



The causal effects of extraversion on positive affect and neuroticism on negative affect: Manipulating state extraversion and state neuroticism in an experimental approach [☆]

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Abstract

Although the relationships between extraversion and positive affect and between neuroticism and negative affect are powerful, the patterns of causality accounting for them are unknown. We employed an experimental methodology to manipulate state extraversion and state neuroticism to determine their causal status. In Experiment 1, state extraversion was manipulated by instructing participants to act extraverted and introverted during two different discussions with two other participants. Participants reported more positive affect when instructed to act extraverted than when instructed to act introverted, and this finding was supported by the ratings of observers. In Experiment 2, state neuroticism was manipulated by instructing participants to act neurotic and emotionally stable during two different discussions. Participants reported more negative affect when instructed to act neurotic than when instructed to act stable. Thus, at least some part of the extraversion-positive affect and neuroticism-negative affect relationships may be accounted for by the causal influences of extraverted behavior and neurotic behavior, respectively.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine whether extraverted behavior causes positive affect and whether neurotic behavior causes negative affect. Demonstrating these causal relationships would be important for at least three reasons. First, overwhelming evidence has established that more extraverted individuals experience higher levels of positive affect than less extraverted individuals do, and that individuals higher in neuroticism experience higher levels of negative affect than individuals lower in neuroticism do. However, none of this evidence has established whether extraversion causes positive affect or neuroticism causes negative affect (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Eid, Riemann, Angleitner, & Borkenau, 2003). Without evidence for such causal impacts, the important potential implications of these relationships for interventions to improve well-being cannot be realized. In contrast, showing that extraverted behavior causes positive affect and that neurotic behavior causes negative affect may open the door to the development of relevant interventions. Specifically, acting as though one is extraverted or not neurotic may be sufficient for increasing psychological well-being, by both increasing positive emotional states and decreasing negative emotional states.

Second, the methodology employed will be to manipulate by instruction participants' current level of extraverted and neurotic behavior and to test for effects on positive and negative affect. Successful manipulation of extraverted behavior and neurotic behavior may open up new directions of research by demonstrating the possibility of manipulating states (current levels of extraversion and neuroticism) in order to test theories about traits. A third reason this research is important is that it evaluates the meaningfulness of states. Demonstrating consequences of states would suggest that deviation from one's baseline way of acting is not purely error but rather is meaningful and potent. Such a finding may encourage more theory and research directed at understanding processes of within-person variation in states (Fleeson & Jolley, *in press*).

1.1. Evidence of extraversion-positive affect and neuroticism-negative affect relationships

Considerable research documents the relationships between extraversion and positive affect and between neuroticism and negative affect. Extraverts are happier than introverts, and individuals higher in neuroticism are more unhappy than those lower in neuroticism (e.g., Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001; Costa & McCrae, 1980; David, Green, Martin, & Suls, 1997; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener & Lucas, 1999; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener et al., 2003; Fossum & Barrett, 2000; Gross, Sutton, & Ketelaar, 1998; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Rusting, 1999; Watson & Clark, 1992; Wilson & Gullone, 1999). The extraversion-positive affect and neuroticism-negative affect relationships are quite strong. Extraversion typically accounts for about 15% and in one study accounted for 34% of the variance in positive affect (Costa & McCrae, 1980; David et al., 1997; Gross et al., 1998; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991; Lucas & Baird, 2004; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Rusting, 1999; Watson & Clark, 1992). These same studies found that neuroticism typically accounts for about 25% and in one study accounted for 36% of the variance in negative affect.

Evidence for the robustness of the extraversion-positive affect and neuroticism-negative affect relationships comes from replication across multiple methodologies. The most common methodology is one-time self-report of both general trait behavior and the general experience of affect (e.g., Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000; Watson & Clark, 1992).

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