

ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Effect of Induced Positive, Negative, and Neutral Mood on Rejection Sensitivity

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PAGES: 86

Previous studies have demonstrated a moderate correlation between rejection sensitivity and depression. In a study of college females, researchers found that high levels of rejection sensitivity were associated with higher BDI scores following a partner initiated breakup (Ayduk, Downey, & Kim, 2001). Another study found that rejection sensitivity and depression are positively correlated for both males and females (Mellin, 2008). No studies to this date have examined the causal effects of depressed mood on rejection sensitivity, however. Cognitive theories would suggest that the relationship between the two may be reciprocal, with trait rejection sensitivity eliciting depression, but then the resulting depression priming individuals to be more sensitive to rejection. The current experiment investigates the causal effects of manipulated mood on levels of rejection sensitivity. Participants were 88 undergraduate students from a mid-sized Midwestern university. Participants were randomly assigned to experience a positive, negative, or neutral mood induction,

using videos. Participants then completed the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS-X), to check the effectiveness of the mood induction procedure, and then the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ), to examine participants' levels of rejection sensitivity. A one-way ANOVA on the PANAS-X scores indicated that the mood induction procedures were effective. Joviality scores were significantly higher in the positive mood group, than the neutral mood group, which were significantly higher than the negative mood group. Sad scores were significantly lower in the negative mood group than the neutral mood group, which were lower than the positive mood group. An ANOVA comparing RSQ scores was significant. Follow-up Tukey HSD tests indicated that participants in the positive mood group reported statistically lower levels of rejection sensitivity than those in the negative and neutral groups (who did not differ). Correlational analyses indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between PANAS Sad and RSQ scores ($r = .258$) and a significant negative correlation between PANAS Joviality and RSQ scores ($r = -.257$). These findings indicate that engaging in activities that elicit a positive mood (e.g., watching uplifting video clips) makes people feel good and allows them to develop different perceptions about social situations and rejection. It also provides support for the utility of positive psychology interventions.