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Reexamining the temporal aspects of affect: relationships between repeatedly measured affective state, subjective well-being, and affective disposition

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Abstract

Research that includes measures of affect has often used measures of affective state, subjective well-being, and affective disposition interchangeably. The present study examined the relationships between three widely-used measures of these constructs. Examination of coefficient alpha and test–retest reliabilities indicated that there are temporal differences between the constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis models indicated that affective state correlates with subjective well-being, which in turn correlates with affective disposition. Results indicate that the constructs are related but not equivalent, and that researchers should ensure they use the most valid instrument for the construct they wish to measure.

Keywords: Affect; Affective state; Subjective well–being; Affective disposition; Construct validity; Test–retest reliability; Internal consistency; LISREL

1. Introduction

In recent years, affect has played a prominent role in psychological, educational, human resources, and consumer behavior research (Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000; Efklides, Papadaki, Papantoniou, & Kiosseoglou, 1997; George, 1991; Gençöz, 2002; Judge & Locke, 1993; Lee & Sternthal, 1999; Levin & Stokes, 1989; Varma, Denisi, & Peters, 1996). For this reason, many researchers have included measures of affect in their studies.

Psychology, in particular, has enjoyed a continuing debate concerning the dimensional and temporal aspects of affect. Specifically, affect has been examined frequently through operationalizations

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such as: the multidimensional circumplex model (Feldman Barrett & Russell, 1998; Remington, Fabrigar, & Visser, 2000); the bipolar positive and negative affect model (Gençöz, 2002; Gomez, Cooper, & Gomez, 2000; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988); bipolar intensity and frequency (Simonsson-Sarnecki, Lundh, & Torestad, 2000; Schimmack & Diener, 1997); unidimensional affective disposition (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000; Judge, 1992); and temporally-based long-term and short-term affect (Watson, 1988b).

The choice of instruments to measure affect has not always been construct-valid, however, due to a lack of clarity in distinguishing between different aspects of affect. Our study offers distinctions between three temporally-based constructs of affect by operationalizing affect as: unidimensional affective disposition; bipolar positive and negative affective state; and bipolar positive and negative subjective well-being. Using a repeated-measure design, we examine the relationships between these three temporally-based constructs of affect and we examine the long-term stability of these constructs.

1.1. Bipolarity of affect

Affect has been conceptualized by using the bipolar positive affect/negative affect model (Watson, 1988a). High positive affect comprises emotions such as interested, strong, determined, active, and proud, while low positive affect comprises emotions such as dull, drowsy, and sleepy (Watson, 1988a). Alternatively, high negative affect comprises emotions such as irritable, ashamed, nervous, guilty, and scared, while low negative affect comprises emotions such as relaxed and calm (Watson et al., 1988).

Although the labels (i.e. positive affect and negative affect) imply that the poles are diametrically opposed to each other, they are not, and may be orthogonal, an assumption which this study tests (Diener, Smith, & Fujita, 1995). Thus, low positive affect is not to be equated with high negative affect. In fact, positive affect and negative affect influence thought processes differently (Isen & Baron, 1991).

1.2. Temporal dimensions of affect

Affect can be conceptualized as three temporally-based constructs: affective state; subjective well-being; and affective disposition. Affective state is the general emotional state one experiences at a specific moment (Gençöz, 2002; George, 1991; Gomez, Cooper, & Gomez, 2000; Nasby & Yando, 1982). Positive affective state enhances thought processes in a manner that facilitates some types of learning. For example, positive affective state enables one to access a broader scope of material from memory (Isen & Daubman, 1984; Nasby & Yando, 1982). This enhances the ability to solve problems creatively (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). This creativity leads thinking to be more flexible so that decision-making is more efficient (Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen, Johnson, Mertz, & Robinson, 1985).

Negative affective state focuses thoughts on material that has been remembered as being associated with unpleasant feelings (Isen & Baron, 1991). This material is less extensive in memory than is pleasantly associated material. Therefore, when in a state of negative affect, one recalls a smaller body of material than when one is in a state of positive affect. Thinking is thereby more rigid and decision-making is more cumbersome (Isen & Daubman, 1984).

Subjective well-being, a relatively stable characteristic, is the frequency with which one experiences different levels or types of affective state during a finite time period. During short time