# The Beneficial Effects of Sadness on Decision-Making

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## Introduction

- The feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012) contends that our emotional state (e.g., anger, happiness, sadness, etc.) tells us about our environment.
- When a person is in a sad mood, it tells that person that something in their environment is wrong and needs to be fixed, which encourages them to think about what might be the cause and how to resolve the problem (Schwarz, 2012).
- Researchers demonstrated a beneficial effect of sadness in a legal setting. Reinhard and Schwarz (2012) found that people in a sad mood were better at detecting lies than happy individuals.

**Hypothesis**:

- Based on the feelings-as-information theory (Schwarz, 2012) , we hypothesized that individuals in a sad mood would engage in a systematic processing style that would lead to more analytic decisions and social judgments.

## Methods

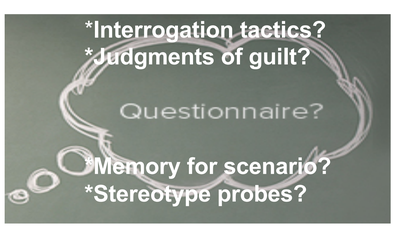
- Participants ($N$ = 200; 60% female; $M_{age}$ = 37, $SD_{age}$ = 11.74) were collected through Amazon's mechanical Turk (mTurk).

**Part 1**

Induced mood with videos , writing, and music

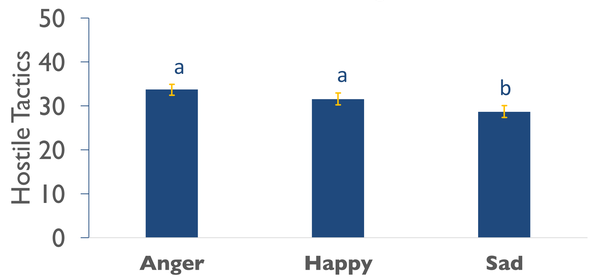

**Part 2**

Imagined interrogation scenario followed successful mood induction

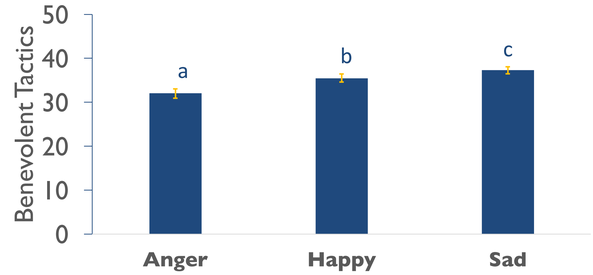



## Results

*Decision Making*

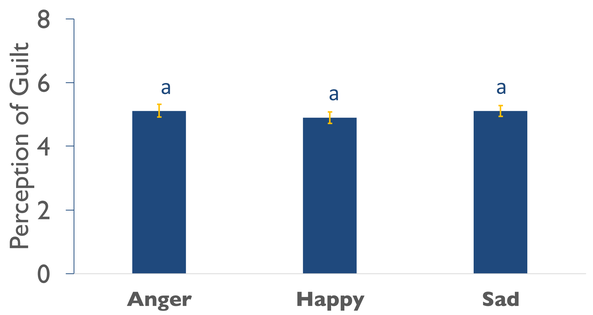



- *Hostile Tactics:* As expected, we found differences in emotion such that angry and happy individuals were more likely to decide to use hostile tactics compared to individuals in the sad condition, $F(2,197) = 3.50$, $p < .05$, Partial $\eta^2 = .034$.




- *Benevolent Tactics*: In contrast to hostile tactics, we found that sad individuals are more likely to decide to use benevolent tactics compared to angry or happy individuals, $F(2, 197) = 6.26$, $p < .01$, Partial $\eta^2 = .06$.

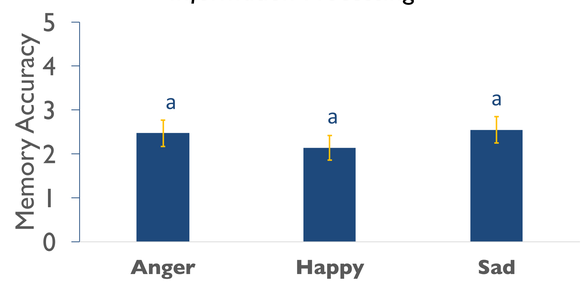
*Social Judgments*




- *Social Judgments:* There were no differences in social judgments such that each emotion condition could not determine if the person was guilty or not, $F(2,197) = .46$, $p > .05$, Partial $\eta^2 = .004$.

## Results

*Information Processing*




- *Information Processing:* In contrast with our hypothesis, information processing, assessed by memory accuracy, did not differ between emotion groups, $F(2, 197) = .484$, $p > .05$, *Partial* $\eta^2 = .004$.

## Conclusions

**Take Home Message**:

- Sadness may help us to think more critically. Other emotions, like anger, may make us less likely to think critically. We should try to harness those beneficial effects when possible.
- Individuals whose actions regularly have severe consequences (e.g., law enforcement, doctors, etc.) should strive to be aware of the ways their emotions affect their thinking and behavior both positive and negative.

**Future directions**:

- Because it is not practical to induce sadness into interrogators, we will try to identify the mechanisms by which sadness enhances these critical thinking skills. Additionally, future research should investigate the minimum intensity one needs to experience each emotion in order for its effects to take place. This critical value could be helpful in determining if a person should make a "big" decision given their current mood.

## Acknowledgments

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