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The Influence of Individual Differences in Emotional Clarity on Sensitivity to Situational Cues

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THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL CLARITY ON SENSITIVITY TO SITUATIONAL CUES

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ABSTRACT

The influence of individual differences in emotional clarity on the use of situational cues in decision making was investigated. Accuracy of situational cues was manipulated in the form of ostensible previous ratings given to participants while viewing pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant pictures. Of importance to this study was whether persons low in emotional clarity would rely more on situational cues, regardless of their accuracy, than would persons high in this trait. Personality was assessed using two scales which measure emotional clarity. Self-monitoring was also examined as a possible moderator of any findings. Contrary to predictions, our findings indicated that individuals low in emotional clarity relied more on situational cues than individuals high in this trait only when the ostensible previous ratings were accurate. Possible explanations for these results are discussed.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, David and Amy, who always encouraged me to pursue my education and provided me with unconditional love and support throughout the course of this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Emotions have traditionally been viewed as irrational, and emotionality has often been conceptualized as an undesirable characteristic. At some point in our lives, we have all been given the advice, “Try not to be so emotional and think of a rational solution to your problem” or “Don’t let your emotions cloud your judgment”. However, many researchers of emotion have suggested that this negative conceptualization of emotion is inappropriate, and it has been hypothesized that emotional experience actually provides important information necessary to make judgments (e.g. Clore et al., 2001; Gohm & Clore, 2002a; Schwarz & Clore, 1996).

What is meant by the term emotion, as opposed to affect or mood, is often a topic of much confusion. Are these terms interchangeable? According to Gohm and Clore (2000), affect is “a broad category including any representation of value (goodness or badness), preferences and attitudes (affective dispositions), as well as emotions and moods (affective states)” (p. 679). Affective states involve positively and negatively valenced feelings which characterize both moods and emotions (Gohm & Clore, 2000). By this definition, emotion and mood are simply different types of affective states. According to Batson, Shaw, and Oleson (1992), affect involves a change in value state, whereas mood involves anticipation of future affective states, and emotion involves the existence of a present goal. Morris (1992) suggests that moods involve internal states, whereas emotions involve appraisals of external situations. One last distinction between emotion and mood is that emotions are affective states which focus on particular objects, whereas moods are affective states which have no specific focus (Averill, 1980; Clore,

1992; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Schwarz & Clore, 1988). An example of the relationship between affect, emotion, and mood involves an individual who receives good news from the doctor. Initially, he/she may feel overjoyed upon hearing the news. After leaving the doctor's office, he/she may experience generally pleasant feelings such as happiness, optimism, or peacefulness for no particular reason. In this example, all of the feelings experienced are affective states, where joy is the emotion resulting from the good news and the generally pleasant feelings comprise the mood which is not attached to any specific event.

A major theory that attempts to explain the effects of mood on judgment is the affect-as-information hypothesis, which states that individuals frequently use their current affective states as informative cues when evaluating and making decisions about their environments (Clore, Gasper, & Garvin, 2001; Clore et al., 2001; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Researchers working from this perspective suggest that feelings are helpful in decision making because they provide information about how one feels toward a particular person or object. In fact, there is a significant amount of research which provides evidence for moods and emotions being used in decision making, judgments, and communicating information (e.g., Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2006; Buck, 1984; Cabanac, Guillaume, Balasko, & Fleury, 2002). Specifically, Gouaux (1971) found that individuals were more likely to rate others as more attractive when they were in a positive mood and less attractive when they were in a negative mood (see also Gouaux, Lamberth, & Friedrich, 1972). In another study, participants served as mock jury members of a bankruptcy case and read descriptions of different outcomes of the bankruptcy, which varied by levels of distress caused by this event (Kadous, 2001). Kadous found was that participants who read the more distressing consequences were more likely to provide a guilty verdict for the accused than were those who read less distressing outcomes. Johnson and Tversky (1983) had

participants read either a positive or negative story, and then had them make estimates on the likelihood that certain risks would occur. They found that individuals who read negative stories rated the risks as more likely to occur than did those individuals who read positive stories. Similarly, Schwarz and Clore (1983) had participants describe positive and negative events and found that they reported greater life satisfaction after describing positive events than after describing negative events. In this same study, Schwarz and Clore (1983) used the weather to manipulate mood and found that participants reported greater satisfaction when the weather was pleasant (warm and sunny) than when it was unpleasant (cold and rainy). Therefore, it is clear that affect serves as an important influence when people make decisions about their environments. However, the proposed study is concerned specifically with emotions and the effects of emotions on judgment.

More recent research has attempted to expand upon the affect-as-information hypothesis by focusing on individual differences in the experience of emotions and how they may influence the use of affect in evaluative processes. Gohm and Clore (2000) identified and defined four latent traits which relate to different aspects of emotionality. These traits include clarity, intensity, attention, and expression. According to Gohm and Clore (2000), *clarity* refers to emotional understanding, and is the extent to which a person is clear about his/her emotions; *intensity* is the magnitude with which an individual typically experiences emotion; *attention* refers to the extent to which an individual monitors and values his/her emotions; and *expression* concerns the extent to which a person displays his/her emotions (see also Gohm & Clore, 2002a, 2002b). Research indicates that these traits are somewhat independent of each other and are manifested differently in individuals. For example, Gohm (2003) examined individual experiences of emotion over three studies and identified four types of persons, labeled

overwhelmed, hot, cerebral, and cool. Overwhelmed individuals reported moderately attending to their emotions, experiencing them intensely, but not understanding their emotions. Persons labeled as hot reported frequently paying attention to their emotions, experiencing them intensely, and also understanding their emotions. Cerebral individuals tended to experience emotions less intensely, identify and describe their emotions well, but pay little attention to them. Lastly, persons labeled as cool reported experiencing their emotions mildly, being unclear about them, as well as not attending to their emotions. Thus, this research provides evidence that individuals differ in the traits of emotional clarity, expression, attention to emotion, emotional intensity independently.

Therefore, if individuals differ in their experience of emotion, the processes by which they use their emotions to make evaluations may also be influenced by such experiences. In fact, there is research evidence which supports this idea. For instance, people who scored low on measures of clarity, average on attention, and high on intensity reported feeling more typically influenced by their moods than others (Gohm, 2003). Gohm, Baumann, and Sniezek (2001) examined firefighters and found that individuals who scored high in emotional clarity were less likely to experience cognitive difficulties when in stressful situations and were able to think more clearly during their drills. In another study, Gohm and Clore (2002b) found that individuals who typically pay attention to their emotions, experience emotions strongly, or express their emotions often tend to choose coping strategies which involve seeking social support or venting. In the same study, they found that persons who tend to be clear about their emotions and understand them typically use active coping strategies that involve making a plan or using positive reinterpretation of the problem. Lastly, Gohm (2003) found that individuals who scored high on emotional measures of intensity, attention, and clarity made judgments that were consistent with

their moods; such that individuals in the negative mood condition considered negative events more likely to occur than individuals in the positive mood condition. Therefore, it seems likely that these individual differences in clarity, attention, intensity, and expression have important implications for decision making. However, the present research will focus specifically on the latent trait of clarity.

Emotional clarity deals with the extent to which individuals typically understand their emotions as well as how clearly individuals tend to experience their emotions (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). The potential benefits of understanding one's emotions have been well supported by previous research. For example, Mueller and Curhan (2006) found that people with greater emotional clarity reported more satisfaction in an interpersonal negotiation and reported greater liking for their partners during the negotiation task. In addition, emotional clarity is associated with openness, conscientiousness, lower social anxiety, belief in negative mood repair, greater empathy, lower levels of depression, and positive psychological well-being (Coffey, Berenbaum, & Kerns, 2003; Emmons & Colby, 1994; Gohm & Clore, 2002b; Salovey et al., 1995; Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002), and individuals with emotional clarity generally tend to experience more positive affect (Emmons & Colby, 1994; Lischetzke & Eid, 2003). Conversely, emotional clarity is negatively associated with depression, ruminative thought, vulnerability to distress, and ambivalence over emotional expression (Salovey et al., 1995; Lischetzke & Eid, 2003). Individuals who understand their emotions also tend to choose adaptive coping strategies such as positive reinterpretation, and recover more quickly from induced negative moods (Gohm & Clore, 2002b; Salovey et al., 1995).

On the other hand, research conducted on low emotional clarity supports seemingly less desirable outcomes. For example, low emotional clarity is positively related to neuroticism,

ruminative thought, difficulty coping during stressful situations, self-consciousness, and cognitive processing difficulties in schizotypal individuals and negatively related to psychological mindedness, extraversion, need for cognition, and openness (Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994; Berenbaum et al., 2006; Coffey, Berenbaum, & Kerns, 2003; Kerns, 2005, 2006; Salovey et al., 1995). In addition, Berenbaum & Irvin (1996) found that people who have difficulty interpreting and describing their emotions are more likely to express anger; and Prince and Berenbaum (1993) found that these individuals experience less positive emotion when engaging in social situations.

According to Robinson and Clore (2002a), the ability of individuals to make accurate decisions using their affective states requires these affective states to be accessible. For example, Damasio (1994) found that individuals who have suffered brain damage and have an inability to use their emotions as feedback show impairment in making everyday decisions, and he suggested that an inability to use such information is maladaptive. When internal states are inaccessible, people may rely on external information in order to make decisions. For example, Robinson and Clore (2002b) investigated retrospective reports of emotional states (past feelings), and found that when attempting to recall past events, individuals were not able to access their subjective feelings and relied, instead, on the semantic meaning of the event. The previous research focuses on the difficulty of accessing retrospective emotion. However, an individual's inability to access *current* emotion should have similar implications. In fact, recent research in our lab suggests that individual differences in the experience of current emotion are important in the use of situational information. For example, Corser and Gohm (2006) found that individuals who tend to experience their emotions mildly relied more on situational cues in a decision making task. Similar to Damasio's (1994) findings, individuals who are confused about their emotions should

have a disadvantage when making judgments. In addition, it seems plausible that these individuals may have less access to their current emotions and may develop a tendency to rely on situational information.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the influence of individual differences in emotional clarity on the reliance on situational cues as opposed to personal feelings when making decisions. According to the affect-as-information hypothesis, individuals should look to their own emotional reactions when making judgments about their environments. However, the degree to which people are able or are willing to use emotional information in decision making processes may vary as a function of individual differences in their own emotional experiences. For example, persons who are confused by their emotions may prefer to use non-personal information, such as the emotional reactions of others, when making such evaluations. The current study explored this idea by manipulating situational cues. Participants were shown a series of pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant pictures from the International Affective Picture System (Center for the Study of Emotion and Attention, 1999). Average pleasantness ratings for these pictures have been calculated from large national samples. Along with each picture, participants were given its ostensible average rating of pleasantness and asked to provide their own ratings. However, accuracy of the normed ratings was manipulated in order to determine whether persons low in clarity are more likely to use pleasantness ratings provided by others rather than using their own emotional reactions to the pictures. Therefore, the actual normed rating was given to participants for some of the pictures, but the ratings given for other pictures was somewhat higher or lower than the real average. Individual differences were then measured. In order to address possible influences of conformity, participants also completed a measure of self-monitoring. Lastly, participants were probed for their suspicions about the

purpose of the experiment and debriefed. If emotional clarity influences the use of affect-as-information, persons low in clarity of emotion were predicted to rely more on the situational cues provided. Therefore, the differences between actual ratings and participants' ratings were expected to be greater for persons scoring low on measures of emotional clarity than those scoring high on this trait.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Volunteers included 527 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at the University of Mississippi. A total of seventy-one participants were excluded from the data prior to analyses for providing an inaccurate response to at least one of the items intended to assess attentiveness to test materials. Another 11 participants were excluded from the data analyses for failure to complete test materials. An additional nine participants were removed due to outlying scores on the personality measures. Outliers were defined as individuals scoring at least 3 standard deviations from the mean. Lastly, ten participants were removed from the dataset based on their suspicions about the nature of the experiment. Included in the analyses were data from 436 participants (272 female, 162 male, and 2 unreported), whose mean age was 19.5. Among these, 79% were Caucasian, 14% were African American, 3% were Asian, 2% were Hispanic/Latino, and 2% were unidentified. All volunteers were randomly assigned to either experimental and control conditions and received partial course credit in exchange for their participation.

Materials

Picture Rating Task. A total of fifty-four images selected from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; 1999) were selected for presentation to participants. The IAPS provides normative ratings of emotion (pleasantness, arousal, dominance) for 604 pictures.

Based on mean pleasantness norms, participants viewed either 18 pleasant ($M \approx 7$), 18 neutral ($M \approx 5$), or 18 unpleasant ($M \approx 3$) pictures. For each picture, participants were asked to provide their own ratings of pleasantness for that picture on a 9-point scale with response options ranging from “extremely unpleasant” to “extremely pleasant.” For each picture in the experimental conditions, participants were also presented with a mean pleasantness rating ostensibly calculated from previous participants. Participants in the control conditions were not given mean ratings, but were simply asked to provide their own ratings for each picture.

The following passage is an example of the instructions participants in experimental conditions read:

> In a moment, you will see several pictures along with their average ratings of pleasantness given by others in a previously conducted study. We are interested, specifically, in comparing your ratings for how these pictures make you feel with those given by previous participants. Using the given scale, please consider the previous rating, and then indicate how each picture makes YOU feel.

Because the manipulation in these conditions was the ostensible mean rating presented to participants, six means were accurate, six were more pleasant, and six were less pleasant in each valence category. For instance, participants in the neutral experimental condition viewed 18 neutral pictures. Of these 18 images, participants were presented with an average pleasantness rating of 5 for six of the pictures; an average rating of 7 for another six, and an average rating of 3 for the remaining six. The actual image that participants saw within each of these three groups was randomized.

The following passage is an example of instructions participants in the control conditions read:

> In a moment, you will see several pictures that were rated by others in a previously conducted study. We are interested, specifically, in comparing your ratings for how these pictures make you feel with those given by previous participants. Using the given scale, please indicate how each picture makes YOU feel.

Following these instructions, participants in these conditions viewed 18 images (pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant) and provided their own ratings of pleasantness for each.

Due to a programming error, data was not recorded for one picture in the unpleasant experimental condition; therefore data for this picture was also removed from the unpleasant control condition prior to analyses. As a result, data from only 17 pictures for each participant in unpleasant valence conditions was included in the final analyses.

Personality Scales. In order to increase reliability, the latent trait of clarity was measured using two scales. The first measurement of clarity involved the clarity subscale of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey et al., 1995), which consists of 11 items which assess the ability to discriminate among feelings. Examples include "I am rarely confused about how I feel" and "Sometimes I can't tell what my feelings are" (reverse scored). Participants rate on a 5- point scale the degree to which they agree with these statements with anchors of "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree." Average Cronbach's alpha over three studies was .85 (Gohm & Clore, 2000). Cronbach's alpha for the current sample was .85.

As a second measure of clarity, participants completed two subscales of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994). The first subscale of interest to the current

study was the difficulty identifying emotions subscale of the TAS-20, which consists of 7 items which assess the inability to identify emotions. Examples from this subscale include “I have feelings that I can’t quite identify” and “When I’m upset, I don’t know if I am sad, frightened or angry.” Average Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale was .80 over three samples (Gohm & Clore, 2000). The second subscale participants completed was the difficulty describing feelings subscale of the TAS-20, which consists of 5 items which assess the inability to identify emotions. Examples include “I am able to describe my feelings easily” (reverse scored) and “I find it hard to describe how I feel about people.” Average Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale over three samples was .75 (Gohm & Clore, 2000). Cronbach’s alpha for the current sample was .81. As with the TMMS, participants rate the degree to which they agree with these statements on the same five point scale. Across three samples (Bagby, Parker, & Tayloy, 1994), the difficulty identifying emotions subscale was correlated with the difficulty describing feelings subscales of the TAS-20 (r = .51, .65, and .72). Another sample (Coffey, Berenbaum, and Kerns, 2003) indicates that both the difficulty identifying emotions and the difficulty describing emotions subscales of the TAS-20 are correlated with the clarity subscale of the TMMS (r = -.46).

Self-Monitoring Scale. To help determine whether participants chose pleasantness ratings out of an attempt to seem socially desirable, they completed the Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS; Snyder, 1974). This scale consists of 25 items which assess the desire to maintain social approval and the tendency to monitor expressive behavior. Examples include “My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs” and “In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.” Participants rate whether they believe each statement is true or false as it pertains to their personalities.

Attention Check. In order to ensure that participants were adequately reading and paying attention to the test materials, between one and two items assessing attentiveness were embedded in various positions within each of the personality measures. Participants were asked to provide a specific response to these items, therefore making it obvious when participants were randomly selecting answers to the personality scale items. A sample item would include a statement such as "Please choose 'c' as the appropriate response to this item."

Procedure

All participants were tested in groups ranging from one to eight persons on computers using MediaLab software on standard computer systems. Upon arrival, participants were told that the purpose of the experiment was to examine relationships between personality and picture rating. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions: pleasant pictures with average ratings; neutral pictures with average ratings; unpleasant pictures with average ratings; pleasant pictures without ratings; neutral pictures without ratings; or unpleasant pictures without ratings. They were seated in front of one of the computers, where the MediaLab program gave on-screen instructions to participants. After providing demographic information, participants then began the picture-rating task. Participants viewed 18 pleasant pictures in the pleasant condition; 18 neutral pictures in the neutral condition; and 18 unpleasant pictures in the unpleasant condition. Once all pictures were rated, MediaLab prompted them to continue and participants completed two personality scales, the Trait Meta-Mood Scale and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, which measure the latent trait of clarity. Following the personality scales, participants completed the Self-Monitoring Scale. After all scales were completed, participants were probed for prior knowledge about the nature of the experiment, thanked, debriefed, and dismissed.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Comparison to National Sample. In order to test whether picture ratings from our sample differed from the national picture ratings, one-sample *t* tests were conducted on average picture ratings for unpleasant, neutral, and pleasant pictures in the control condition. One-sample *t* tests employed on overall ratings of unpleasant, neutral, and pleasant pictures indicated that participants in the control condition rated the pictures as being less pleasant than did participants in the national sample, $t(83) = -3.1$, $p = 002$, $t(68) = -3.5$, $p = .001$, $t(73) = -3.1$, $p = .003$, respectively (see Table 1 for means and standard deviations). These findings indicate that our sample of participants considered pictures of each valence to be less pleasant overall than did participants in the national sample.

Manipulation Check. To determine whether our experimental instruction (ostensible previous ratings) effectively manipulated participant's ratings in these conditions, one-sample *t* tests were employed on ratings for pictures with less pleasant, accurate, and more pleasant ratings. A one sample *t* test employed on pictures with accurate ratings indicated that participants in the control condition did not rate pictures differently than participants in this experimental condition, $t(208) = .473$, $p = .637$ (see Table 2 for means and standard deviations). Thus, individuals who saw accurate previous ratings did not differ from individuals who saw no previous ratings. However, one sample *t* tests employed on pictures with less pleasant and more pleasant ostensible ratings indicated that participants in the control conditions did rate the pictures differently than did participants in these experimental conditions,

$t(208) = -4.54$, $p = .000$ and $t(208) = 4.40$, $p = .000$, respectively. Thus, individuals who saw inaccurate previous ratings did differ from individuals who saw no previous ratings. Therefore, it appears that the instruction manipulation in the present study was effective.

Effects of Emotional Clarity on Situational Cues. In the current sample, the difficulty identifying emotions subscale of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994) was correlated with the difficulty describing feelings subscale of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale ($r = .60$). In addition, the clarity subscale of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (Salovey et al., 1995) was correlated with the difficulty identifying emotions subscale of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (r = -.70) and with the difficulty describing feelings subscale of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (r = -.55). Therefore, the use of a composite score of clarity was justified due to the high correlation among these three scales. However, because the subscales of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale measure *difficulty* in identifying and describing emotions, items from these subscales were reverse-keyed prior to further analysis. Next, a composite score of clarity was calculated by taking the mean of the clarity subscale of the Trait Meta-Mood Scale, the difficulty identifying emotions subscale of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale, and the difficulty describing feelings subscale of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale. A median split was then conducted on this composite score to rank participants as either high or low on the latent trait of clarity. Difference scores were calculated for each participant in the experimental conditions by subtracting his/her rating for each picture from the normed rating. The absolute values of these difference scores were used as the dependent measure in the following analyses.

To test the influence of personality on sensitivity to environmental cues, a 2 (high/low trait emotional clarity) x 3 (picture valence) x 3 (accuracy of given ratings) repeated measures analysis of variance was employed on these difference scores, with personality and picture

valence as between-subject factors and with accuracy of ratings as a within-subjects factor. Because persons low in trait clarity are typically unsure about their emotions, it was expected that participants who were low in this trait would rely more on the situational cues and rate the pictures closer to the given ratings than participants who were high in this trait, regardless of the accuracy of the given ratings. This effect was expected to occur for pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral pictures. Therefore it was expected that difference scores would be greater for participants low in clarity when inaccurate ratings are given, regardless of condition. However, there should have been no difference between scores when the given rating was accurate. Conversely, because persons high in trait clarity are generally sure about their emotions, it was expected that participants high in this trait would ignore the situational cues and go with their own pleasantness ratings for the pictures. In other words, they should not be swayed by the inaccurate ratings because they are more likely to be sure of the picture's actual valence. As with low-clarity participants, the valence of the pictures was not expected to matter, such that this effect would occur for pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral groups. Therefore, it was expected that there would be no differences among scores for participants high in emotional clarity.

This ANOVA yielded a significant main effect for valence condition, $F(2,201) = 5.60$, $p < .01$, indicating that participants rated pleasant pictures as more pleasant than neutral and unpleasant pictures (see Table 3 for means and standard deviations). Main effects of instruction and clarity did not reach significance, $F(2,402) = 2.0$, $p = .134$ and $F(1,201) = .14$, $p = .708$, respectively. Thus, participants' picture ratings did not differ based on the accuracy of ostensible ratings or based on their individual differences in trait emotional clarity. However, a significant interaction between personality and instruction was revealed, $F(2,402) = 5.9$, $p = .003$. Planned pairwise comparisons indicated a significant mean difference between ratings for high clarity and

low clarity participants who saw accurate ostensible ratings ($M_{High} = 1.17$, $SD_{High} = .06$; $M_{Low} = 1.38$, $SD_{Low} = .06$, $p = .017$). Therefore, this interaction effect was mainly due to group differences in ratings for pictures with accurate instructions.

In order to test for potential moderating effects of conformity and self-presentation, participants' scores on self monitoring were included in the analysis of variance as a covariate. The three-way interaction remained non-significant, $F(2,402) = 2.3$, $p = .098$. As expected, self-monitoring did not appear to play a role in the current study.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the influence of emotional clarity on the use of situational cues when reporting emotional reactions. Previous research led to the hypothesis that individuals with low emotional clarity would have less access to their current emotions and, therefore, would rely more on the previous ratings provided than would individuals with high emotional clarity. It was also hypothesized that there would be no difference in ratings among high and low clarity individuals when the ostensible ratings given were accurate. Although some of the findings reached significance, they did not support the hypotheses as predicted. Possible explanations for the findings of this study are discussed below.

Differences in ratings between low clarity and high clarity individuals were expected, but only when the situational cues (ostensible ratings given) were inaccurate. In direct opposition to this hypothesis, however, our findings indicated that differences between high and low clarity participants only reached significance when the ostensible pleasantness ratings given were accurate. In other words, difference scores were only greater for low clarity individuals when the given ratings were accurate, but both low and high clarity individuals were equally swayed by less and more pleasant ostensible ratings.

One interesting finding involves the difference between pleasantness ratings for our local sample and the national sample. Across the valence conditions, control participants in our sample considered the pictures significantly less pleasant than did individuals in the national sample.

Perhaps this difference made our manipulations too unbelievable. For instance, if a particular picture has a national pleasantness rating of five, but our sample considered it to have a pleasantness rating of four, and they were given an ostensible rating of seven, this manipulation may have been too extreme for our sample to consider. In addition, the fact that our participants considered all of the pictures to be less pleasant than the national norms in essence means there were no "accurate" ratings given to our participants. For example, if a particular picture has a national pleasantness rating of seven and participants were given an ostensible rating of seven, this "accurate" ostensible rating was still higher than the average pleasantness rating for our local sample. Future research in this area should first conduct pilot work to establish local pleasantness norms for the pictures, and base situational cue manipulations on this data.

In addition, our theoretical explanation for why low clarity individuals would be more likely to rely on situational cues involved these people having less access to their current emotions. Although previous research (e.g., Robinson and Clore, 2002b) has demonstrated that an inability to access emotion leads to a reliance on situational cues, perhaps this construct does not appropriately extend to low emotional clarity. Perhaps these individuals have equal access to their emotions, but simply have more difficulty trusting them. Framed this way, it is possible that individuals who typically do not trust their emotions may still be able to accurately identify the pleasantness of pictures, and may not actually experience the disadvantage we originally expected. Future research could more directly probe the connection between trait emotional clarity and access to current emotions in order to provide more insight about the relationship between this personality trait and situational cues.

In conclusion, more research is needed before any compelling remarks can be made about the true nature of emotional clarity and its influence on sensitivity to situational cues. Although

the results of the present study are not readily interpretable, perhaps by making the suggested changes to the current design, a better idea of the relationship between situational cues and emotional clarity can be more appropriately addressed.

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Table 1
Overall picture ratings as a function of valence

	Current Sample	National Sample
	M (SD)	*M* (SD)
Valence		
Pleasant	6.65 (.94)	6.99 (.08)*
Neutral	4.74 (.76)	5.06 (.21)**
Unpleasant	2.79 (1.08)	3.16 (.16)*

Note: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$

Table 2
Picture ratings as a function of condition

	M	(SD)	Sample Size
Control Condition	4.64	(1.87)	227
Experimental Condition			209
Less Pleasant Ratings	4.07	(1.83)***	
Accurate Ratings	4.70	(1.72)	
More Pleasant Ratings	5.15	(1.66)***	

Note: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$

Table 3

Picture ratings as a function of valence condition, accuracy of ostensible ratings and trait emotional clarity

	Low Clarity	High Clarity
	M (SD)	*M* (SD)
Unpleasant Pictures		
Less Pleasant Ratings	1.37 (.38)	1.37 (.39)
Accurate Ratings	1.28 (.55)	1.13 (.47)
More Pleasant Ratings	1.36 (.66)	1.45 (.62)
Neutral Pictures		
Less Pleasant Ratings	1.48 (.62)	1.46 (.67)
Accurate Ratings	1.28 (.66)	1.05 (.57)
More Pleasant Ratings	1.26 (.52)	1.19 (.58)
Pleasant Pictures		
Less Pleasant Ratings	1.46 (.58)	1.75 (.63)
Accurate Ratings	1.62 (.96)	1.29 (.39)
More Pleasant Ratings	1.58 (.72)	1.57 (.48)

APPENDIX A

Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS)

Please read each statement and decide whether or not you agree with it. Place a number in the blank line next to each statement using the following scale:

5 = strongly agree 4 = somewhat agree 3 = neither agree nor disagree
2 = somewhat disagree 1 = strongly disagree

____ 1. I try to think good thoughts no matter how badly I feel.
____ 2. People would be better off if they felt less and thought more.
____ 3. I don't think it's worth paying attention to your emotions or moods.
____ 4. I don't usually care much about what I'm feeling.
____ 5. Sometimes I can't tell what my feelings are.
____ 6. I am rarely confused about how I feel.
____ 7. Feelings give direction to life.
____ 8. Although I am sometimes sad, I have a mostly optimistic outlook.
____ 9. When I am upset I realize that the "good things in life" are illusions.
____ 10. I believe in acting from the heart.
____ 11. I can never tell how I feel.
____ 12. The best way for me to handle my feelings is to experience them to the fullest.
____ 13. When I become upset I remind myself of all the pleasures in life.
____ 14. My belief and opinions always seem to change depending on how I feel.
____ 15. I am often aware of my feelings on a matter.
____ 16. I am usually confused about how I feel.
____ 17. One should never be guided by emotions.
____ 18. I never give in to my emotions.
____ 19. Although I am sometimes happy, I have a mostly pessimistic outlook.
____ 20. I feel at ease about my emotions.
____ 21. I pay a lot of attention to how I feel.
____ 22. I can't make sense out of my feelings.
____ 23. I don't pay much attention to my feelings.
____ 24. I often think about my feelings.
____ 25. I am usually very clear about my feelings.
____ 26. No matter how badly I feel, I try to think about pleasant things.
____ 27. Feelings are a weakness humans have.
____ 28. I usually know my feelings about a matter.
____ 29. It is usually a waste of time to think about your emotions.
____ 30. I almost always know exactly how I am feeling.

APPENDIX B

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20)

Using the scale provided as a guide, indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by writing a number in the blank next to that item.

Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
a	b	c	d	e

____ 1. I often get confused about what emotion I am feeling.
____ 2. It is difficult for me to find the right words for my feelings.
____ 3. I have physical sensations that even doctors don't understand.
____ 4. I am able to describe my feelings easily.
____ 5. I prefer to analyze problems rather than just describe them.
____ 6. When I'm upset, I don't know if I am sad, frightened or angry.
____ 7. I am often puzzled by the sensations in my body.
____ 8. I prefer to just let things happen rather than to understand why they turned out that way.
____ 9. I have feelings that I can't quite identify.
____ 10. Being in touch with emotions is essential.
____ 11. I find it hard to describe how I feel about people.
____ 12. People tell me to describe my feelings more.
____ 13. I don't know what's going on inside me.
____ 14. I often don't know why I am angry.
____ 15. I prefer talking to people about their daily activities rather than their feelings.
____ 16. I prefer to watch "light" entertainment shows rather than psychological dramas.
____ 17. It is difficult for me to reveal my innermost feelings, even to close friends.
____ 18. I can feel close to someone, even in moments of silence.
____ 19. I find examination of my feelings useful in solving personal problems.
____ 20. Looking for hidden meanings in movies or plays distracts from their enjoyment.

APPENDIX C

Self-Monitoring Scale (SMS)

Read each item and decide whether the statement is True or False as it pertains to you personally.

1 = True
2 = False

____ 1. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people.
____ 2. My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs.
____ 3. At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like.
____ 4. I can only argue for ideas which I already believe.
____ 5. I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.
____ 6. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people.
____ 7. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues.
____ 8. I would probably make a good actor.
____ 9. I rarely seek the advice of my friends to choose movies, books, or music.
____ 10. I sometimes appear to others to be experiencing deeper emotions than I actually am.
____ 11. I laugh more when I watch a comedy with others than when alone.
____ 12. In groups of people, I am rarely the center of attention.
____ 13. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.
____ 14. I am not particularly good at making other people like me.
____ 15. Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time.
____ 16. I'm not always the person I appear to be.
____ 17. I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor.
____ 18. I have considered being an entertainer.
____ 19. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else.
____ 20. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting.
____ 21. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.
____ 22. At a party, I let others keep the jokes and stories going.
____ 23. I feel a bit awkward in company and do not show up quite as well as I should.
____ 24. I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end).
____ 25. I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them.

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- Trait Attention to Emotion Influences the Effect of Mood on Decision Making; Society for Personality and Social Psychology; January 2010
- Influence of Emotional Clarity on Reported Mood and Judgment; The University of Mississippi; October 2010

Publications and Papers

- Kitchens, M. B., Corser, G. C., Gohm, C. L., VonWaldner, K.L., & Foreman, E. L. (in press). Mispredicted affective responses to the outcome of the 2008 presidential election of Barack Obama. *Psychological Reports*.