

Unfinished business: How completeness affects the impact of emotional states and emotion concepts on social judgment [☆]

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Abstract

In two studies, we compared the impact of cold emotion concept primes with induced hot emotional states on subsequent social judgments. We hypothesized that the completeness of the prime episode is an important determinant of whether accessible information will lead to emotionally congruent or incongruent judgments. We extend previous research on knowledge and emotion accessibility effects by demonstrating that the effects of incomplete versus completed prime episodes are independent of whether we prime emotion states or emotion concepts. That is, our results show that both hot and cold affective information activated by incomplete prime episodes leads to assimilation, whereas information activated by completed prime episodes leads to contrast effects. Implications for accessibility research are discussed.

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Emotions play a pivotal role in social perception. There is a large literature demonstrating that people's emotional states influences how they encode, recall, and judge social information (see e.g., Forgas, 2000; Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002; Schwarz & Clore, 1996). A recent study by Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) provides a nice illustration of this effect. These researchers presented participants with a story about a morning in someone's life, written such that the character's experiences and resulting feelings could be interpreted as somewhat happy or sad. Results showed that participants who had read the story while listening to happy, cheerful music (and consequently felt happy), rated the target person as relatively happy compared to partici-

pants who had read the story while listening to sad, gloomy music (and felt sad).

In addition to such *emotion-congruent* effects, it has also been suggested that emotional states may lead to *emotion-incongruent* effects (see e.g., Ottati & Isbell, 1996; Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Stapel, Koomen, & Ruys, 2002). That is, sometimes we interpret the behavior of others as clear indications of sheer happiness because we feel sad and depressed ourselves ("See them, they are young and happy. I am old and lonely."). In other words, people do not always judge others in accordance with their own emotional state, and may instead judge others in direct contrast to their own feelings. But what determines whether our social judgments reflect assimilation or a contrast effects to our own emotions?

There are several models that can be used to address this question (see e.g., Martin, 1986; Mussweiler, 2003; Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; Stapel et al., 2002; Stapel & Suls, 2006). Schwarz and Bless's (1992) Inclusion Exclusion Model (IEM), for example, predicts assimilation or contrast depending on how accessible affective information is *categorized*. That is, if affective information is "included" along with the target representation, assimilation should be found. If

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affective information is “excluded” from the target representation, contrast should be more likely. In the present study we test the hypothesis that the completeness of the emotion induction episode influences inclusion/exclusion and thus the direction of the emotional impact on judgments. Inspired by Martin (1986), we propose that *completed* emotional primes lead to exclusion effects and thus incongruent social judgments, while incomplete emotional primes lead to inclusion effects and congruent judgments.

Completeness, assimilation, contrast

Martin (1986) studied the impact of incomplete versus completed trait priming (e.g., adventurous versus reckless) on judgments of ambiguous adventurous/reckless behaviors (e.g. “Donald thought he might cross the Atlantic in a sailboat”). The results indicated that thoughts related to a priming task were more likely to persevere beyond the prime task when the performance of this task has been interrupted than when it has been allowed to continue to completion (see also Butterfield, 1964; Deutsch, 1968; Zeigarnik, 1927). Consequently, trait priming was more likely to result in an assimilation bias when participants had not yet completed the priming task at the time they started the judgment task. Participants who had been allowed to complete the priming task, however, contrasted their evaluations away from the primed information.

Put in terms of categorization, Martin’s (1986) findings suggest that because “unfinished business” (an incomplete priming task) causes task related thoughts to persevere beyond the prime task, the boundaries between the prime episode and the target evaluation episode are diffuse. Due to this mental overlap of the two cognitive tasks, accessible information activated by unfinished priming episodes is likely to be incorporated with the representation of the target. In other words, if the prime episode does not constitute a *distinct* (and separate) entity, accessible information will be considered as bearing on the target, yielding inclusion effects (see Martin, 1986; Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Stapel et al., 2002).

Conversely, task completion seems to be a powerful “stop rule” for task related thoughts (Lewin, 1951). This is because task related thoughts loses its functionality after a task has been completed and could potentially interfere with other, more necessary tasks that the individual faces (see Förster, Liberman, & Higgins, 2005). In other words, when a task is finished, a *closed* Gestalt of the task can be constructed (Schiffman & Greist-Bousquet, 1992). Such a closed Gestalt constitutes a distinct entity with clear-cut boundaries between the prime episode and the target evaluation episode. As a consequence, primed information is more likely to be “excluded” from the target evaluation (see Schwarz & Bless, 1992), rendering carry-over effects from the priming episode to target judgments less likely and contrast effects more likely (see also Kubovy, 1977; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; Stapel et al., 2002; Wyer & Srull, 1989).

Other models agree with this line of reasoning. Similar to Schwarz and Bless’s (1992) IEM, Stapel and Koomen’s

(2001) Interpretation Comparison Model (ICM) argues that the distinctness of the activated information is one prominent factor that determines whether the information is included into or excluded from the target representation. In addition, Martin’s (1986) Set/Reset Model (SRM) argues that if the prime stimuli and the target stimuli are comprised of “distinct entities”, accessible information is less likely to be used for the interpretation of the target (see also Martin & Achee, 1992; Martin & Seta, 1983). Finally, in recent work by Fiedler, Schenck, Watling, and Menges (2005), the authors argue that an incomplete priming episode activates a relatively open mindset, which facilitates subsequent interpretational effects of a target, whereas a completed priming episode activates a relatively closed mindset, which makes it less likely that a target is interpreted in line with accessible information.

Emotions, emotion concepts, and completeness

To date, the role of completeness of an *emotion induction* episode as a predictor of its impact on social judgments has not received much (if any) attention. In line with previous research on accessibility effects (see Martin, 1986), we hypothesize that the completeness of an emotion induction episode will determine whether subsequent social judgments are assimilated or contrasted with the induced emotion. We will test this hypothesis using an experimental methodology recently employed by Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002).

Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) examined the effects of “hot” emotional state activation versus “cold” emotion concept activation on social judgments. In their study, the main question was whether hot emotional state activation follows the same judgmental laws as cold emotion concept activation (see Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002). The authors presented participants with a target story, characterizing a morning in a person’s life. In order to activate emotion concepts, half of the participants were asked to solve a sentence-unscrambling task (see Srull & Wyer, 1979), in which either happy sentences (e.g., “The audience was ecstatic”) or sad sentences (e.g., “He sunk into melancholy”) had to be created from scrambled word strings. In order to activate emotional states, the other half of the participants was primed with either happy or sad classical music through what is called, “the continuous music technique” (see Eich & Metcalfe, 1989). In this procedure, emotions are induced by playing (happy versus sad) music throughout the entire experimental session (i.e., during encoding as well as judgment of the target stimulus). Results showed that people in the emotion induction condition rated the target person in accordance with their emotional states (an emotion-congruency effect), while people in the emotion concept activation condition did not. Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) thus concluded that activation of an emotional state is sufficient for producing emotion-congruent judgments, whereas the activation of merely *emotion concepts* is not.

Interestingly, these results contradict the findings of decades of priming studies that have reliably demonstrated

assimilation effects of concept priming on judgments in paradigms that are quite similar to Innes-Ker and Niedenthal's (see Higgins, 1996). How can we explain their findings? In the present research, we test the hypothesis that it is the completeness of the prime episode that matters independent of whether emotional states or emotion concepts are activated. We posit that Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) found emotion-congruency effects in the emotion state conditions and not in the concept conditions because of differences in the techniques they used to induce emotional states versus emotion concepts. In the Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) studies, participants in the emotion concept condition were asked to solve a sentence-unscrambling task. It is crucial to note that all participants were allowed to complete the priming task, making it a completed emotion concept activation task. Following the reasoning described earlier, this might have caused exclusion effects (see Martin, 1986; Schwarz & Bless, 1992; Stapel & Koomen, 2001). Interestingly, also not interpreted in this way by Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002), their findings suggest that participants in the happy concept activation condition did indeed judge the target as somewhat less happy ($M=0.697$), relative to participants in the sad concept activation condition ($M=0.921$), suggesting a contrast effect. Conversely, in the emotion induction condition, Innes-Ker and Niedenthal had participants listen to music during the entire experimental session –thus during both encoding and evaluation of the target. We hypothesize that this *incomplete* emotion induction procedure cognitively overlapped with encoding and evaluation of the target, making inclusion effects more likely.

The aim of the present studies is to demonstrate that the judgmental effects of “hot” emotional state activations (assimilation and contrast) do follow the same laws as the judgmental effects of “cold” emotion concept activations. In contrast to the findings of Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002), in the two present studies, we test the hypothesis that incomplete primes will lead to assimilation, whereas completed primes will lead to contrast, independent of whether emotion concepts (e.g., “happy”) or emotional states (e.g., “I feel happy”) are activated.

Study 1

In Study 1, we used similar information activation techniques as Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002): a music induction (see also Eich & Metcalfe, 1989) and a sentence-unscrambling task (see also Srull & Wyer, 1979). We extend these paradigms, however, by manipulating whether both prime tasks are completed or incomplete at the time participants encode and judge the target.

Method

Participants and design

Undergraduate students ($n=126$) served as participants in exchange for course credit or 3 Euros. The data from 7 participants were eliminated because five individuals did

not complete all of the experimental material and two participants reported suspicion regarding the purpose of the experiment and awareness of the influence of the prime task on their judgments. The design consisted of a 2 (Primed Emotion: happy, sad) by 2 (Prime Type: emotional state, emotion concept) by 2 (Prime Episode: completed, incomplete) between subjects design. Participants were assigned randomly to conditions.

Emotional state induction

For participants in the emotional state conditions, participants were asked to recall a happy or sad event that they had experienced (see Schwarz & Clore, 1983). During the emotion self-induction, participants were listening to either happy classical music (e.g., allegros from Mozart's “Eine kleine Nachtmusik”) or sad classical music (e.g., Barber's “Adagio for Strings”) (see Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002).

Emotion concept activation

Participants in the emotion concept conditions were asked to perform a sentence-unscrambling task. Participants had to construct grammatically correct sentences out of several series of scrambled word strings related to either happiness or sadness. The material we used consisted of a Dutch translation of the sentence-unscrambling task originally used by Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002).

Completed versus incomplete emotion state induction

In the emotional state conditions, participants in the completed conditions were primed with music prior to (but not during) encoding and evaluation of the target description. Participants in the incomplete conditions were primed with music throughout the entire experimental session, thus also during encoding and evaluation of the target.

Completed versus incomplete emotion concept activation

Participants in the completed emotion concept condition were instructed to unscramble a set of 20 sentences. Participants in the incomplete emotion concept condition were asked to unscramble a set of 24 sentences. These participants were told that this task had a time limit (see Martin, 1986). In reality, though, no such time limit was imposed. Rather, participants were interrupted from the task after unscrambling the 20th sentence. Thus, participants were primed with 20 sentences in both the complete and incomplete emotion concept conditions. However, in the complete condition, all participants actually completed the task while participants in the incomplete condition were led to believe that they had not completed the task.

Social judgment

Participants were asked to read a paragraph about a character named M, actually a Dutch translation of the Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) paragraph. The paragraph was purposely ambiguous such that M's behavior could either be interpreted as somewhat happy or sad. After reading the story, participants answered some

questions about M's behavior (see Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002). Two questions asked for judgments about M's emotional well-being, anchored by unpleasant-pleasant and sad-happy. Two questions asked about M's emotional reaction to a phone call, anchored by displeased-pleased and sad-happy. In addition, we asked several questions about M which were unrelated to happiness and sadness. Specifically, we asked whether M felt calm or aroused, whether M thought her cat was safe or unsafe, cold or warm, and whether the novel M was reading was easy or difficult to read. All judgments were rated on 5-point scales, ranging from -2 to $+2$.

Experienced emotions

After participants completed the judgment task, participants received a rating scale that contained mood adjectives and asked them to indicate how much of each emotion they were currently feeling (e.g., happy, sad, angry, etc.). These adjectives represented subsets of adjective sets previously used as measures of positive and negative affect by other researchers (Russell, 1978; Watson & Tellegen (1985)). Responses were given on 7-point rating scales, ranging from 1 to 7, with higher ratings indicating more intense experiences of the emotion.

Procedure

Upon arrival to the laboratory, participants were seated in individual cubicles equipped with a computer, stereo headphones for the music induction, and a booklet containing the target story, the judgment questionnaire and the questionnaire assessing participants' experienced emotional states. After the experiment participants were probed for general suspicion concerning the goal of the experiment, and awareness of the influence of the priming task on later judgments with a funnel debriefing procedure (see Chartrand & Bargh, 1996). As mentioned above, the two individuals who reported awareness of the influence of the prime task were deleted from the sample. Finally, participants were thanked and dismissed.

Results

Manipulation check

First, we computed a happiness score by averaging participants' experienced *happiness* and *contentment*. Then we computed a sadness score by averaging participants' experienced *sadness* and *gloom*.

The effects of the independent variables on participants' experienced happiness and sadness were investigated by performing a 2 (Primed Emotion: happy, sad) by 2 (Prime Type: emotional state, emotion concept) by 2 (Prime Episode: completed, incomplete) Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with participants' experienced happiness and sadness scores as dependent variables. This analysis revealed a main effect of Primed Emotion, $F(2, 110) = 5.88$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .10$, and a Primed Emotion \times Prime Type interaction, $F(2, 110) = 7.16$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$. For other effects, $F_s < 1$.

A test of simple main effects in the *emotion state conditions* revealed that participants in the happy emotion state condition felt happier ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 0.90$) than participants in the sad emotion state condition ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.89$), $F(1, 111) = 14.13$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Participants in the happy emotion state condition also felt less sad ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 0.75$) than sad emotion state participants ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.80$), $F(1, 111) = 20.76$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$. As predicted, a test of simple main effects in the *emotion concept conditions* revealed no differences of experienced emotions ($F_s < 1$). This suggests that, our emotion state manipulation was successful and indeed affected participants' emotions, whereas our emotion concept manipulation did not affect experiences of the associated emotions (see also Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002).

We also conducted ANOVAs for measures of emotional states that are descriptively unrelated to happiness and sadness (fear, shame, anger, calmness, inspiration). As expected (see Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002), these analyses revealed no effects, suggesting that our emotion state manipulation was successful in activating mainly happiness or sadness.

Social judgment

We computed a target score based on the rated happiness of the character in the target story. The effects of the independent variables on this score were investigated by performing a 2 (Primed Emotion: happy, sad) by 2 (Prime Type: emotional state, emotion concept) by 2 (Prime Episode: completed, incomplete) ANOVA. This analysis revealed only the predicted Primed Emotion \times Prime Episode interaction, $F(1, 111) = 20.86$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$ (Other effects $F_s < 1$).

As the *incomplete* panel of Table 1 shows, participants in the happy conditions judged the behavior of the character in the target story significantly more positive ($M = 0.63$, $SD = 0.41$) than participants in the sad condition, ($M = 0.22$, $SD = 0.56$), $F(1, 111) = 9.43$, $p < .01$, ($\eta^2 = .14$), indicating an assimilation effect. As predicted, this effect occurred independent of whether happiness or sadness was an induced emotion state or an activated emotion concept. In the *completed* side of the design, this effect was reversed (see Table 1). Here, participants in the happy conditions rated the elements of the target story significantly less positively ($M = 0.23$, $SD = 0.57$) than participants in the sad

Table 1

Mean (*SD*) happiness ratings of the character in the target story as a function of Primed Emotion, Prime Type and Prime Task

Primed Emotion	Prime Episode			
	Completed		Incomplete	
	Happy	Sad	Happy	Sad
Prime Type				
Emotional State	0.21 (0.51)	0.77 (0.51)	0.60 (0.44)	0.19 (0.47)
Emotion Concept	0.26 (0.64)	0.61 (0.50)	0.67 (0.38)	0.25 (0.65)

Note. Ratings were made on a scale from -2 to $+2$, with higher scores indicating more happiness.

condition, ($M = 0.68$, $SD = 0.50$), $F(1, 111) = 11.16$, $p < .01$, ($\eta^2 = .16$), indicating a contrast effect.

In sum, the results of Study 1 support the hypothesis that an incomplete emotion priming episode leads to assimilation in subsequent judgments, whereas a completed priming episode is more likely to lead to contrast effects, independent of whether the priming stimuli were emotional states or emotion concepts.

Study 2

Although the results of Study 1 support our hypothesis, one could argue that the “continuous music task” (incomplete emotional state priming) is not really comparable to “not unscrambling all scrambled sentences” (incomplete emotion concept priming). In order to increase the comparability of the concept and emotion priming procedures, in Study 2 we used a sentence-unscrambling task for priming emotion concepts as well as emotional states (see Stapel, 1997). Once again, we hypothesize that how accessible emotion-related information is used during the impression formation process is a function of the completeness of the prime episode rather than a function of whether emotional states or emotion concepts have been primed.

Method

Participants and design

Senior high school students ($n = 109$) served as participants. The design consisted of a 2 (Primed Emotion: happy, sad) by 2 (Prime Type: emotional state, emotion concept) by 2 (Prime Episode: completed, incomplete) between subjects design. Participants were assigned randomly to conditions.

Emotional state induction

In order to induce emotional states, participants in the emotional state induction conditions were asked to construct grammatically correct sentences out of series of self-related scrambled sentences. That is, participants had to unscramble sentences like “I fell into melancholy”, or “I made a funny joke”. In addition, participants were asked to “try to feel the mood suggested” in each of the scrambled word groups that had an asterisk (*) next to them. In previous research, it has been demonstrated that this technique is capable of inducing emotional states in correspondence with the emotional content of the sentences (happy versus sad) (see Stapel, 1997).

Emotion concept activation

Participants in the emotion concept activation conditions were asked to unscramble sentences in which only initials of different names of other people were given (e.g., “P. fell into melancholy”, or “C. made a funny joke”). Participants were not instructed to try to feel the mood suggested by the content of the sentences.

Completed versus incomplete priming

Task completion was manipulated the same way as in the sentence-unscrambling tasks in Study 1.

Procedure

After participants arrived they received a booklet containing the priming task, the target story, the judgment questionnaire and the Brief Mood Inspection Scale (BMIS) (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988), which assesses participants’ experienced emotional states. Finally, participants were probed for general suspicion, thanked and dismissed. No participant reported suspicion regarding the purpose of the experiment or awareness of the influence of the prime on his or her judgment.

Results

Manipulation check

First, we computed a happiness score by averaging scores on the items *happy*, *lively*, *active*, and *peppy*. Then we computed a sadness score by averaging scores on the items *sad*, *tired*, and *gloomy*.

The effects of the independent variables on participants’ experienced happiness and sadness were investigated by performing a 2 (Primed Emotion: happy, sad) by 2 (Prime Type: emotional state, emotion concept) by 2 (Prime Episode: completed, incomplete) Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with participants’ experienced happiness and sadness scores as dependent variables. This analysis revealed a main effect of Primed Emotion, $F(2, 100) = 3.58$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$, and a marginal significant Primed Emotion x Prime Type interaction, $F(2, 100) = 2.60$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .05$. For other effects, $F_s < 1$.

A test of simple main effects in the *emotion state conditions* revealed that as predicted, participants in the happy emotion state condition felt happier ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.69$) than participants in the sad emotion state condition ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.92$), $F(1, 101) = 8.73$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Participants in the happy emotion state condition also felt less sad ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.52$) than sad emotion state participants ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.61$), $F(1, 101) = 5.93$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. As predicted, a test of simple main effects in the *emotion concept conditions* revealed no differences of experienced emotions ($F_s < 1$). This suggests that, as expected, our emotion state manipulation was successful and indeed affected participants’ emotions, whereas our emotion concept manipulation did not affect experiences of the associated emotions.

We also conducted ANOVAs for measures of emotional states that are descriptively unrelated to happiness and sadness (loving, calm, nervous, funny, warm, and desperate). As expected, these analyses revealed no effects ($F_s < 1$), suggesting that our emotion state manipulation was successful in activating mainly happiness or sadness.

Social judgment

We computed a target score based on the rated happiness of the character in the target story. The effects of the

Table 2
Mean (*SD*) happiness ratings of the character in the target story as a function of Primed Emotion, Prime Type and Prime Task

Primed Emotion	Prime Episode			
	Completed		Incomplete	
	Happy	Sad	Happy	Sad
Prime Type				
Emotional State	0.70 (0.85)	1.09 (0.53)	1.00 (0.64)	0.62 (0.43)
Emotion Concept	0.69 (0.74)	1.12 (0.70)	1.02 (0.48)	0.54 (0.77)

Note. Ratings were made on a scale from -2 to $+2$, with higher scores indicating more happiness.

independent variables on this score were investigated by performing a 2 (Primed Emotion: happy, sad) by 2 (Prime Type: emotional state, emotion concept) by 2 (Prime Episode: completed, incomplete) ANOVA revealed only the predicted Primed Emotion \times Prime Episode interaction, $F(1, 101) = 11.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .10$ (Other effects $F_s < 1$).

As the *incomplete* panel of Table 2 shows, participants in happy conditions rated the character of the target story as significantly more positively ($M = 1.01$, $SD = 0.56$) than participants in the sad condition, ($M = 0.57$, $SD = 0.62$), $F(1, 101) = 6.13$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$, an assimilation effect. As predicted, this effect occurred independent of whether happiness or sadness was an induced emotion state or activated emotion concepts. In the *completed* side of the design, this effect was reversed (see Table 2). Here, participants in the happy conditions rated the elements of the target story significantly less positively ($M = 0.69$, $SD = 0.78$) than participants in the sad condition, ($M = 1.10$, $SD = 0.61$), $F(1, 101) = 5.32$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$, a contrast effect.

These results further support the hypothesis that how emotional information is used during the impression formation process is a function of the completeness of the prime episode rather than a function of whether information is primed as “hot” emotional states or as “cold” emotion concepts. Incomplete priming led to assimilation, whereas completed priming led to contrast, independent of whether we induced emotional states or primed emotion concepts.

General discussion

Emotions color our lives, give our thoughts meaning, and give our actions direction. What we feel determines in great part what we think and do. When we are in love we see love all around us. When we feel depressed, we think the world is coming to an end. The present findings suggest, however, that emotions may yield incongruency (contrast) as well as congruency (assimilation) effects on subsequent judgments, depending on whether or not the emotion activation is “unfinished business”. Specifically, emotions are more likely to lead to assimilative judgments when the procedure of the emotion induction (e.g., music or emotion-inducing sentences) remains unfinished at the time the target stimulus needs to be encoded and evaluated. Contrast is

more likely, however, when the episode of affect-activation is completed before encoding and evaluation of the target.

Empirically, the present findings concur with Martin’s (1986) seminal work on the impact of completed versus incomplete priming episodes on the direction of priming effects. Martin (1986) showed that trait concept priming led to assimilation when participants had not completed the priming task at the time of judgment, whereas contrast occurred when they had (see also Zeigarnik, 1927). The aim of the present study was to extend this research and investigate whether the impact of “hot” emotional state activation would be similar to Martin’s (1986) “cold” concept priming effects (see also Innes-Ker & Niedenthal, 2002). The conclusion is clear: Our results show that completed priming episodes lead to contrast, whereas incomplete episodes lead to assimilation for when both emotional states or emotion concepts have been activated.

There are several models that can be used to explain the present findings (Schwarz & Bless’s (1992) Inclusion Exclusion Model; Stapel & Koomen’s (2001) Interpretation Comparison Model, Martin’s (1986) Set Reset Model). Although these models differ in important ways (see Stapel & Suls, 2006), they agree that if accessible information constitutes a “distinct entity” it is more likely to be “excluded” from the interpretation of the target information, yielding a contrast effect. If accessible information is diffuse, unbounded or free-floating (see also Murphy & Zajonc, 1993), it is more likely to be “included” in the target representations such that assimilative judgments occur. The present studies suggest that incomplete priming episodes are more likely to activate information that is diffuse and easily included in target representations, whereas complete priming episodes are more likely to activate information that is distinct and more readily excluded from target representations.

With respect to Higgins (1996) studies, our findings support the idea that priming “cold” emotion concepts is different from inducing “hot” emotion states. Hot emotion state activation more easily affects explicit judgments of experienced affect (“I feel happy,” “I feel sad”) than cold concept priming techniques. That is, priming words that are associated with particular emotions (happy, sad) does not necessarily result in the induction of the associated emotions (see also Leventhal & Scherer, 1987). One does not necessarily feel happiness when one is primed with “happy” concepts.

When it concerns the judgmental impact of cold concept priming versus hot emotion priming, however, we *cannot* conclude that emotion concepts activation has different effects than emotional state induction, as Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) have suggested. Whether activated information is an emotion concept or an emotion experience seems to be less important in subsequent judgments (see also Clore & Colcombe, 2003). Both emotional state activation and emotion concept activation are capable of producing both emotion-congruent as well as emotion-incongruent judgments.

The suspicious reader might argue that “typical” priming studies use completed (rather than incomplete) priming tasks and find assimilation (rather than contrast) effects (see Higgins, 1996). We believe, however, that it is important to note that the target stimulus created by Innes-Ker and Niedenthal (2002) for measuring priming effects has never been used before in knowledge accessibility research. Although it is not yet clear how the kind of target stimulus affects the direction (assimilation or contrast) of priming effects, Maringer and Stapel (2006) demonstrated that different target stimuli (faces versus specific behavior descriptions) evoke different types of impression formation effects (see also Fiedler et al., 2005).

In sum, as everyday experience suggests, people are not always slaves to their emotions, such that their emotions guide their thoughts, judgments, and actions in a unidirectional manner. Sometimes we are more attuned to recognizing other people’s positive emotions *because* we feel happy ourselves and thus these emotions are so similar to our own. But at other times we more easily recognize the cheerfulness and happiness of others *because* we feel unhappy ourselves and these emotions are so different. People are active agents in the construction of their social realities. One aspect of this activity is the selective application of affective information. Whether such information is made accessible in a completed or incomplete way seems to be an important predictor of how people go about this.

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