

Happiness and Reminiscing: The Role of Time Perspective, Affect, and Mode of Thinking

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Three experiments showed that subjects' ratings of general life satisfaction depended not only on the hedonic quality of the life experiences they happened to recall but also on the way in which they thought about them. Specifically, the hedonic quality of present life events influenced subjects' judgments of well-being in the same direction. The hedonic quality of past events, however, had a congruent impact on well-being judgments only when thinking about them elicited affect in the present but otherwise had a contrast effect on these judgments. Two factors were found to determine if thinking about the past elicits affect: whether subjects describe the events vividly and in detail or only mention them briefly, and whether subjects describe how the events occurred rather than why they occurred. Possible mediating mechanisms and implications of these results are discussed.

People's feelings of happiness and satisfaction are no doubt a function of the affective quality of their everyday experiences. The nature of this relation, however, is not as straightforward as one might expect. For example, whereas negative experiences do frequently decrease individuals' perceptions of their quality of life (e.g., Zautra & Reich, 1983), some findings indicate that negative events may also increase subjective well-being (Elder, 1974).

In fact, even events of extreme hedonic value seem to be poor predictors of individuals' well-being. For example, Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman (1978) found in their study that people who won a million dollars in a lottery

were generally not any happier than the control subjects. Moreover, they were less able to enjoy more mundane events such as watching television or eating breakfast. More generally, objective circumstances often explain only a small part of the variance of subjective ratings of happiness and satisfaction in surveys (e.g., Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Kamman, 1982).

It is therefore clear that to understand the impact of life events on judgments of well-being, it is insufficient to consider only the quality of these events. Rather, one must consider the psychological mechanisms that mediate between the external event and individuals' happiness and satisfaction. For example, it seems reasonable to suppose that the influence of objective life circumstances on judgments of happiness and satisfaction depends in part on whether these events are actually thought about at the time the judgment is made. According to most models of cognitive functioning (e.g., Anderson & Bower, 1973; Wyer & Carlston, 1979), the recent use of information increases its accessibility in memory and thereby increases the likelihood of its influence on subsequent judgments. One implication of this mechanism is that events that have occurred more recently may have a generally greater impact on judgments of well-being than events that have occurred in the

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Experiment 1 is based in part on Elisabeth Gschneidinger's master's thesis. Experiments 2 and 3 were conducted in collaboration with Herbert Bless and Antje Nebel. The authors gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments of Robert S. Wyer on a previous draft of this article and the most stimulating discussion of these findings by the University of Illinois Social Cognition Group.

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more distant past. These latter events may have an influence only if they have been thought about recently or are for other reasons called to a person's attention at the time the judgment is reported.

However, the influence of the life events one thinks about may not only depend on their hedonic relevance but also on the way the events are thought about. For example, thinking about an event that has recently occurred may lead to a more positive evaluation of one's life if the event is positive than if it is negative. This may be partly because the recalled event is considered representative of other events that occur in one's present life (cf. Tversky & Kahneman, 1982). Note, however, that events that occurred in the distant past may often not be considered representative of one's present situation. To this extent, they may be used as comparative standards relative to which one's present life is evaluated. Thinking about these sorts of events may therefore have a contrast effect on subsequent evaluations (cf. Dermer, Cohen, Jacobsen, & Anderson, 1979); that is, subjects may judge themselves less satisfied if the past events they happen to be thinking about were pleasant than if they were unpleasant.

There is, however, a complicating factor. Hedonically relevant events can affect individuals' current mood states, and this positive or negative mood state might influence life satisfaction independently of the conditions that gave rise to it. For example, Schwarz and Clore (1983) had subjects recall either pleasant or unpleasant past events but instructed them to pay particular attention to the feelings associated with the events and to "describe them as vividly and in as much detail as you can." Under these conditions, subjects who described negative past events were in a more depressed mood and reported lower life satisfaction than subjects who described positive events. The impact of recalling negative events, however, was eliminated if subjects were induced to misattribute their current depressed mood to characteristics of the experimental room. From this discounting effect it was concluded that individuals used their mood at the time of judgment as a piece of information. They evaluate their life on the basis of their current mood unless their mood is considered not informative.

Two general hypotheses are suggested by these considerations. First, the hedonic quality of recently occurring life events one happens to think about will have a congruent influence on judgments of general life satisfaction. That is, positive events will increase and negative events will decrease the reported well-being. Second, past events one happens to think about will influence the judgment of life satisfaction in the opposite direction of their hedonic quality when these events do not elicit strong affective reactions in subjects as a consequence of thinking about them—a contrast effect will occur. When the process of thinking about the past events elicits affect, however, their judgments will be influenced by the affect they are experiencing as a result of thinking about the events, and so the events may have an affect-congruent influence on judgments, despite their temporal distance.

Three experiments are reported. The first two provide direct tests of the hypotheses we just outlined. The third experiment provides further evidence that the way in which subjects think about past life events determines how much they elicit affect and therefore whether they have a positive or negative influence on life satisfaction.

Experiment 1 was conducted to test the expectation that thinking about present events will have a positive influence on judgments of well-being, whereas thinking about past events will lead to a contrast effect. Subjects who think about present events are expected to report higher well-being when the event is positive, rather than negative, whereas subjects who think about past events are expected to report higher well-being when the event is negative, rather than positive.

Experiment 1

Method

Subjects. Fifty-one students at a professional school for translators and interpreters volunteered (without payment) to help the experimenter with the "construction of a questionnaire." Their average age was 20.8 years. The study was conducted in groups from 1 to 5 participants; in the vast majority of sessions, 3 subjects at most participated. Subjects were assigned randomly to the experimental conditions.

Procedure. At the outset of each experimental session, subjects were informed that the Department of Psychology was attempting to develop a questionnaire to assess life

events in a systematic and reliable manner and that to construct this questionnaire it was necessary to collect a large sample of positive and negative life events from which to choose appropriate materials. Subjects were asked to help out in two ways; first, by describing a life event they had experienced, and second, by answering some general questions about their life using different response scales so that we could determine the most suitable scales to use in the final questionnaire.

Depending on experimental conditions, subjects were asked to think about either their present life or their past life, and then to write down three events that were either particularly positive and pleasant or were particularly negative and unpleasant. These detailed descriptions were given in the questionnaire, and the experimenter was blind to the experimental conditions. It was pointed out that a short description of each event would be sufficient, and only one third of a legal-size page was provided for each event.

After the subjects had completed this task, they were asked to help with the second task, namely, selecting appropriate response scales for items in the final questionnaire. Under this pretext, subjects were asked to answer questions that had been associated with different response scales.

First, they rated their happiness along a response scale consisting of 11 numbered categories with endpoints labeled *unhappy* and *happy*. Then, they rated their life satisfaction along an unnumbered 11-category scale with endpoints labeled *unsatisfied* and *satisfied*. Finally, they rated how they felt *during this moment* along a 7-point scale ranging from bad (-3) to good (3).¹

Results

The primary dependent variables were subjects' ratings of happiness and satisfaction as well as of their mood. Because the former two ratings were always highly correlated, they were combined into one index of subjective well-being.

Mood. The effects of the experimental variables on subjects' mood are shown in Table 1. Although the quality of recalled events seems to have a greater effect when the events were present rather than past events, neither the main effect of event quality, $F(1, 48) = 1.4$, nor its interaction with time perspective, $F < 1$, was significant.

Subjective well-being. The effects of the quality of recalled life events on subjective well-being are shown in the bottom half of Table 1. These effects are clearly dependent on when the events occurred. Participants who had recalled present events described themselves as happier and more satisfied with their life as a whole if the recalled events were positive than if they were negative. When subjects had recalled past events, however, this pattern was reversed. They rated themselves less happy and

Table 1
*Ratings of Mood and Subjective Well-Being:
Experiment 1*

Time perspective	Quality of event	
	Positive	Negative
	Mood	
Present	5.5	4.6
Past	4.7	4.6
	Index of subjective well-being	
Present	8.9 _a	7.1 _b
Past	7.5 _{bc}	8.5 _{ac}

Note. Mood ratings were made on a scale from 1 to 7; ratings of subjective well-being, on a scale from 1 to 11. Higher values indicate more positive ratings. Means sharing a common subscript do not differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) on a directional t test.

satisfied when the recalled events were positive than when they were negative.

This conclusion is confirmed by an interaction of event quality and time perspective that was significant for ratings of both happiness, $F(1, 48) = 8.42$, $p < .005$, and satisfaction, $F(1, 48) = 6.12$, $p < .02$, as well as for the composite score, $F(1, 48) = 8.46$, $p < .005$. No main effect for event quality was found on either measure, both F s < 1 .

Discussion

The results clearly demonstrate that when subjects' recall of life events does not have much influence on the emotions they experience, the effect of these events on well-being judgments is a function of the information they provide that is relevant to these judgments. The evaluative quality of present events, which are relevant to well-being, has a positive effect on judgments. However, past events appear to be used as a standard of comparison in judging the quality of one's life in the present, producing contrast effects on judgments of well-

¹ To avoid the possibility that the mood measure may have induced subjects to think about the causes of their current affective state, mood was always assessed last. Based on findings by Schwarz and Clore (1983), an earlier assessment of mood might have led the subjects to attribute their affect to the experimental manipulation, which would have "discounted" the informational value of subjects' mood for their judgments of well-being.

being similar to those reported by Dermer et al. (1979). In the literature, contrast has been found to be a function of the distance between two stimuli on the dimension of judgment (e.g., Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983). The present results suggest that the temporal distance between two events may have the same effect. Thus, knowledge of the objective conditions of life per se is not sufficient to predict subjective well-being. The impact of an event is a function of both the hedonic quality of the event and its temporal distance. This may well account for the typically weak relation between objective life conditions and subjective well-being that has frequently concerned researchers studying how life events influence happiness and satisfaction (cf. Kamman, 1982).

Although the effects of experimental manipulations on subjects' mood ratings were not significant, it should perhaps be noted that thinking about present events, unlike thinking about past ones, appeared to have some moderate influence on subjects' mood. Therefore, one cannot completely discount the possibility that subjects' judgments in the present conditions were influenced by the affect associated with these events as well as by the direct implications of the events themselves. However, it is nonetheless clear that when thinking about past events does not elicit affect, they lead to contrast effects on well-being.

Experiment 2

The results of Experiment 1, in combination with the earlier findings by Schwarz and Clore (1983), suggest that thinking about past events produces a contrast effect on well-being judgments when thinking about the events does not elicit affect, as in the present experiment. On the other hand, past events seem to have a positive influence on judgments of well-being when thinking about them does elicit affect, as in the Schwarz and Clore (1983) study.

Because Experiment 1 and the earlier study by Schwarz and Clore (1983) were conducted in entirely different situations, it is necessary to confirm this difference in a single study. Experiment 2 was designed for this purpose.

Method

Subjects. Forty-five university students participated in Experiment 2. The cover story was essentially the same as in the first experiment.

Procedure. Ostensibly, in order to contribute life events for the inventory, subjects were asked to write down events that had occurred in their life a considerable time before.

Subjects were asked to write down either events that they had experienced as "positive and pleasant" or as "negative and unpleasant" at the time they occurred. However, the instructions for describing them were varied. In the *pallid recall* conditions, subjects were instructed to recall three particularly pleasant or unpleasant events and to describe them in only a few sentences. To prevent elaborate descriptions, only four lines were provided for each event. In contrast, subjects in the *vivid recall* conditions were asked to imagine only one event but to reexperience the event as vividly as possible. In addition, subjects were asked to think about how they felt at the time the event occurred, what led to these feelings, and whether this event had elicited thoughts or fantasies that increased their feeling. After this instruction, subjects were provided two pages with 21 lines to describe the event in detail.

After reporting this experience, subjects were given a short questionnaire that asked for ratings of their general happiness, satisfaction, and momentary mood. This was done with instructions similar to those used in Experiment 1.

The experiment was conducted in groups with 3 to 5 subjects per session. Because the instructions for recalling past life events were provided in written form, the experimenter was blind about the experimental conditions. To keep the amount of writing roughly constant, subjects under pallid recall conditions were asked to describe three events, whereas those subjects under vivid recall conditions described only one event.

Results

Nine subjects failed to follow the instructions in the intended way. Four subjects in the pallid recall conditions gave very detailed accounts of their past experiences and used more space than was provided by continuing their descriptions on the back page. Four other subjects described both positive and negative events. One subject in the negative conditions described the event in positive terms and commented that this particular event had been "the best thing that had occurred to him." These 9 subjects were excluded from the data analysis.

Mood ratings. Subjects' judgments of how they felt at the moment suggest that the experimental manipulations influenced subjects' feelings in the way intended. Data about these feelings are shown in Table 2. Subjects in vivid recall conditions reported being in a more positive mood when they had described a positive event ($M = 5.7$) than when they had described a negative one ($M = 4.2$), $F(1, 33) = 3.97, p < .06$. This finding replicates the results obtained by Schwarz and Clore (1983). In contrast, the mood reported by subjects in

Table 2
*Ratings of Mood and Subjective Well-Being:
 Experiment 2*

Type of description	Quality of event	
	Positive	Negative
	Mood	
Detailed	5.7	4.2
Short	5.1	5.1
	Index of subjective well-being	
Detailed	9.1 _c	7.9 _{ab}
Short	6.8 _b	8.4 _{ac}

Note. Mood ratings were made on a scale from 1 to 7; ratings of subjective well-being, on a scale from 1 to 11. Higher values indicate more positive ratings. Means sharing a common subscript do not differ significantly ($p < .05$) on a directional t -test.

pallid recall conditions was identical ($M = 5.1$), regardless of whether they had recalled positive or negative events, $F < 1$ (for the simple main effect). This replicates the pattern of mood ratings obtained under comparable conditions of Experiment 1 (see Table 1). Thus, the hedonic quality of the event affected subjects' mood only if they had described the event very vividly and if their attention was directed toward their mood at the time the event had occurred. Describing the event in a short and pallid way did not lead to differences in subjects' mood ratings.

Subjective well-being. As in Experiment 1, a single index of subjective well-being was calculated by pooling subjects' ratings of happiness and satisfaction. As Table 2 indicates, subjects in pallid recall conditions rated themselves as less satisfied when the events were positive than when they were negative, replicating the results of the earlier experiment. In contrast, subjects in vivid recall conditions reported themselves more satisfied when the event they recalled was positive than when it was negative. This replicates the results reported by Schwarz and Clore (1983). These conclusions are supported statistically by a Type of Description \times Type of Event interaction, $F(1,33) = 7.57$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

These findings suggest that it is not only the hedonic quality of events in people's past life

that determines individuals' judgments of well-being, but also the way they think about them. If a past event is described in a few words and the circumstances do not allow one to form a vivid representation, it is more likely to be used as a standard of comparison for the subsequent judgment. However, descriptions that induced the person to form a vivid impression were more likely to affect ratings of happiness and satisfaction in the direction of their hedonic quality. The finding that mood ratings differed in the vivid description conditions but not in the pallid description conditions suggests that positive or negative affect was the mediator of judgments when a vivid impression was formed.

Experiment 3

The results of Experiment 2 suggest that the likelihood that thinking about past events elicits affect may be a function of how vividly the event is thought about. The relation between these two variables has been noted mainly by clinical psychologists who have been working with systematic desensitization therapy. Wolpe (1958), for instance, assumed that the physiological reactions to a vividly imagined fearful situation are virtually identical to the reactions that occur when the fear eliciting object is presented. Experimental evidence (e.g., Lang, 1979; Roberts & Weerts, 1982) supports this assumption. Furthermore, words that are concrete and elicit vivid images were found to be more likely to elicit emotional reactions than semantically equivalent words that are low in imageability (Turner & Layton, 1976).

These findings corroborate the suggestion of Experiment 2 that a vivid way of thinking about a hedonically relevant event may elicit affect that is consistent with the hedonic quality of the event. At the same time, there are some ambiguities that may be worth clearing up in a subsequent experiment. First, the number of events the subjects had to recall was not independent of the experimental conditions. Second, the instructions of the vivid recall conditions not only induced the subjects to form a vivid representation but also directed the attention toward their feelings at the time the event occurred. Consequently, the results we obtained may not have been solely due to the vividness of subjects' descriptions per se

on the affect they elicited. Finally, a considerable number of participants had to be excluded from the analysis because they deviated from the instructions.

Therefore, it seemed desirable to conduct a third study in which (a) the number of recalled events would not vary with conditions, (b) vividness would be manipulated without directing attention toward the feelings at the time of the event, and (c) the instructions made sure that all subjects would follow them closely.

Manipulating vividness may be feasible by having subjects think about life events in different ways. One possibility was suggested by Bower, Black, and Turner (1979) who argue that events are hierarchically structured and that one might move up and down in this hierarchy by asking either "why" or "how" questions. Asking "why" elicits thoughts about general, abstract causes, whereas asking "how" leads to thoughts about more specific means by which an event came about. If this is so, then describing how an event happened should lead to a more vivid representation of it (cf. Strack, 1983), and therefore should be more likely to elicit affect than explaining why it occurred. Therefore, its hedonic quality should have a more positive effect on judgments of well-being in the former condition than in the latter. This hypothesis was tested in the third experiment.

Method

Subjects. Sixty-four students participated in the experiment under the same cover story as in the earlier studies. The experiment was conducted in groups of up to 5 participants who were randomly assigned to conditions.

Procedure. Subjects were first asked to think about their past life and to write down one particularly positive or pleasant (or negative or unpleasant) event. Then, under the pretext of collecting more in-depth information about life events, they were asked either to write down why this event occurred or how it came about. Subjects in the why conditions were instructed to give three concise accounts of why the event had occurred. The experimenter emphasized that we were not interested in how the event came about, but rather in why it had happened. To keep the length and detail of the descriptions similar for all participants, a restricted number of lines was provided on the response form for conveying their explanations. Subjects in the how conditions were instructed to describe in detail how the event had occurred. In this condition it was explicitly emphasized that it was not the goal to find out why this event had happened but how it came about. The pro-

vided number of lines available on the response form was the same as it was in the why condition. The central dependent variables were identical to those in the previous experiments.

Results

Manipulation check. To assess the effect of the different instructions on their mode of thinking, subjects were asked after the experiment how they had gone about describing the event. Specifically, they were instructed to indicate on a scale ranging from *the degree to which they had been searching for causes and reasons* (0) or *imagined the course of the event concretely and vividly* (9). Subjects in the how conditions reported higher ratings on this scale ($M = 6.9$) than subjects in the why conditions ($M = 3.4$; $F(1, 52) = 28.16$, $p < .001$). The quality of the event did not influence these ratings, nor did the two factors interact, all $F_s < 1$. Informal inspection of the descriptions confirmed the implications of these self-ratings in that subjects in the how conditions reported more aspects of the event that were sensorily perceivable than subjects in the why conditions. Thus the conclusion that subjects generated more vivid descriptions in the how conditions than in the why conditions seems justified.

Mood ratings. As Table 3 shows, subjects' mood was hardly affected under the why conditions. In contrast, subjects in the how conditions who had thought about a positive event reported a better mood than subjects who had thought about a negative event. The Instructional Set \times Type of Event Recalled interaction was significant, $F(1, 59) = 4.76$, $p = .03$.

Subjective well-being. Subjects' judgments of well-being, also shown in Table 3, show the expected effects. That is, subjects who had described how the event came about reported more happiness and satisfaction when the event was positive than when it was negative. However, subjects who had explained why the events occurred described themselves as less happy and satisfied in the former condition than in the latter. Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with mode of thinking (why vs. how) and quality of the event (positive vs. negative) yielded significant interactions for happiness ratings, $F(1, 60) = 6.93$, $p < .01$, satisfaction

Table 3
Ratings of Mood and Subjective Well-Being:
Experiment 3

Type of description	Quality of event	
	Positive	Negative
	Mood	
How	5.8	4.6
Why	5.2	5.7
	Index of subjective well-being	
How	8.2 _a	6.3 _b
Why	7.8 _a	8.9 _a

Note. Mood ratings were made on a scale from 1 to 7; ratings of subjective well-being, on a scale from 1 to 11. Higher values indicate more positive ratings. Means sharing a common subscript do not differ significantly ($p < .05$) on a directional t test.

ratings, $F(1, 60) = 6.36$, $p < .02$, and for the composite score, $F(1, 60) = 8.13$, $p < .006$.²

Path Analyses

The conceptualization we have proposed to account for the results of Experiments 2 and 3 assumes that the affect subjects experience at the time they judge their life satisfaction has a positive influence on these judgments and that this is true regardless of potential additional influences. To the extent that it elicits affect, thinking about a hedonically relevant past life event will therefore have a positive effect on subsequent judgments through the mediating influence of the elicited affect. On the other hand, past life experiences may also be used as standards of comparison in judging the quality of the present life, and thus may have a negative, contrast effect on judgments. This latter effect may only be detected, however, when the positive, affect-mediated effect is small (i.e., when little affect is elicited by the recalled past experiences).

To evaluate further if this interpretation is reasonable, the data in Experiments 2 and 3 were subjected to path analyses. In each case, path coefficients were based on regression analyses of (a) subjects' well-being judgments as a function of their reported mood and the manipulated positive or negative quality of the past experience they recalled, and (b) subjects' reported mood as a function of the quality of

their recalled past experience. The results of these analyses are shown in Figure 1. The small number of subjects involved in each analysis prevents adequate statistical testing of these results. Nonetheless, the effect of reported mood on well-being is clearly positive in all cases. However, only in the detailed description condition of Experiment 2 and the how condition of Experiment 3 did the type of the recalled life experience affect subjects' mood.

The only discrepancy from prediction arises from the fact that the direct influence of recalling life events on well-being judgments appears to be positive under the latter two conditions. If the influence of affect is partialled out, one would expect no effect of the manipulated quality of the event or, perhaps, a contrast effect. The obtained positive influence, however, may be an artifact of the measurement procedures. That is, the measure of reported mood is undoubtedly not a perfectly valid index of the feelings that subjects actually experience. To the extent that this measure does not capture all the variance in mood produced by the recalled life experiences, the residual affect (not accounted for by this measure) may appear to have a direct influence on judgments. This influence may override the contrast effect resulting from the use of these experiences as comparative standards. (For a detailed discussion of this problem in another research paradigm, see Birnbaum & Mellers, 1979.) The results therefore do not raise serious problems for the present conceptualization.

General Discussion

The findings of the present research demonstrate that reminiscing about positive and negative experiences may influence people's sense of happiness. The present results also

² Although not all the simple effects in Experiments 2 and 3 reached conventional levels of statistical significance (cf. the subscripts in Tables 2 and 3), a combined analysis of both studies following a suggestion by Rosenthal (1978) demonstrates the reliability of the present findings. Specifically, subjects in the conceptually equivalent "detailed description" and "how" conditions reported higher well-being after describing positive rather than negative events, $z = 2.90$, $p < .002$, one-tailed, while the reverse is true for subjects in the combined short description and why conditions, $z = 2.47$, $p < .007$, one-tailed.

show that the nature of this influence depends not only on the hedonic quality of the events but also on when the events occur and how they are thought about.

That thinking about present events has a positive impact on individuals' reported well-being is not too surprising, because present events tend to be representative of one's current life situation. However, because recalling present events had some (although nonsignificant) effect on subjects' mood, the possibility of an affective influence cannot be completely discarded.

The influence of thinking about the past is more complex, however, as it depends on whether one's present emotional state is affected by these thoughts. Specifically, if think-

ing about a past event does not elicit emotion, the event may become a standard of comparison against which the present situation is evaluated. Thus, recalling a positive event of the past may reduce reported happiness, whereas thinking about a negative event may enhance it. If, however, thinking about positive and negative past events elicits affect, judgments of one's happiness are positively influenced by the hedonic quality of the event. Whether thinking about an event elicits strong feelings seems in turn to depend on individuals' mode of thinking. That is, imagining an event very vividly and concretely is more likely to produce affective reactions than thinking about it in a more pallid and abstract fashion.

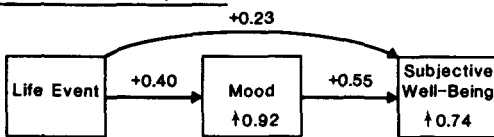
The effect of subjects' mood on their judgments of happiness is compatible with different theories of affective influence on judgments (some of them are discussed by Clark & Isen, 1982). For instance, it is possible that the elicited affect made mood-congruent aspects of the subjects' present life more accessible than aspects that are incongruent with the manipulated mood state. Thus, subjects may have been more likely to retrieve positive features of their present life when positive affect was elicited and negative features when the affect was negative. The judgment of present well-being would then be based on an affectively biased sample of evidence.

Other research (Schwarz & Clore, 1983; Schwarz & Strack, 1985) suggests that a person's mood may serve as information for making affect-relevant judgments. For one thing, affect did not influence judgments when it was attributed to an external, transient source (Schwarz & Clore, 1983). The notion that thinking about a hedonically relevant past event provides information for subsequent judgments seems to be the most parsimonious explanation of the present results. Both the elicited affect and the quality of the recalled event provide information for judgments of well-being.

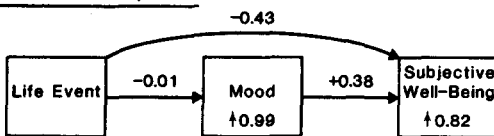
The resulting informational model of well-being judgments is represented in Figure 2. The model implies that individuals base their judgments of well-being on the perceived quality of their present life, which includes external circumstances and internal conditions such as mood states. The actual judgment is computed by using a standard of comparison

Experiment 2

a) Detailed Descriptions

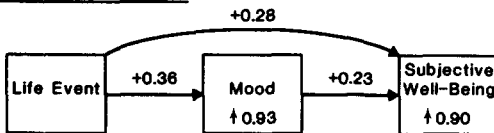


b) Short Descriptions



Experiment 3

a) "How" Conditions



b) "Why" Conditions

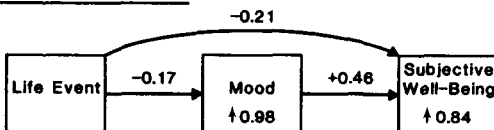


Figure 1. Path diagrams depicting the direct and mood-mediated influence of recalling a past life event on judgments of subjective well-being. Residual paths are indicated by the unconnected arrows.

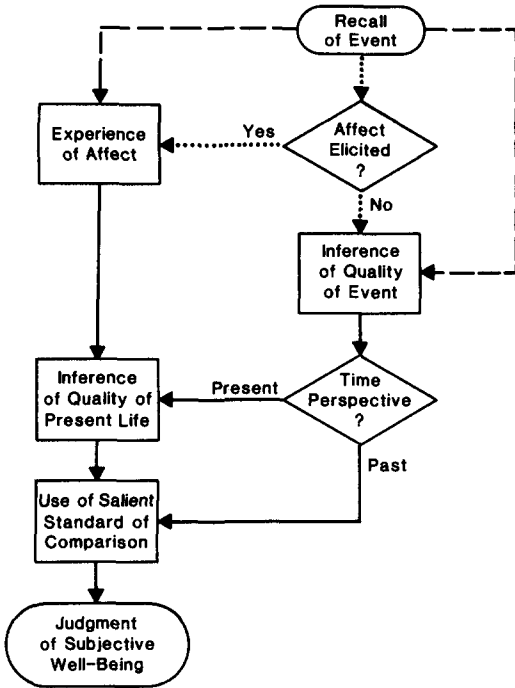


Figure 2. Representation of the informational model of judgments of well-being. The dashed lines belong to variant A, the dotted lines to variant B.

that is salient at the time. The salience of a particular standard will be increased by prior activation of information about, for example, other people's quality of life, by normative standards like fears, hopes and aspirations and, of course, by information about the person's own quality of life in the past. Recalling a hedonically relevant experience may thus influence the assessment of the person's life quality either positively if the event belongs to the present or negatively if the event belongs to the past and becomes a salient standard of comparison.

Figure 2 shows two alternative ways in which affect that is elicited by recalling the experience may influence the judgment, each of which is consistent with the results of the present study. Variant A (represented by the dashed lines in Figure 2) assumes that the quality of the event and the elicited affect have simultaneous influences on the judgment. Thus, recalling a present event influences the judgment in the direction of its hedonic value through both the elicited affect and the activated information

about the event. Recalling a past event, however, exerts two opposite simultaneous influences: an affect-mediated influence that is congruent with the quality of the event and a contrast effect by activating a standard of comparison. Variant B (represented by the dotted lines), on the other hand, implies a primacy of affect. That is, if sufficiently strong affect is elicited, the judgment of well-being is solely based on the information the affect provides about the person's life and not on the other informational aspects of the experience. If recalling a life event does not elicit sufficiently strong affect, information about the event influences the judgment. The direction of this influence, however, depends on subjects' time perspective. That is, thinking about a present event activates information that is representative of one's present life. Thinking about a past event activates a standard of comparison. In the first case, the judgment is therefore changed in the direction of the hedonic quality of the event; in the second case, it is influenced in the opposite direction. A related model dealing with global versus specific judgments of well-being was suggested by Schwarz and Strack (1985). Obviously, more research is needed to distinguish between these two variants.

Independently, the present findings do not apply only to reports of subjective well-being. Rather, they suggest that thinking about past life events may not only influence self-judgments but also other affect-relevant judgments. Whether thinking about a (positive or negative) past experience elicits affect may be equally important for the interpretation of another person's behavior (cf. Kelly & Wyer, 1985) and, more generally, for the interpretation of social events.

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