

Personality and Emotional Reactivity

HOWARD BERENBAUM AND MELISSA WILLIAMS

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

This study examined the relationship between personality and emotional reactivity. Extraversion and neuroticism were measured using the Eysenck Personality Inventory. Subjects were randomly assigned to receive either caffeine or placebo. Reported emotional experience was measured after subjects viewed positive and negative affect-eliciting filmclips, and facial expressiveness was measured from videotapes recorded while the subjects viewed the filmclips. Personality was associated with emotional reactivity among individuals who received placebo, but not among individuals who received caffeine. Among individuals who received placebo, higher levels of extraversion were associated with less reactivity to the negative stimuli, and higher levels of neuroticism were associated with less reactivity to positive stimuli. © 1995 Academic Press, Inc.

A growing body of research has been devoted to the exploration of the relationship between personality and emotion. Although more recent work (e.g., Watson & Clark, 1992) has examined the "Big Five" personality dimensions, most of the research in this area has focused on extraversion and neuroticism. Extraversion has typically been found to be associated with positive affect, and neuroticism has typically been found to be associated with negative affect (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1980; Tellegen, 1985; Diener & Emmons, 1985). Personality may be linked to emotion for both temperamental and instrumental reasons (McCrae & Costa, 1991). A temperamental connection would be based on individual differences in personality influencing the likelihood of individuals responding in different ways to similar events. For example, the neurological underpinnings of extraversion may be associated with sensitivity to reward cues, which would make extraverts more likely than introverts to experience pleasant emotions. An instrumental connection would be based on individual differences in personality leading individuals to have experiences that differ

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in their likelihoods of eliciting different kinds of emotional reactions. For example, extraversion may be associated with the likelihood of engaging in activities that have a high likelihood of leading to reward, which would make extraverts more likely than introverts to experience pleasant emotions.

There are at least two reasons why additional research exploring the relationship between personality and emotional reactivity is warranted. First, the vast majority of the research examining the relationship between personality and emotion has been correlational in nature. As pointed out by Larsen and Ketelaar (1991), experimental procedures are particularly well suited to exploring the relationship between personality and emotion. Although Larsen and his colleagues have conducted several such studies (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989, 1991; Bunce, Larsen, & Cruz, 1993), they have relied exclusively on self-report in order to measure emotional reactivity. Thus, there is a need for additional research that utilizes experimental procedures and measures emotional reactivity using multiple measurement strategies.

The second reason additional research is warranted is that the results of previous research have not all been consistent. Although extraversion has typically been found to be associated with reactivity to positive stimuli, and neuroticism has typically been found to be associated with reactivity to negative stimuli, Bunce *et al.* (1993) recently found a different pattern of results. The goal of the study conducted by Bunce *et al.* was to explore the relationship between personality and excitation transfer effects. Bunce *et al.* had subjects rate how slides made them feel under two different conditions, following an exercise manipulation and then again under control conditions. Bunce *et al.* found that extraversion was negatively correlated with the size of the excitation transfer effect to negative slides, and neuroticism was positively correlated with the size of the excitation transfer effect to positive slides. Thus, the typical associations between extraversion and positive affect and between neuroticism and negative affect were not found by these investigators.

The results of the Bunce *et al.* (1993) study suggest that: (1) extraversion may sometimes be associated with reactivity to negative stimuli, (2) neuroticism may sometimes be associated with reactivity to positive stimuli, and (3) the nature of the association between personality and emotional reactivity may be sensitive to arousal manipulations. There are at least two reasons to suspect that the relationship between personality and emotional reactivity may be influenced by arousal manipulations. First, arousal plays a central role in many models of both personality (e.g., Eysenck, 1967) and emotion (e.g., Thayer, 1989). Second, since cognitive performance has been found to be associated with interactions between personality and arousal manipulations (e.g., Revelle, Humphreys, Simon, &

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