

Weather's Effect on Mood

By Leah Pohlman

From the winter blahs to summer smiles, it is evident that weather can have an effect on a person's temperament. Seasonal Affective Disorder, rain, and even the sun can affect a person's mood. In hopes of providing assistance to those afflicted by the weather, it is important to understand what moods are affected and why.

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is "a form of depression that occurs during the darker, colder months of the year" (Scott-Clarke, 2008, para. 2). This depression can take many forms including extreme fatigue, difficulty waking up, and weight gain due to increased eating of carbohydrate-rich food (Seasonal Affective Disorder: Light Therapy, 2009, para. 1). SAD affects approximately 6.3% of adults (Swedo et al., 1995,



p. 1016), and its effects have been described by sufferers as having "a 'why bother' attitude...It's a very pervasive feeling. It's always there. It's like a dreadful, heavy feeling in the pit of my stomach from October to March" (Scott-Clarke, 2008, para. 5). Although there has

been very little research done regarding the effects of SAD on teens (Swedo et al., 1995, p. 1016), it is not unreasonable, based on the high levels of depression amongst youth, to suggest that SAD affects teens and adults similarly. As such, it is important to understand that teens who behave differently in the fall or winter may be suffering from this debilitating condition, and programming may need to be adjusted in order to better suit their needs.

In order to combat Seasonal Affective Disorder, sufferers are often encouraged to try treatments used to manage other forms of depression, such as prescription drugs or visiting a psychologist. However, a very popular form of managing SAD is through light therapy. Light therapy is conducted by sitting in front of a box that emits bright light for 30 minutes each day. "The light emitted from the device mimics natural light and causes a biochemical change in the brain that lightens mood and helps relieve SAD symptoms" (Scott-Clarke, 2008, para. 18-19).

Aside from Seasonal Affective Disorder, other forms of weather can also affect a person's mood. On the September 9, 1993 airing of Morning Edition on National Public Radio, commentator Joel Achenbach answered the



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question “Why is rain sometimes dreary and depressing, and sometimes wonderfully romantic?” (Achenbach, J.). He suggested “if the air pressure falls and the humidity rises, we retain more water in our bodies, and that causes a sluggish personality...experts call it a flat affect, and we know it as the blahs” (para. 1). However, he also suggested that during thunderstorms people feel more focused. This is as a result of the ozone and negative ions that thunderstorms emit. Negative ions, he suggested, alter your brain chemistry and excite your neurons (para. 2), leading to a significantly different effect than that caused by simple rain. Achenbach stated that these alterations lead to an increase of euphoria and brainwaves (para. 2). Therefore, while some people may find thunderstorms to be a scary experience, scientific evidence suggests that, with the extra negative ions in the air, this could be an ideal time to engage the creativity of patrons.

For those who work with teenagers, a group who already experiences intense mood swings, it is important to understand that weather could further affect these emotions. As such, one may choose to alter programming based on the weather, and the anticipated moods of patrons. For example, if working in a library on a rainy day, teens may feel slow and sluggish, and this would be the perfect opportunity for passive programming, in which teens could do as much or as little as they want. In cases of thunderstorms, teens could have more energy and be in need of more active programming to engage their minds and their bodies.

In the end, while it is important to understand the effects that the weather may have on the moods of teenagers, it is more important to listen to the teens themselves. We must understand that weather will not affect all teens, and it will certainly not affect them in the same way. However, by being aware that these changes could occur with the weather, we can better prepare ourselves for the sluggishness that may come with rain, and the energy that may come with thunderstorms.

References

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