

# Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal

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Volume 1 | Issue 4

Article 4

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5-2006

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Leaha Sharpe  
*Lindenwood University*

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### Recommended Citation

Sharpe, Leaha (2006) "Moods and Their Effects," *Undergraduate Psychology Research Methods Journal*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.

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## **Moods and Their Effects**

**Leaha Sharpe**

**Lindenwood University**

*The purpose of this project is to find out whether positive or negative moods will carry over into an experiment with a simple fill in the blank statement, which states, “When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_”. Participants used in this study consisted of 50 undergraduate student volunteers from Lindenwood University. The participant was asked to answer the previous statement and then to fill in a questionnaire regarding the current and normal moods of the individual. Statistically, there was no significant correlation between the statement and the current mood of the participant. It is concluded that participants answered either positively or negatively for reasons other than the participant’s current mood.*

When participating in different types of interactions, people realize that their moods have the ability to make other individuals’ moods change in order to feel similar to the mood of their own. Why is that? It is most likely that people do not have any intent to carry over their negative or upsetting moods into other situations, but does it happen? The problem under investigation in this experiment is to determine whether or not individuals carry over their moods and emotions from one experience to another situation.

Sometimes, people do not even realize how or if their mood affects others. Moreover, if it does have an effect, it could be a negative influence if they are in a bad

mood or mindset. “A number of conceptualizations of mood and emotions have been applied to help explain their influences on decisions” (Schwarz, 2000, as cited in Magnan, 2005, 1). It is true that every individual experiences both negative and positive affects in his or her lives. These affects can then influence the daily lives of others by disrupting their positive moods and by possibly casting a negative state of mind over to another individual. Positive affect is the presence of emotions such as excitement, joy and happiness, whereas negative affect is the existence of aversive emotions such as feeling depressed, anger or sadness. These affects can result in making the wrong decisions in important situations; therefore, carrying over negative moods can be hazardous to individuals.

There are numerous consequences that could result from the decisions that people make, therefore, individuals should not carry over negative moods into other circumstances in order to make clear, rational decisions. For example, Loewenstein and Lerner (2003), (as cited in Magnan, 2005, 1) describe two different types of affective influences that seem to play a role in a person’s decision-making including immediate and expected emotions. When a person makes a decision based on immediate emotions, they take into account the emotions experienced at the time the decision was made. When a person makes a decision based on expected emotions, they attempt to predict the emotional consequences associated with each course of action (Meilers & McGraw, 2001).

Magnan (2005) stated that mood might have influence on a situation but only to a certain extent, the extent to which the mood itself is interpreted. Then why do

individuals interpret moods in such ways? It is difficult for people to avoid the obvious moods of an individual when the mood is just coming off and creating a dark cloud over everything in sight.

Positive and negative moods also have affects, not only on our decisions but also on the processing of information that we take in as humans. “Behavioral decision making research has provided extensive documentation that framing normatively equivalent information in positive versus negative ways, so-called valence-based framing, may systematically affect the decisions or actions decision makers take” (Kaufmann & Kuvaas, 2004, 60). In general, it is true that positive moods or emotions are associated with more effective and less biased processing of information than negative mood.

The purpose of this project was to find out whether positive or negative mindsets or moods would carry over into an experiment with an easy fill in the blank statement, “When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_”. By reviewing a questionnaire, the experimenter would be able to find out small details of what has been occurring in the lives of the participants and thereby judge whether or not their recent situations have had an effect on their mood that perhaps carried over into the experiment.

The experimenter hypothesized that participants would answer this statement, “When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_,” based on the recent mood and events that had occurred in the participants’ lives. More specifically, the experimenter believed the majority of students who answered the statement negatively, such as evil, jealous or deceiving, etc., would have had some experience recently that had

brought on this negativity. The experimenter was predicting that the same would be true for positive answers, where students who answer the statement positively would have recently experienced something that has brought on this positivism.

The experimenter was interested in testing this experiment because she would like to see if certain events have more of an effect on the participant's answers and whether or not they carried over from one situation to another. If people were to know the results from this study they may then realize that bad moods carry over into other life situations. They could also then change their mood for the better to help make clearer decisions and also be able to process information much healthier.

The participants were provided with a small sheet of paper with only one statement written on it. They were asked to fill in the blank with the first initial thought that came to mind. The participants would then be provided with a short questionnaire. The questions consisted of items such as asking about how they are feeling at the current time and what has happened recently in his or her life that possibly could have affected his or her moods during the experiment. Also, on the questionnaire were issues concerning the participant's normal mood to see if there was a difference in the participant's current and normal moods and if that mood could have then had an effect on the answer to the statement, "When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_".

## Method

### *Participants*

Fifty undergraduate Lindenwood University students volunteered and participated in the experiment regarding current moods in relation to recent experiences. Thirty-four participants were male and sixteen participants were female. All of the students were recruited as volunteers for this experiment. The experimenter recruited participants by means of requesting students in the experimenter's classes as well as in the computer labs to participate in the experiment.

### *Materials*

In this study, the experimenter used the following materials. A pen was provided for the participants so that they were able to fill out all of the information that was required of them; such as the informed consent and a questionnaire (see Appendix A). The experimenter also needed a pen in order to sign the informed consent of each participant. Also provided for the participant was a small piece of paper with, "When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_" written on it (see Appendix B). A questionnaire was also used in this study in order to determine the participant's current and normal moods as well as why the participant answered the statement the way he or she did.

The setting for the experiment consisted of an informal atmosphere with a desk, and one chair for each the participant and the experimenter. The setting varied for many participants. However, all participants took part in the study in a classroom setting, but not necessarily the same one. The rooms all had sufficient lighting. However, the rooms

may have had some minor distractions to the participants due to people coming in and out of the room for the mere factor that it was shared with professors and their students. The experimenter also had a watch in order to tell the time of each experiment and to make sure we were staying in the time range listed in the recruitment description.

### *Procedure*

When the participant came in, the experimenter invited him or her to sit down in a chair in front of the desk. The experimenter was seated on the other side of the desk with all of the necessary paperwork and materials at hand. The experimenter then handed the participant two informed consent forms, one of which the participant kept and the other which the experimenter kept for her own record. After the participant had signed the form, the experimenter asked him or her to fill out the following statement, “When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_”, with the first thing that came to the participant’s mind.

Then the experimenter provided a questionnaire for the participant to answer with questions concerning the current and normal moods of the participant. The questionnaire was a short seven-question survey of questions regarding how the participant was feeling at the time of the experiment as well as how the participant would rate their normal mood on a scale from 1-10 (1 being extremely depressed or upset and 10 being extremely happy). After the participant completed the questionnaire, the experimenter debriefed the participant and handed out a feedback letter with a contact number.

## Results

A chi-square analysis was conducted on SPSS to show whether participants' responses to the statement, "When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_", correlated significantly with the current mood of the participant. Results from the chi-square test indicated that it is approaching significance with a value of  $p = .073$ . The statistical notation of the chi-square was  $\chi^2_{(49)} = 5.225$ . The experimenter found that 52% of participants experienced emotional or physical pain recently, but an even higher percentage of participants (78%) experienced joy or happiness in the past couple of days prior to the experiment. According to the findings, 84% of the participants that volunteered for this study stated that he or she were currently dealing with stress in their lives. Perhaps this may have had an impact on the large amount of negative answers to the statement, "When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_".

One of the questions on the questionnaire asked if the participant had experienced any sort of emotional or physical pain recently and 60% of participants who answered yes also had a positive answer to the statement, whereas only 44% of participants who answered no to the same question had a negative answer to the statement (see Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1. Response type by whether or not subjects experienced emotional or physical pain recently**

		Response Type		
		Positive	Negative	Totals
Experienced any emotional or physical pain recently?	YES	14 (60%)	12 (44%)	26 (52%)
	NO	9 (40%)	15 (56%)	24 (48%)
	Totals	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50



Similarly, 82% of participants with a positive answer stated that they had experienced joy and happiness recently and only 74% of participants who answered no agreed that they had not experienced any sort of joy or positivism recently (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2. Response type by whether or not subjects experienced joy or happiness recently**

		Response Type		
		Positive	Negative	Totals
Experience any joy or happiness recently?	YES	19 (82%)	20 (74%)	39 (78%)
	NO	4 (18%)	7 (26%)	11 (22%)
	Totals	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50

Lastly, 83% of participants who answered the statement with a positive answer stated they were currently dealing with stress in their lives while 88% of participants who answered the statement negatively agreed to currently dealing with stress (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3. Response type by whether or not subjects are currently dealing with stress in life**

		Response Type		
		Positive	Negative	Total
Currently dealing with stress in life?	YES	18 (78%)	24 (88%)	42 (84%)
	NO	5 (22%)	3 (12%)	8 (16%)
	Totals	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50

In addition, the participants were asked to rate what his or her normal mood was on a scale of 1-10 using the same scale (1 being extremely depressed or upset and 10 being extremely happy). Statistics show that 95% of participants who answered the

statement positively, normally rate themselves as positive people (see Figure 4). On the other hand, 92% of participants who answered the statement negatively, normally rate themselves as positive (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 4. Response type by subject's current mood**

		Response Type		
		Positive	Negative	Totals
Current Mood	Unhappy	0 (0%)	4 (15%)	4 (8%)
	Neutral	4 (17%)	4 (15%)	8 (16%)
	Happy	19 (83%)	19 (70%)	38 (76%)
	Totals	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50

**FIGURE 5. Response type by subject's normal mood**

		Response Type		
		Positive	Negative	Totals
Normal Mood	Unhappy	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)
	Neutral	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	2 (4%)
	Happy	22 (96%)	25 (92%)	47 (94%)
	Totals	23 (46%)	27 (54%)	50

## Discussion

This experiment did not lend support to what was predicted by the hypothesis. Statistically it was not significant that participant's current moods have any effect on a simple fill in the blank statement. However, the statistics showed that the correlation was approaching significance. The hypothesis stated that the current moods of individuals would be reflected from the answer to the statement, "When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_". The hypothesis was proven to be approaching significance but not quite there yet, because 76% of participants confirmed that they were currently in a positive mood, however, only 46% answered the statement positively. Perhaps with more participants, this experiment could retain more accurate results.

The vast majority of participants rated themselves normally with a positive outlook or mood, even though 54% of participants answered the question negatively. This is similar to Jundt (2002) findings that stated, "High levels of positive affect result in shallower thinking and lead to decisions that rely more on simple, heuristic-based information processing, such as those found with judgmental biases. It is also believed that high levels of negativity, result in more in-depth, systematic thinking" (1). Perhaps, since the experimenter asked the participants to answer the statement with the first initial thought that came to the participant's mind, they may have not had time to think about what they truly believed, but rather just a superficial thought.

The timing of the experiment could have had an impact on the participant's moods due to the fact that the majority of the research took place directly after Spring break. This extraneous variable could have changed some participant's moods to be

more positive and perhaps less stressed. This variable could have had an effect on making the participant's recent moods more positive due to a week free of homework and exams.

One of the limitations of this study was the number of participants recruited. Unfortunately, with only fifty participants, all being students from Lindenwood University, the experimenter was not able to get a clear representation of the population. In addition, perhaps the experimenter could have had a different statement that would have gotten students to think more about moods and not merely the participant's opinions concerning other individuals.

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### **Author Note**

Leaha Sharpe, undergraduate student at Lindenwood University.

I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Scribner for providing me with inspiration for the basis of this research project.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Leaha K. Sharpe,

Email: [leaha2004@yahoo.com](mailto:leaha2004@yahoo.com)

## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

1. Are you a...  
Male                  Female
  
2. How would you rate your current mood?  
(1 being extremely depressed or upset and 10 being extremely happy)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
  
3. Have you experienced any sort of emotional or physical pain or sorrow in the past couple of days?  
Yes                  No  
  
Can you explain more?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Have you experienced any sort of joy or happiness in the past couple of days?  
Yes                  No  
  
Can you explain more? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Are you currently dealing with stress in your life?  
Yes                  No  
  
If so, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Why did you answer the statement concerning humans the way that you did?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. How would you normally rate your mood on the same scale of 1-10?  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## **Appendix B**

### **Test Statement**

ID #:

When it comes down to it, people are basically \_\_\_\_\_.