, this framework predicts the interesting possibility that mood regulation can occur in the direction of neutral or negative affect.

The question of what moods are "appropriate" is largely a social one. Just as good moods may be appropriate at circuses, on holidays, or during sex, neutral moods may be appropriate in line at the bank and bad moods may be perfectly appropriate at funerals, hospitals, or alone in one's room after a lousy day. Each setting may elicit some true mood—but carry with it in addition the expectation that this or quite another mood is appropriate for particular people in that setting. This modification of the hedonic view is not particularly useful in this form, however, as it only replaces a simple prediction with a multifariously complex one: Rather than trying to feel good, people try to feel whatever fits the situation—and there are many, many situations.

To make sensible predictions about how people would regulate their moods in the presence of social constraints it is necessary to recognize that the most general constraint on mood is aimed at mood eradication. In other words, in the absence of any information that would allow a person to distinguish what mood should be sought in a given situation, the best choice is to seek none at all. At times, we may enter into social interactions seeking approval (Carnegie, 1936). At other times it may be worthwhile to be perceived as scary, pious, pitiful, or otherwise (Jones & Pittman, 1982). A neutral mood would seem to be the best guess amidst the multiple mood affordances suggested by the complexities of social settings. This assertion is supported by the observation that people tend to moderate their attitudes prior to engaging in discussion about them with another person (Cialdini, Levy, Herman, & Evenbeck, 1973). It is interesting that this anticipatory attitude change is in the direction of the center of the opinion scale rather than in the direction of the actual or presumed position of the other. In other words, it appears that rather than trying to anticipate another's attitude and adjusting their own accordingly, people prepare themselves by moderating their attitudes. The implications of Cialdini, Levy, et al.'s (1973) findings for anticipatory mood regulation are fairly straightforward. It appears that if people are somehow inclined to regulate their mood in anticipation of social interaction, the direction of such regulatory attempts should be in the direction of neutrality, regardless of whether the initial mood is positive or negative.

Of course, affective neutrality is a concept in need of some clarification. A neutral mood is not the same as affective indifference, nor does it imply the assumption of moods as bipolar experiences. Rather, it is a readiness for involvement in interaction that suspends or erases prior mood. In this sense, it is the opposite of Goffman's (1963) description of individuals who indulge in private moods in public places: he called them "away." He observed that their private emotions and abstention from involvement in social life are taken as a sign of deviance and social estrangement. For this reason, "away" appears only in settings allowing deviance (e.g., a mental hospital) or promoting estrangement (e.g., a waiting room filled with strangers). To become involved in social interaction, then, is to cut short such private activity and reorient oneself to the social field at hand. This is done by inhibiting private states such as preexisting negative or positive moods, distracting oneself in service of neutrality, and thus becoming available for new involvement.

The neutralization of mood is an important tactic to learn as one develops. It is clear that whereas young children fail to regulate their moods, older children become capable of recognizing the importance of mood regulation prior to social contact. Harris (1989), Lewis and Michalson (1983), and McCoy and Masters (1990) have all emphasized the development of mood control as an important task children undertake with the aid of adults who are hoping the goal will be achieved before bedtime. Most of the research in this area has focused on the movement toward positive moods, but in many cases the control of negative affect in social settings also serves the goal of achieving neutrality (e.g., Masters, Ford, & Arend, 1983). To instill in our children a sense that pouting and crying are improper responses to the request of cleaning up one's room or an ill-chosen birthday present is, in fact, one of the most challenging tasks of parenthood. Thus, it is possible to suggest that children are responding not just to adult pressures to feel good, but rather to pressures to feel less.

The value of composure may be culturally universal (Lyman & Scott, 1968). Although there are societies that prefer agitation over cool in specific settings, preference for composure is the rule rather than the exception. There is a broad and consistent social predilection for "Coolness . . . the capacity to execute physical acts, including conversation, in a concerted, smooth, self-controlled fashion . . . or to maintain affective detachment during the course of encounters involving considerable emotion" (Lyman & Scott, 1968, p. 145). Why this preoccupation with coolness or affective neutrality? There are a number of possible reasons. To enter into a social interaction burdened with an unwanted mood may be perceived as a roadblock to the smoothness of an interaction, as Lyman and Scott suggested. Negative and perhaps even positive affective states may be perceived as a danger to commonly accepted display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1969) or as having the potential to impose one's own mood on the other (Masters, 1991). The focus of the present research is to explore the preference for being cool and collected in the laboratory by looking at mood regulation in response to anticipated interaction with a stranger. We

chose anticipation of social interaction for two reasons. First, it may represent one powerful set of circumstances placing constraints on our affective experience. Second, previous research has shown that anticipating interaction has a variety of effects in terms of how participants process information about those they expect to meet (Erber & Fiske, 1984; Forgas, 1991). Presumably, these information-processing differences stem from participants' desire to ready themselves for the interaction cognitively. On the basis of the foregoing discussion we would predict that participants might also show information-processing differences in the service of readying themselves for the interaction affectively.

Preliminary Research

In the first two studies we measured participants' tendency to neutralize their moods prior to an expected interaction with a stranger by looking at their choice of cheerful, depressing, or affectively neutral newspaper stories. Prior to their use in the main experiment the headlines were pretested with regard to the funniness and sadness of the corresponding story. A sample of 25 undergraduates used separate 5-point scales to rate the funniness and sadness for each headline. The results of this pretest are depicted in Table 1. Four of the headlines suggested that the corresponding stories might be cheerful or funny: "Adventurer aborts attempt to cross Bering Strait in a tub," "Speeding woman mistook police siren for screaming boyfriend," "Woman sues city, county after being hit by toilet," and "Cow burps threat to environment, EPA study claims." Four headlines pretested to suggest stories with a sad or upsetting content: "Nine men, woman rape a pregnant woman," "Man facing death penalty for killing tot," "Officials, witnesses say 62 people killed," and "Beached whale Odie dies of lung infection." Four more headlines pretested to suggest stories that were affectively neutral: "Crack for Bush gotten in federal sting," "Shuttle workers load Galileo on Atlantis," "Lung cancer clue found," and "USAir, NTSB discount report of crew drinking." The negative and neutral headlines were from newspaper articles that had appeared in the *San Antonio Express News* between September and October 1989; the cheerful headlines were from stories compiled in National Lampoon's *True Facts*. Regardless of their affective impact, all stories were pretested and found to be similar in terms of how interesting they were (*M*s = 2.83 to 3.52 on a scale from 1 [*not at all interesting*] to 5 [*extremely interesting*]).

Of course, the results of this first pretest are informative only with regard to the mood-altering qualities of the newspaper stories for people in whom no prior mood has been induced. There is a possibility that participants in happy or sad moods might show differential preferences for reasons other than to neutralize their moods. It may be that for people in a sad mood the positive stories seemed silly and trivial rather than cheerful. Similarly, people in a happy mood may avoid positive stories for fear of being or coming across as capricious. In light of these possibilities we conducted a second pretest in which we asked 60 undergraduates to rate the headlines in terms of how the accompanying stories would make them feel. Half the participants rated the mood-altering qualities of the stories if they felt happy; the remainder rated them if they felt sad. Participants made their ratings on 9-point scales ranging from *sad, depressed* (1) to *happy, cheerful* (9).

The results of this pretest indicated that participants believed that the stories would change their mood in the predicted direction regardless of how they felt to begin with. On average participants felt that the cheerful stories would make them feel happier ($M = 5.55$) and the depressing stories would make them feel sadder ($M = 2.85$) than the neutral stories ($M = 4.71$), $F(1, 58) = 118.42, p < .0001$. There were two exceptions to this general finding as evidenced by an interaction between type of story and type of mood, $F(1, 58) = 4.38, p < .05$. The nature of this interaction is depicted in Table 2. Newman-Keuls multiple

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Funniness and Sadness Ratings for 12 Newspaper Headlines (Pretest 1)

	Funny		Sad	
Headline type	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Cheerful headlines				
Adventurer aborts attempt to cross Bering Strait in a tub	4.03	1.03	1.03	0.25
Speeding women mistook police siren for screaming boyfriend	4.58	0.84	1.03	0.47
Woman sues city, county after being hit by toilet	4.34	1.04	1.32	0.69
Cow burps threat to environment, EPA study claims	3.90	1.17	1.31	0.65
Neutral headlines				
Crack for Bush gotten in federal sting	1.83	0.94	1.53	1.05
Shuttle workers load Galileo on Atlantis	1.35	0.60	1.10	0.39
Lung cancer clue found	1.03	0.18	1.35	0.84
USAir, NTSB discount report of crew drinking	1.32	0.74	1.87	1.31
Depressing headlines				
9 men, woman rape a pregnant woman	1.26	0.75	4.71	0.63
Man facing death penalty for killing tot	1.03	0.18	3.74	1.44
Officials, witnesses say 62 people killed	1.03	0.25	4.10	1.02
Beached whale Odie dies of lung infection	1.39	0.83	4.13	0.89

Note. Higher means indicate stronger affect. Scores could range from 1 to 5.
EPA = Environmental Protection Agency; NTSB = National Transportation Safety Board.

comparisons revealed that, first, the cheerful stories were perceived to be more happiness inducing by participants who imagined themselves to feel sad (M = 5.87) than by participants who imagined themselves to feel happy (M = 5.24), $p <$ .05. Second, the difference in the ratings of the mood-altering qualities of the neutral stories and the cheerful stories did not quite reach acceptable levels of significance for participants who imagined themselves to feel happy, although the means were in the predicted direction (M = 5.24 vs. 4.82).

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Ratings of the Affective Impact of Cheerful, Neutral, and Depressing Stories as Conveyed by Their Headlines for Participants Who Imagined Themselves to Feel Happy or Sad (Pretest 2)

	Story type		
Imagined feeling	Cheerful	Neutral	Depressing
Happy			
M	5.24	4.82	2.80
SD	1.03	.94	.83
Sad			
M	5.87	4.60	2.90
SD	1.11	.89	.84

Note. Higher means indicate more happiness. Scores could range from 1 to 9.

Experiment 1

Method

Overview. Undergraduate participants took part in an experiment on judging newspaper writing. They were exposed to cheerful or sad music and then asked to rank order a number of cheerful, sad, and neutral newspaper headlines according to how much they would like to read the stories. Prior to ranking their preferences, all participants had been informed that there would be another task immediately following the ratings task. Half the participants expected to do this task alone, and the remainder expected to do the task with another participant. The rankings of the newspaper stories served as an indication of participants' attempts to control their moods.

Participants. Sixty-four undergraduates (18 men and 46 women) participated in the experiment in exchange for course credit. They were randomly assigned to conditions with the stipulation that there be equal cell frequencies.

Mood inductions. The present study used cheerful or depressing music to induce either a happy or a sad mood. The musical selections were the same as those used by Wenzlaff, Wegner, and Klein (1991). Two different tapes were used to induce a happy mood: selections from David Byrne's "Beleze Tropical, Brazil Classics 1," or Hubert Law's jazz version of Bach's "Brandenburg Concerto No. 3." The tapes used to induce a sad mood were "Russia Under the Mongolian Yoke" and "Field of the Dead" from Prokofiev's "Alexander Nevsky, Op. 78," or Keith Jarrett's "Spheres, Movements 6 and 7." To avoid altering participants to the relevance of mood to the experiment, checks on the manipulation of mood were not included in the present study. Checks reported by Wenzlaff et al. (1991) indicated in one experiment that there were robust differences in self-ratings of mood between groups of participants played these happy and sad tapes, and in a second experiment that these ratings were also significantly different in the expected directions from the mood ratings made by participants who heard a neutral tape. In this study as in those, participants were not informed that the experimental purpose of the tapes was to induce mood change (cf. Slyker & McNally, 1991).

Procedure. In an attempt to ensure that the experimenter collecting the dependent measure was blind to the mood conditions, we used two experimenters. Prior to each participant's arrival, the first experimenter began to play a tape containing either the cheerful or depressing music. When participants arrived, she explained that the experimenter who was supposed to run the session was held up and asked participants to wait in the room for a few minutes. She then left the room and returned 10 min later to announce that the main experimenter was on her way. She then turned off the tape, signaled the second experimenter to start the session, and left the room. The second experimenter waited in a classroom across the hall and received the signal only after the tape had been turned off to be unaware of the type of music participants listened to.

After getting participants' informed consent, the second experimenter explained that the session involved two brief, unrelated experiments. The first one involved judgments of the impact of newspaper writing. The second one involved an unspecified task to be completed in a room across the hall. For participants who had been assigned to the anticipated interaction condition, the experimenter added that "when you are done with the newspaper stories, there will be a second task where you will have to work with another person in the other room." For participants assigned to the no anticipated interaction condition the experimenter explained that "when you are done with the newspaper stories, there will be a second task where you will work by yourself in the other room." Following this manipulation of anticipated interaction, the experimenter explained that participants' task in her experiment was to read and rate short newspaper stories. She added that she had more newspaper stories than participants could possibly read and asked participants to rank order their preference for 12 stories based on the stories' headlines.

The experimenter handed participants a list of 12 headlines from actual newspaper articles. After participants completed the rank ordering of their preferences, the experimenter indicated that the experiment was over and debriefed participants.

Results

We had asked participants to rank order their preferences rather than indicate them on a rating scale primarily because we felt that it was a better approximation of how people make these types of decisions. Unfortunately, the increased ecological validity of our measure left us with data that could not easily be analyzed by means of an analysis of variance (ANOVA). To get around this problem we created a positivity index based on the results of our second pretest, which had suggested a linear increase in the mood-altering qualities of the stories from the depressing ones to the cheerful ones. Specifically, we multiplied the ranks of positive stories by 3, the neutral stories by 2, and the negative stories by 1. That way a lower score indicates a relative preference for more cheerful information and a higher score indicates a relative preference for more depressing information. To test our hypothesis that participants would attempt to neutralize their positive and negative moods prior to interacting with a stranger through selective exposure to mood-incongruent stories, we submitted their average positivity scores to an ANOVA with mood (positive or negative), anticipation of interaction (no, yes), as well as participant gender as between-subjects factors. The analysis yielded two effects. First, there was a main effect for gender, indicating that women on average preferred more depressing stories (M = 13.10) than men (M = 12.49), $F(1, 56) = 4.28$, $p < .05$. More important, there was a significant interaction between induced mood and anticipation

of interaction, $F(1, 56) = 8.86$, $p < .005$. Table 3 illustrates the nature of the interaction. Note that higher numbers indicate a preference for depressing stories. Planned comparisons between participants' relative preferences indicated that participants who did not anticipate to interact with another preferred mood-congruent stories. In the positive mood condition they preferred more cheerful stories ($M = 12.43$), whereas participants in the negative mood condition preferred more depressing stories ($M = 13.37$), $t(56) = 2.35$, $p < .05$. This proclivity to prefer mood-congruent stories was diminished when participants anticipated interacting with another participant. In this case participants in a positive mood preferred more depressing stories ($M = 13.33$), $t(56) = 2.25$, $p < .05$. Analogously, participants in a negative mood who had anticipated interacting with another preferred more cheerful stories ($M = 12.59$), $t(56) = 2.00$, $p < .05$. This shift in preferences as a result of anticipating interaction represents a marginally significant reversal toward preference for mood-incongruent stories ($M =$ 13.33 and 12.59, respectively), $t(56) = 1.85$, $p < .08$.[1]

Discussion

The results support the theoretical notion that participants will attempt to regulate their moods in anticipation of social interaction with a stranger. Participants who were in a good mood and knew that they would be by themselves sought out more positive information than participants in a negative mood. This proclivity for mood-congruent material is consistent with prior research on mood congruency (e.g., Blaney, 1986; Clark & Isen, 1982; Erber, 1991; Forgas & Moylan, 1987; Isen, 1984).

A very different picture emerged, however, when participants anticipated to interact with a stranger following the exposure to the musical mood induction. In this case, participants in positive and negative moods alike began to seek out mood-incongruent material, stories that had the potential to counteract their mood. It is important to recognize, too, that this effect is not attributable to any difference between the no-interaction groups and the anticipated interaction groups in their perception of later task engagement. Participants in both conditions expected that there would be another task following the main experiment, with the only difference being that some participants expected to do this task with someone else. And it was these participants who chose reading material likely to counteract their mood.

We do not know whether moods in fact were changed by the readings. Thus, the actual effectiveness of mood regulation activities is not revealed in this experiment. This, however, is not at issue. What is important to note from these findings is that people undertake activities clearly relevant to mood in the presence of anticipated social interaction, and that these activities have as their goal self-exposure to information incongruent with ongoing mood. It would be of interest to learn when and under what conditions such attempts reach their intended goal, as such research might create links between the study of attempted mood regulation and actual mood change (cf. Wegner, 1989; Wenzlaff et al., 1988).

The results of this experiment are open, of course, to a variety of theoretical interpretations. Most of these suggest limits on the general idea that people might always try to neutralize their moods in anticipation of social interaction. It might be argued that such mood regulation could be dependent not only on perceived appropriateness in the social setting, but also on the perceived characteristics of the interaction partner. It is not clear whether a person would neutralize a mood on coming to interact with close friends or intimates, for example, or if the person would neutralize a mood on coming to interact with others who already were experiencing the same mood. Continuing our focus in this article on the mood-regulation effects of antici-

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for the Affective Valence of Story Preferences as a Result of Induced Mood and Anticipated Interaction (for Experiment 1)

	Anticipated interaction	
Mood	No	Yes
Positive		
M	12.43	13.33
SD	1.03	1.17
Negative		
M	13.37	12.59
SD	1.19	1.02

Note. Higher means indicate higher preference for depressing stories. Scores could range from 10.33 to 15.67.

[1] Despite the advantages of computing an overall positivity score for data-analytic procedures, there are possible problems as well. Specifically, the score could conceal rather than reveal the nature of participants' preferences, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer. Consider, for example, a hypothetical participant who gives the four sad stories rankings of 1 to 4, gives the four happy stories rankings of 5 to 8, and gives the four neutral stories rankings of 9 to 12. This pattern would yield a score of 14.33. Now, consider another hypothetical participant who gives the four sad stories rankings of 5 to 8, gives the happy stories rankings of 9 to 12, and gives the neutral stories rankings of 1 to 4. This participant's score would also be 14.33 despite the fact that the rankings reflect very different preferences. As a check against the possibility that our overall positivity score may have been composed of an inordinate number of such cases, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using average ranks of positive, neutral, and negative headlines as a within-subjects factor with higher numbers indicating higher preferences. This analysis revealed a significant three-way interaction among mood, anticipation of interaction, and preferences, $F(4, 120) = 4.11$, $p < .02$. Participants in a happy mood, who did not anticipate to interact with a stranger, preferred cheerful ($M = 6.97$) and neutral ($M = 6.63$) stories over depressing stories ($M = 5.81$). This preference for mood-congruent information was reversed for happy participants who expected interaction. They preferred happy stories less ($M = 5.61$) than neutral ($M = 6.78$) or depressing stories ($M = 6.88$). Participants in a sad mood, who did not anticipate to interact with a stranger, showed an increased preference for depressing stories ($M = 7.53$) compared with neutral ($M = 5.67$) and cheerful ($M = 6.30$) stories. Again, this pattern was reversed for sad participants who expected interaction. Participants in this condition preferred cheerful ($M = 6.85$) and neutral ($M = 6.90$) stories over depressing stories ($M = 5.75$). Because this pattern of findings is essentially consistent with the one obtained using the transformed scores, we are cautiously confident that the transformed scores accurately reflect the valence of participants' informational preferences.

pated interaction with strangers, this latter hypothesis was the focus of our second experiment.

Experiment 2

People may think that a neutral mood will be most generally appropriate when they enter into an interaction with a stranger. It is also plausible, however, that they assume that others—about whom they know nothing—are themselves in a neutral mood. Thus it may be that participants in Experiment 1, rather than trying to neutralize their mood, tried to get themselves into a mood that matched the assumed mood of the other person. This explanation becomes especially reasonable when one considers that interactions between people whose moods are mismatched could potentially be quite awkward.

The way to tease mood neutralization apart from mood matching is to vary the mood of the person with whom participants expect to interact. If a motive to match the other's mood was in fact responsible for the findings of Experiment 1, one would expect participants to engage in information-seeking behavior designed to bolster a prevailing mood when the other is in the same mood and to reverse a prevailing mood when the mood of the other does not match one's own.

Method

Overview. We once again varied participants' moods by exposing them to cheerful or depressing music. All participants then were led to anticipate interaction with another participant who was described to them as being in a positive, neutral, or negative mood.

Participants. Seventy-two undergraduates (31 men and 41 women) participated in the experiment in exchange for course credit. They were randomly assigned to conditions with the stipulation that there be equal cell frequencies.

Procedure. The procedure of this experiment was largely identical to the procedure used in Experiment 1. The exceptions were that following the mood induction participants were all told that there would be a second experiment in which they would have to work with another participant. In addition, the experimenter explained that one of the goals of this second experiment was to find out whether knowing something about one another made a difference in how well participants did in that second experiment. Therefore, participants were to fill out a brief form about themselves. The experimenter added that the participant was in a condition in which he or she was to learn about the other participant but the other participant did not get to learn about him or her.

The experimenter then left the room, ostensibly to see if the other participant was done filling out the form. In fact the experimenter went to a folder containing three different forms already filled out. To ensure that the experimenter was blind to conditions the three forms were placed in the folder upside down, and he or she picked the one on top without looking at it. The forms contained responses to biographical questions (age, hometown, year in school) and to the questions "Why did you choose UVa?" ("My sister went here," "It has a good reputation and it is very inexpensive") and "How do you like Charlottesville?" ("The people seem to be pretty friendly, but a lot of the city is very separate from the university," "The surrounding countryside is very beautiful"). Following these responses, which were identical in all conditions, were the alleged participant's verbal responses to the question "How are you feeling right now?" and his or her response on an 11-point rating of current mood. The scale ranged from −5 (*very bad*) to +5 (*very good*).

In the positive other condition, the response read "Pretty good, I actually feel really happy" and was accompanied by a +4 on the mood scale. In the negative other condition, the response read "Not very good, I'm feeling kind of bummed" and was accompanied by a −4 on the mood scale. Finally, in the neutral other condition, the responses were "OK" and 0, respectively. When participants were done looking at the information about the other, they were given the list of headlines and indicated their preferences.

Results

We again created an overall positivity index of participants' preferences and submitted the resulting scores to an ANOVA with participants' mood (positive or negative), other's mood (positive, neutral, and negative) as well as participant gender as between-subjects factors.[2] The analysis yielded three significant effects. First, as in Study 1, women on average preferred more depressing stories (M = 12.93) than men (M = 12.52), $F(1, 60) = 7.78$, $p < .01$. Second, participants in a positive mood preferred more depressing stories (M = 13.09) than participants in a negative mood (M = 12.41), $F(1, 60) = 10.20$, $p < .01$. This uniform preference for mood-incongruent information may reflect the fact that all participants expected to interact with a stranger. The third and theoretically most important result was an interaction between participants' mood and the alleged mood of the other, $F(1, 60) = 5.73$, $p < .01$. Apparently, mood of the interaction partner does influence the degree of mood neutralization people seek. Table 4 illustrates the nature of this interaction. Planned comparisons between participants' preferences in the six experimental conditions revealed three significant differences. This pattern of differences did not correspond to a simple version of mood neutralization but even less to a straightforward application of a mood-matching rule or a hedonic rule. Instead it suggests a general pattern of neutralization qualified by some interesting exceptions.

First, as might be expected from Experiment 1, participants anticipating interaction with neutral others showed clear evidence of neutralization. Those in a positive mood who were expecting to interact with a neutral other preferred more depressing stories (M = 13.61) than those in a negative mood (M = 12.04), $t(60) = 3.82$, $p < .01$. Thus, it seems that anticipated interaction with a neutral other produces the same impetus toward mood neutralization observed in the prior experiment to follow from anticipated interaction with another whose mood is unknown.

Interestingly, this pattern of neutralization was no longer observed when participants expected to meet another who was in a negative or a positive mood. In these conditions there were no significant differences between participants in good moods and participants in bad moods with regard to their preferences for cheerful and sad stories. There was a marginally significant tendency on the part of negative-mood participants to seek out more depressing stories when the other was in a negative mood (M = 12.70) rather than a neutral mood (M = 12.04), $t(60)$ =

[2] As in Study 1, we conducted a MANOVA using the average ranks of positive, neutral, and negative headlines as a within-subjects factor. This analysis yielded the expected three-way interaction among participant's mood, other's mood, and story preference, $F(4, 120) = 2.81$, $p < .05$, with the pattern of means matching the pattern of means obtained on the transformed scores. Thus we are confident that, as in Study 1, the transformed scores adequately reflect the valence of participants' informational preferences.

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for the Affective Valence of Story Preferences as a Result of Induced Mood and Mood of Anticipated Other (for Experiment 2)

	Mood of anticipated other		
Participant mood	Neutral	Negative	Positive
Positive			
M	13.61	12.56	13.10
SD	1.07	1.05	1.01
Negative			
M	12.04	12.70	12.51
SD	1.08	.68	1.00

Note. Higher means indicate higher preference for depressing stories. Scores could range from 10.33 to 15.67.

1.61, $p < .15$. Whereas this could be taken as tentative evidence for the application of a mood-matching rule, the behavior of positive-mood participants did not fall in line with mood matching. Instead, among these participants a quite different pattern emerged in that they preferred more cheerful stories when they knew the other was in a bad mood ($M = 12.56$) compared with when the other was in a neutral mood ($M = 13.61$), $t(60) = 2.91$, $p < .01$. The pattern of results to this point suggests that one exception to mood neutralization occurs when a person in a good mood expects to interact with an unhappy other. In this case, neutralization is abandoned in favor of a tendency to try to maintain or even bolster the positive mood.

The other exception to neutralization appears to involve mood matching. The participants whose moods were matched with those of their anticipated interaction partners showed no strong preference for stories, with only slight and nonsignificant tendencies toward mood neutralization. Happy participants expecting to meet a happy other showed a very small and nonsignificant preference for depressing stories compared with sad participants expecting to meet a sad other. Thus, it appears that something akin to mood matching may short-circuit mood neutralization attempts under some circumstances. Specifically, knowing that one will interact with another whose mood matches one's own appears to deflect any strong preference for counteracting one's current mood.

Discussion

Taken together, these experiments provide evidence for the idea that people are likely to regulate their moods in preparation for social interaction. The data support the idea that such regulation attempts are directed primarily toward neutralizing an existing positive or negative mood when the anticipated interaction is with a stranger. The results of Experiment 1 suggest this conclusion in a straightforward manner, in that anticipated interaction with a person whose mood was unknown produced clear indications of self-exposure to material incongruent with own mood.

The picture that emerges from Experiment 2 is similar although somewhat more detailed. It appears that the evidence for neutralization continues to be strong when people are explicitly told that their upcoming partner will be in a neutral mood, and that it is strong as well when unhappy participants are led to expect interaction with someone who is happy. Significant evidence of neutralization was not found in this study under two circumstances: when participants were expecting to interact with someone who already shares their mood and when happy participants were expecting to interact with someone sad.

Before attempting to put forth potential theoretical accounts for these cases, it is necessary to look at the outcomes of the two studies in light of possible alternative explanations. Our explanation for the observed shift in preferences from mood-congruent material to mood-incongruent material hinges in large part on the assumption that this is motivated by a desire to be unburdened with a mood that might be inappropriate for the anticipated interaction with a stranger. However, our desire to manage our moods in this way may be due to more instrumental motives as well. Specifically, there is evidence that people engage in mood management prior to undertaking a task requiring cognitive resources (Erber & Erber, 1994). In the present studies, all participants expected to do a task either by themselves or with another participant. It is therefore possible that participants may have attempted to regulate their moods not so much in preparation for the anticipated interaction per se, but instead specifically to prepare for working with another participant.

A second problem with interpreting the observed shift in preferences as indicative of participants' desire to change their mood away from positive or negative prior to the anticipated interaction stems from the nature of our dependent measure. Looking at participants' preferences for cheerful or depressing stories may be a less-than-perfect way to assess attempts at mood management. People are notoriously drawn to bad news. Most likely this fascination with the misery of others is not caused by a deep-seated desire to make us feel miserable. Rather, it could be due to a desire to make us feel better by means of social comparison (Wills, 1981). In other words, reading depressing stories could make us feel better as we realize that the undesirable events we are reading about are not happening to us (Wheeler & Myake, 1992). From this point of view, the negative mood participants in Study 1 may have preferred happy stories to make themselves feel better, and positive mood participants may have preferred sad stories also to make themselves feel better through downward comparison.

Experiment 3

In light of the previous possibilities, we conducted a study that would allow us to more clearly show that participants would engage in mood regulation specifically prior to anticipating social interaction rather than anticipating a task, use a more direct measure to assess participants' mood regulation strategies, and shed additional light on the generality of the phenomenon under investigation. This third study is based on the premise that participants whose mood was not experimentally manipulated and who expected to interact with a stranger would actively avoid exposure to material that could change their mood in either a positive or negative direction.

Method

Participants and design. Sixty undergraduates (33 women and 27 men) participated in an experiment on social interaction. They were

randomly assigned to watch either a happy or depressing video. Half of the participants did this with the expectation that they would subsequently meet another participant. The other half expected to fill out questionnaires on their opinions about social interactions. The amount of time participants spent watching either video served as the dependent measure.

Procedure. Upon arrival participants were told that the purpose of the experiment was to explore social interaction patterns and styles. Participants who were led to anticipate interaction were told that they would be meeting with another participant of the same gender. Participants were further told that, following the interaction, "we would like you to give your opinion of the interaction and the other person." Participants not anticipating interaction were told that they would be "completing a set of questionnaires in order to explore your opinions about social interaction, and how you feel about meeting with other people." Following these instructions, all participants were told that their participation in the study would last for about half an hour. Because participants received credit for 1 hr of participation, a faculty member asked that participants in the study rate some videos for use in the future. The experimenter added that participants should do this rating task first because the videos were very brief, and because she still had to either greet the other participant or prepare the questionnaires. Both sets of participants were told that the experimenter would leave the room while they watched the videos. Participants in the interaction condition were reminded that they would meet their interaction partner upon completion of the ratings task. Participants in the no-interaction condition were told that they would be filling out the social interaction questionnaires.

Following these instructions, the experimenter seated participants in front of a television monitor, which was connected to a videocassette recorder (VCR), and told them that they were to watch a video clip first and then fill out a questionnaire. To increase the credibility of the cover story, the experimenter held up a copy of the alleged questionnaire and then placed it on a table out of participants' sight. She then inserted one of two unlabeled videotapes into the VCR. One tape contained a 15-min clip of comedy routines by Robin Williams and Ellen DeGeneris (cheerful tape). The other tape contained a 15-min clip of a documentary on homelessness (depressing tape). The experimenter told participants to feel free to watch as much of the video as they wanted. She then handed them a remote control and told them to stop the tape as soon as they felt that they had watched enough. Before leaving the room, the experimenter reminded participants once again that they would either be meeting another participant or complete social interaction questionnaires upon completion of the video ratings task. For both conditions, she added that she would return in 10 min. Participants then watched either one of the two videos. After 10 min had elapsed, the experimenter returned, recorded the time participants had watched the video from the VCR display, probed participants for suspicion, debriefed them, and thanked them for their participation. None of the participants was able to guess the experimental hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

The only dependent measure was the time participants spent watching the cheerful or depressing tape. We submitted this measure to a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA with anticipation of interaction (no or yes), valence of tape (cheerful or depressing), and gender as between-subjects factors. The only significant effect that emerged from this analysis was a main effect for anticipation of interaction. Consistent with our theoretical expectations, participants spent less time watching either kind of tape when they expected to interact with another participant (M = 318.33 s) than when they expected to fill out questionnaires (M = 442.13 s), $F(1, 52) = 10.36, p < .01$.

The observation that participants reduced exposure to potentially mood-altering information when they expected to interact with another suggests that they may have tried to avoid attaining a mood that would be inappropriate for interacting with a stranger. Prolonged exposure to cheerful or depressing material changes participants' moods in a positive or negative direction, which is one reason why this technique is frequently used to induce happy and sad moods in the laboratory. By the same token, reduced exposure to cheerful or sad material helps avoid the onset of either type of mood.

Of course, one could argue that the reduced self-exposure to mood-altering material as a result of anticipating interaction may be due to something other than participants' concern for affective appropriateness. Specifically, participants may have been more anxious to meet someone than to fill out questionnaires. We cannot rule this interpretation out entirely. However, the experiment went through considerable lengths to minimize any difference in the valence of the task participants expected to do. Participants in the no-interaction conditions expected to fill out questionnaires that asked them about their opinions and feelings about social interactions. Furthermore, because the experimenter told participants that she would return in 10 min, they had no reason to believe that they would get to meet their interaction partner sooner if they turned the VCR off earlier. Instead, how quickly participants could proceed with the interaction part of the experiment was entirely determined by the return of the experimenter. Thus, we are fairly confident that the observed reduction in exposure to cheerful and depressing material, observed among participants who expected to interact with another, reflects their desire to avoid attaining a mood that could be inappropriate for that particular situation.

Note that we refrained from collecting self-reports of participants' mood following exposure to the videos. There were good reasons not to include such a measure. First, we reasoned that participants in the anticipated interaction conditions would most likely turn the video off once they realized their mood was about to change in a positive or negative direction. From this vantage point, one would essentially predict a null effect between the two interaction conditions. Null effects are notoriously fraught with considerable interpretational ambiguity (cf. Cohen, 1995). Furthermore, participants would have completed their self-reports immediately following exposure to the videos. It might well have been possible that the demand inherent in such a procedure would have contributed to obscuring any possible differences that may have existed between the two interaction conditions based on an average exposure difference of just over 2 min.

General Discussion

The results of the three studies combined provide a good deal of evidence for our social constraints model of mood regulation. Study 1 shows that happy and sad participants' usual preference for mood-congruent material changes when they expect to interact with a stranger. In this case, they prefer mood-incongruent material, presumably to attenuate the previously induced mood states. Study 3 shows conceptually similar findings for participants whose mood was not experimentally manipulated, and using a more direct measure of their information-seeking behavior. The observation that participants attempted to avoid

both cheerful and depressing information without expecting to work on a task suggests that the shifts toward avoiding mood-congruent information are primarily due to the anticipation of social interaction rather than concerns about mood impeding task performance.

The finding of Study 2 that participants do not neutralize their mood when they anticipate being with someone of their own mood, for instance, seems to indicate that something like a motive for mood matching may be operative. People may not try to overcome happiness or sadness when they expect soon to be among others who are of the same mind. It is interesting, though, that this preference for mood matching operated only to stop neutralization and did not operate here as a motive to instigate mood change in general.

If mood matching were a general motive, overall movement toward others' moods should occur. It would be expected that happy participants would try harder to become sad when they planned to meet a sad person and that sad participants would try harder to become happy when they planned to meet someone who was already happy. There was no evidence that people anticipate and try to adopt the moods of their partners in this way, as there was no main effect for partner's mood in the experiment, and no evidence either that greater discrepancies of own and other mood might prompt mood regulation in the direction of the other. Rather, mood matching simply worked to block the normal process of neutralization—stopping people from seeking mood-incongruent stimuli when they saw that their partner shared their current mood. If our data offer evidence in favor of mood matching, in short, they suggest only that it operates to preempt the more normal process of neutralization.

The other exception to mood neutralization observed in Experiment 2 may stem from a different source that is also of theoretical interest. Recall that among participants who were happy, the expectation of meeting someone in a sad mood did not bring about any tendency toward neutralization—and instead prompted a slight trend toward bolstering the happy mood through the choice to read happy news stories. It does seem clear in this case that neutralization is forsaken when it promises to bring us down just in time to meet someone who is likely to bring us down yet further.

The anticipation of meeting an unhappy other may be a special case that prompts self-protective mood bolstering. Although this was not observed as a significant contrast in this research, it remains a key exception to the more general trend toward neutralization. Indeed, the slight tendency we observed in Experiment 2 for sad participants to seek out happy experiences before meeting a sad person might also be taken as indicative of a self-protective response to anticipated interaction with an unhappy other. (This exception, it should be remembered, might also be accounted for as an instance of mood matching as well.)

Sad people, at any rate, present the individual with troubling prospects for subsequent interaction. Depressed people can be unusually demanding. Thus they may invite negative behavior from others (Horowitz et al., 1991) and easily bring on negative moods in their interaction partners (Coyne et al., 1987). It may be that with this in mind, people expecting to interact with sad others make preparations for siege by neglecting their more usual tendency to neutralize their moods. Dissipating a happy mood just when it might serve as an important buffer against the contagious sadness of another would seem to be particularly foolish. Thus, in the case of sad others people may neglect their more common impulse to neutralize their good moods for social interaction.

Having noted the case of meeting a sad other as a major exception, the results of our three experiments, on balance, are supportive of the idea that people will attempt to neutralize their moods in anticipation of social interaction. In the first two studies evidence was found that happy people seek out sad experiences specifically in an effort to undermine a happy mood. In the third study we found that people avoid happy experiences, presumably to avoid attaining a happy mood in the first place. Although somewhat counterintuitive, such strategies makes good sense if one assumes, as does Goffman (1963), that, all else being equal, social interactions with strangers are the wrong settings in which to indulge in private emotions.

Reasoning from this conclusion, it is possible to suggest that some anticipation of interaction may be present whenever people engage in mood neutralization. So, for example, the present findings might be extended to offer an interpretation of the observation that people often retrieve autobiographical memories that are incongruent in affective tone with their mood during retrieval (Parrott & Sabini, 1990). On its face, this finding is somewhat perplexing because it appears to imply that people might always attempt to neutralize their moods. However, our results suggest that this observation might be limited to experiments in which participants anticipate interaction with others. Parrott and Sabini did not explicitly manipulate such anticipation, but the perception of possible interaction with the experimenter or others may have been enough in this setting to create the observed mood-incongruity effects. Rather than an anomaly, these memory results may represent an instance of socially induced mood regulation.

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