Title: SPRING BREAK OR HEART BREAK? EXTENDING VALENCE BIAS TO EMOTIONAL WORDS

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Ambiguous stimuli are useful for assessing individuals’ biases toward positivity or negativity. For example, images of surprised faces presented without context could convey a positive (unexpected gift) or negative meaning (seeing a car crash). The degree to which an individual tends to interpret ambiguity as negative measures their “valence bias” and characterizes their affective style. Currently, the most well-validated sets of ambiguous stimuli for assessing valence bias include nonverbal signals (images of faces and scenes), overlooking an inherent ambiguity in verbal signals (language). This study contributes a set of ambiguous words (as well as lexically-matched clear-valence words) to further capture emotional bias toward positivity and negativity. Using an initial list of 630 words chosen from existing stimulus sets, 103 participants rated each word as positive or negative. From these pilot data, we selected 32 words with dual valence ambiguity (i.e., low response consensus in ratings and relatively slow response times) and 32 words with clear valence (16 positive, 16 negative). To demonstrate generalizability in valence bias, we compared ratings of this final set of words to ratings of faces and scenes in a new sample of 87 adults (36 female, 51 male). Valence bias for ambiguous words was significantly correlated with ratings for ambiguous (surprised) faces (*r*(85) = .23, *p* = .031) and scenes (*r*(85) = .49, *p* < .001). These findings suggest that valence bias generalizes to verbal ambiguity and thus provide a novel way to measure valence bias.

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