



The role of extraversion, neuroticism and positive and negative mood in emotional information processing

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Abstract

The present research investigates the role of the personality dimensions of extraversion and neuroticism in emotional information processing and the moderating role of positive and negative mood. Six hundred and fifty-four university female students completed the Persian version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R); then, on the basis of extreme scores in extraversion and neuroticism dimensions from the main sample, four groups (each with 30 Ss) were selected. All groups experienced positive and negative induced mood in two separate sessions with 2 weeks interval. After mood induction in each session, subjects performed three cognitive tasks: free recall, probability rating and story completion. The findings revealed that subjects with higher extraversion, made more positive judgments and interpretations in the positive mood condition; and individuals with higher neuroticism, made more negative judgments and interpretations in the negative mood condition; but extraverted and neurotic subjects did not differ significantly in the number of positive and negative recalled words in the two mood conditions. Overall, the results indicated that personality traits influence emotional information processing, and support the moderating role of mood states in judgment and interpretation.

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1. Introduction

Several studies found that while extraversion (E) correlates strongly with positive affect, neuroticism (N) correlates strongly with negative affect (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1980; Gomez, Cooper, & Gomez, 2000; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991; Robinson, Ode, Moller, & Gotez, 2007). Gray (1970, 1981, 1987) offers an explanation for emotional susceptibility in extraverts and neurotics. Based on Gray's theory, E and N represent individual differences in the relative strengths of the behavioral activation system (BAS) and the behavioral inhibition system (BIS), respectively. Gray suggested that the anxiety component of N represents an increased sensitivity to punishment signals and the impulsivity component of E represents an increased sensitivity to reward signals (Rusting, 1999). A number of researchers (e.g., Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991) have noted that individual differences in susceptibility to positive and negative affect could be the result of underlying individual differences in sensitivity to signals of reward and punishment. These sensitivities suggest that E and N might also relate to cognitive processing of positive and negative emotional information. Extraverted individuals should retrieve rewarding or positive information from memory (and make positive judgments), and neurotic individuals should retrieve punishing or negative information from memory (and make negative judgments) (Rusting, 1999).

A number of studies have found that processing of emotional stimuli is associated with both current mood and stable personality traits (e.g., Rusting, 1999; Zeleneski & Larsen, 2002). This raises the possibility that personality traits associated with mood states are useful predictors of selective processing of emotional information (Gomez, Gomez, & Cooper, 2002). According to *Mood congruency hypothesis* (Bower, 1981, 1991), current mood states influence memory, judgment and other cognitive processing in an emotion-congruent manner; positive mood states should increase the tendency to make positive judgments and retrieve positive memories; negative mood states should increase the tendency to make negative judgments and retrieve negative memories. Some studies have obtained evidence supporting the mood congruent processing (e.g., Barber, 2001; Forgas, 1990; Isen, Shalke, Clark, & Karp, 1978; Mayer, Gaschke, Braverman, & Evans, 1992; Mayer, McCormick, & Strong, 1995). However, some researches have not found the mood congruent effects (e.g., Gayle, 1997; Parrot & Sabini, 1990).

Trait congruency hypothesis (Rusting, 1998) suggests that people preferentially process emotional stimuli that are congruent in emotional tone with their personality traits. A number of studies have obtained results consistent with this hypothesis (e.g., Bradley & Mogg, 1994; Gomez et al., 2002; Rusting & Larsen, 1998). Many of the previous studies that have examined the effects of mood states or personality traits on emotion-congruent processing, have been guided by associative network theories, such as, Bower's "*network theory of affect*" (1981, 1991). According to this theory, each specific emotion is represented by a particular emotion node within a cognitive network consisting of emotion related memories and cognitions. When an emotion is experienced, the corresponding emotion node is activated and past events and beliefs associated with that emotion are brought to mind. This theory suggests that a specific-emotion node by a related emotion evokes emotion-related attention, perception, memory, interpretation and judgment.

Just as previous research shows, most studies have only examined one of these variables (mood states or personality traits). Although, some researchers have examined the interactive effects of moods and traits on cognitive processing (e.g., Bradley & Mogg, 1994; Jansson & Lundh, 2006; Rusting, 1999; Taimer & Robinson, 2004; Zeleneski & Larsen, 2002), the results are not

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