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The What, When, and How of Affective Influences on Interpersonal Behavior

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The primary strength of the affect infusion model (AIM) is its ability to integrate the different ways in which affect influences cognition and behavior. The model is founded on the assumption that there is no single way in which affect influences cognition and behavior, and this much is surely correct. Further, the model integrates the different ways in which affect influences cognition and behavior by arguing that the openness and constructiveness of the prevailing processing strategy (whether that process involves high effort or low effort) determines whether there is "affect infusion". This infusion may result in mood congruence effects on the contents of cognitions and behaviors or in effects on the way in which information is processed (e.g., top down vs. bottom up).

In his target article Forgas (this issue) demonstrates how predictions regarding interpersonal behavior can be derived from the AIM, and he reviews the results of a considerable number of studies that test these predictions. In commenting on the target article we use our observations about the strength of this evidence as a means of making some more general observations about the AIM.

One difficulty we had with the evidence reviewed in the target article concerns the extent to which the AIM as such is needed to account for several of the findings presented. For example, in the studies using the restaurant scenario (Forgas, 1993, 1995), mood effects were more pronounced when participants were presented with badly matched as opposed to well-matched couples. This is in keeping with a rather large body of literature showing that mood is likely to have a greater impact on ambiguous stimuli than on unambiguous stimuli. Forgas assumes that badly matched couples required more lengthy and extensive cognitive processing, but there is no direct evidence to support this assumption, and in the absence of such evidence it seems more parsimonious to interpret the effect as representing the influence of mood on ambiguous stimuli.

In another study, Forgas and Gunawardene (2000) found that positive mood resulted in a greater incidence of positive social behaviors than did negative mood. Is this evidence of mood congruence, or is it simply evidence that different affective states are accompanied by different behaviors? The difference is a subtle but nevertheless important one. Emotion theorists (see, e.g., Frijda, 1994a; Levenson, 1994; Scherer, 1994) assume that emotions and other affective states have an impact on behavior. From such a perspective it

is hardly surprising to find that people who are induced to feel happy by watching a pleasant videotape behave differently than do people who are induced to feel sad by watching an unpleasant videotape. In our view, the influence of the affective state on social behavior is often more direct than that proposed by the AIM, where the affective state primes positive or negative cognitions and thereby promotes positive or negative social behavior.

What is missing from this study (apart from a control condition in which participants were in a neutral state) is evidence that affect infusion into social behavior only occurs when an "open, constructive strategy" is used. In the absence of evidence that the impact of affect is contingent on type of processing strategy, it seems to us that a conventional emotion-theory account offers a more parsimonious account for the findings.

A similar sort of problem afflicts the next set of studies summarized by Forgas. These concern the influence of affect on making a request to another person. The theoretical argument offered is that the influence of affect on requesting should be greater if the request is a complex or difficult one to make. The findings show that, by comparison with sad participants, happy participants preferred more direct, impolite requests, were more likely to formulate such requests, and were more likely to say that they would use such requests in a range of social situations. Is this evidence of the influence of affect on the way in which participants cognitively represented the situation, which in turn had an effect on their social behavior, as Forgas argues, or is it a reflection of the fact that happy people are more confident than sad people and are therefore more willing to use direct (and possibly impolite) forms of request? Again, the latter explanation seems more parsimonious than the one offered by the AIM. What we miss from these studies is evidence that the influence of a given affective state on social behavior varies as a direct function of the processing strategy employed.

The next set of studies reviewed by Forgas concern responses to requests. In effect, these are studies of the impact of affective state on helping behavior. Consistent with much previous work (see Schaller & Cialdini, 1990), participants in a negative mood state were less helpful than were participants in a positive mood state. The most important finding from this study is the one that comes closest to providing the evidence that we regard as crucial to an AIM explanation. The influence of

affect was greater when the request was impolite and unconventional than when it was polite and conventional. If one assumes that responding to an impolite and unconventional request demands more substantive processing, then these findings suggest that the impact of affect is indeed dependent on processing strategy. As evidence that the impolite and unconventional request induced more substantive processing, Forgas cites evidence that such requests were better recalled than were polite, conventional ones. Indeed, this is hardly surprising, in the sense that atypical events are by definition more attention grabbing and should therefore be easier than typical ones to recall (see Fiske & Morling, 1995). Does the fact that something is recalled more easily later mean that it was processed more substantively at the time of occurrence? That one cannot recall an episode does not necessarily mean that one did not process it carefully in the first instance. It is worth remembering that dual-process theories of persuasion (e.g., Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) do not appeal to memory for message content as an index of processing strategy but rather to the ratio of positive to negative cognitive responses that are evoked by messages that vary with respect to argument quality. Ideally, a conceptually similar index of processing strategy would be used in research testing the AIM. Such a measure would reflect the openness and substantiveness of the prevailing processing strategy without depending on recall or recognition of the stimulus materials.

The next set of studies in Forgas's target article are concerned with bargaining and negotiation. Happy participants were found to be more optimistic and cooperative than control or negative-mood participants, and happy participants were also more cooperative and achieved better outcomes than did those in a negative mood state. Again, these effects are interpreted in terms of affect selectively priming mood-congruent thinking, giving rise to greater optimism and cooperation or pessimism and competition. As evidence that these effects are dependent on processing strategy, Forgas cites variations due to individual differences. Machiavellians and need for approval moderated the effect of mood on negotiation strategies and outcomes, which is interpreted as evidence that mood only influences those who use what Forgas refers to as open processing. Another way to state this would be to say that mood has a greater influence on those who are open to the influence of contextual factors, one of which is mood. It is still unclear whether the impact of mood is moderated by differences in processing style, as the AIM would have it.

The next sequence of studies, on persuasive communication, examines the interesting issue of how affect influences the production of persuasive messages. Those in a negative mood state produced higher quality, more persuasive messages than did those in a posi-

tive mood state, with neutral mood state participants falling between these two. Interesting as this finding undoubtedly is, we had some problems reconciling it with another finding from the same study, namely that positive mood state had a beneficial effect on the originality and creativity of the arguments. There seems to us to be a certain tension between the two sets of findings, stemming from the fact that originality and creativity are often regarded as attributes of high-quality arguments.

A further issue is that these findings are interpreted as showing that positive-mood participants engaged in "top-down, internally driven" processing, whereas negative mood participants engaged in "bottom-up, situationally oriented" processing. Here we run into one of the unclaritys of the AIM, as we see it: Does affect shape processing strategy and thereby influence cognitions and behaviors, as in these persuasion studies, or is the influence of affect on cognition and behavior contingent on the type of processing strategy being employed? In the first case, processing strategy mediates the impact of affect on cognition and behavior; in the second, it moderates the impact of affect on cognition and behavior.

Of course, processing strategy could in principle play both types of role, and in his target article Forgas claims that both moderation and mediation effects can occur. However, the mediation role is not very clear, given that it is stated that "affect can also mediate the extent of affect infusion once substantive processing is adopted" (Forgas, this issue). Exactly what is being mediated here remains ambiguous. Furthermore, it is not clear to us when moderation and when mediation should occur. It is apparent that substantive processing is a precondition for affect infusion, but once somebody is processing substantively his or her affective state can also influence the degree to which the processing is top down versus bottom up. What is presumably intended is that the moderating role of processing strategy is responsible for the effects of affect on the content of cognition and behavior (i.e., mood congruence), whereas the mediating role of processing strategy reflects the influence of affect on the process of cognition. However, there is a potential overlap between the openness of the prevailing processing style and the degree to which it is top down versus bottom up, with top down being less open than bottom up. This blurs the distinctions between the content and process effects of affect and between the moderating and mediating roles of processing style.

A related but more general observation about the target article concerns the precision and consistency with which constructs and terms are defined and used. For example, regarding the different cognitive processing strategies that are mentioned, terms such as *open* and *constructive* processing strategies are used without being sufficiently clearly defined, with the re-

sult that some apparent inconsistencies creep in. Forgas (this issue) argues that “open, elaborate, and constructive thinking” is assumed to draw on “their own memory-based ideas to produce an appropriate response.” To us this suggests internally driven, top-down information processing. Forgas further distinguishes between “direct-access processing,” “motivated processing strategies,” and two other processing styles, “heuristic” and “substantive.” Substantive processing is an instance of open and constructive processing, and yet here it is assumed to require individuals to “select, encode, and interpret *novel* information and relate this information to their preexisting memory-based knowledge” (italics added). This implies an emphasis on situational aspects as opposed to internally driven processes. Likewise, in this discussion both heuristic and substantive processing are assumed to be open types of processing, yet later in the paper heuristic processing is assumed to be more internally driven and top down, as opposed to substantive processing, which is assumed to be more careful and more bottom up. Terms such as *open*, *constructive*, and *substantive* are by no means synonymous, and yet they seem to be used interchangeably in the context of the AIM. They may well point to the same underlying process, but the way in which they do so should be more tightly specified.

A somewhat similar point concerns the different terms that are used to refer to affective states. Forgas is quite explicit about the fact that most of the research he summarizes in the target article is concerned with the impact of mood states on interpersonal behavior, yet throughout the article we find references to “happy” and “sad” participants, which suggests that emotional states are involved, and at certain points of the paper specific emotions such as sadness, anger, anxiety, and regret are mentioned. Most emotion theorists draw distinctions between moods and emotions (see, e.g., Frijda, 1994b) and between their likely effects on cognition and behavior (see Clore & Gasper, 2000). It would be helpful if the AIM were to make similar distinctions.

In summary, there is much to commend the AIM. It seeks to provide a comprehensive description of the different ways in which affect can influence cognition and behavior and—more important—an account of the conditions under which these influences occur and the processes that are responsible for such effects. The target article summarizes theory and research in which the AIM is used to account for affective influences on interpersonal behavior. The studies reviewed provide compelling evidence of the influence of affect on different types of interpersonal behavior (i.e., the “what”). Less compelling, to our way of thinking, is the evidence concerning the conditions under which

this influence occurs (i.e., the “when”) and concerning the processes that are responsible for such influence (i.e., the “how”). As the author himself acknowledges, a great deal more research is needed.

Note

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