

Mixed feelings not remembered as well as happy or sad ones

June 25 2008

Imagine you're about to step onto a rollercoaster at an amusement park. You are filled with apprehension and joy, mixed emotions that last beyond the dizzying ride. How will you remember the experience?

According to new research in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, people tend to underestimate the intensity of their recalled feelings if those feelings were mixed, as opposed to purely happy or sad.

Authors Jennifer Aaker (UC-Berkeley), Aimee Drolet (UCLA), and Dale Griffin (University of British Columbia) conducted a series of studies that tested participants' emotions when they faced scenarios such as taking tests and moving, events that are typically associated with mixed emotions.

"We conducted two longitudinal experiments which show that the intensity of mixed emotions is underestimated at the time of recall—an effect that appears to increase over time and does not occur to the same degree with happy or sad emotions," write the authors. The underestimation increases over time, to the point that people sometimes don't remember having felt ambivalent at all.

Interestingly, the authors found that Asian Americans did not exhibit the same degree of memory decline for mixed emotions as Anglo-Americans did.

The authors' explanation for the modification of memory is that many

people feel uncomfortable with mixed emotions. They are motivated to resolve the conflicts, and thus memories of the emotional intensity fade.

They also found that current beliefs affect the memory of mixed emotions more than the actual emotions. "Over time, people rely less on episodic memories of emotion experiences that link their recall to specific details of the situation and more on semantic cues that link their recall to general beliefs and theories," write the authors.

The research indicates that people who are more comfortable feeling mixed emotions have better memories of those emotions. "These questions are important because decisions about the future are determined less by the online (actual) emotion experience than by the memory of the emotion experience," write the authors.

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

Citation: Mixed feelings not remembered as well as happy or sad ones (2008, June 25) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-06-happy-sad.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--