Laugh and Be Happy
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INTRODUCTION

• Often described as a cognitive disorder, depression is characterized by negative schemas that guide cognition (Koster, De Lissnyder, Derakshan, & De Raedt, 2011) due to unbalanced inhibitory processes (Dai & Feng, & Koster 2011).
• Consequently depressed individuals show severely reduced inhibition for negative words compared to normal controls (Dai, Feng & Koster, 2011).
• Although such inhibitory patterns account for the cognitive component of depression as described in the literature, it cannot explain why therapies employing positive mood inductions are effective.
• The current study looked at how the relationship between depressed trait was affected by a positive mood induction.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS
96 female undergraduate students ($M_{age}=19.13$ $SD=1.74$ $Min=17$ $Max=26$) with normal or corrected to normal vision, and without a history of depression or anxiety, were recruited via the online Research Participation System at Simon Fraser University.

DESIGN
In the Negative Affective Priming (NAP) task subjects respond to one word while ignoring another.

Ignored Repetition (IgnRep):
Previous distractor and current target share a valence.

Control:
Previous distractor was neutral.

NAP Effect:
For each word valence NAP = RT IgnRep – RT Control

RESULTS

Positive Emotions x NegWordNAP
Positive Emotions x NegWordNAP
Positive Emotions x NegWordNAP

CONCLUSIONS

Results support previous work done by Booy & Liotti (submitted) suggesting a mood induction results in mood congruent rumination. However contrary to expectations, higher depressed trait scores was associated with lower inhibition for positive words. This may indicate a subconscious compensatory mechanism, to prevent a depressed episode.

LIMITATIONS

The variability in the current task is very large, likely due to a number of factors. First subjects are of various ethnic backgrounds and English speaking ability thus some subjects were much slower than others. Second, subjects were run at different times of day which may have impacted responsivity to the mood induction and reaction times. Third, Words were selected to control for arousal level and valence. However, differences in word frequency and familiarity likely contributes to the variability in the data.

REFERENCES

• Booy, R. M., & Liotti, M., (Submitted). State and trait influences on inhibition in pre-clinical depression.

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