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Parsing positive emotion in relation to agentic and affiliative components of extraversion ☆

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Abstract

Extraversion is comprised of agentic and affiliative components, which are characterized by distinct positive emotional states of positive activation and warmth-affection, respectively. This study examined these positive emotions using the International Affective Picture System, a standardized set of pictures used to induce emotion. Compared to response to neutral pictures, the following target emotions were induced: (1) affiliative pictures induced warmth-affection and pleasantness, (2) agentic pictures induced positive activation, pleasantness, and arousal, (3) high arousal nonagentic pictures induced pleasantness and arousal, and (4) low arousal nonaffiliative pictures induced pleasantness. As previously demonstrated (Morrone, J. V., Depue, R. A., Scherer, A. J., & White, T. L. (2000). Film-induced incentive motivation and positive activation in relation to agentic and affiliative components of extraversion. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 29(2), 199–216; Morrone-Strupinsky, J. V. & Depue, R. A. (2004). Differential relation of two distinct, film-induced positive emotional states to affiliative and agentic extraversion. *Personality and*

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Individual Differences, 36(5), 1109–1126), agentic picture-induced positive affective ratings were significantly related to a trait measure of social potency, but not to other extraversion scales. The results support a multicomponent conceptualization of the extraversion trait, where agentic and affiliative components are associated with distinctive positive emotional experience.

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1. Background

The relation between positive affect and extraversion is well-established (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; Larsen & Diener, 1992; Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000). Positive affect is the defining feature of many psychometric measures of extraversion (Tellegen, 1985; Tellegen & Waller, in press; Watson & Clark, 1997), and has been included as a lower-order trait of extraversion in several personality models (Depue & Collins, 1999; Eysenck, 1990). When measures of positive affect were factor analyzed jointly with several multidimensional personality questionnaires, they loaded as highly on a general extraversion factor as traits of social activity and surgency, which is consistent with correlations between measures of positive affect and extraversion ($r = .66$ with extraversion; $r = .61$ with surgency; Watson & Clark, 1997). Extraversion has explained up to 40% of the variance in state positive affective ratings (Hutchinson et al., 1996). According to the temperament theory, extraversion reflects a susceptibility to experience positive emotional states (Lucas & Baird, 2004; Zelenski & Larsen, 1999). In the affect-level model, trait extraversion has a direct effect on baseline positive affective level, whereas in the affect-reactivity model, extraverts are considered more likely to respond to positive stimuli, either with greater frequency or intensity (Lucas & Baird, 2004). There is support for both models, depending on the level of arousal generated, with more arousing stimuli producing greater reactivity.

Extraversion is comprised of two major components referred to as agency and communion (Church & Burke, 1994; Tellegen & Waller, in press; Watson & Clark, 1997; Wiggins, 1991). Each is associated with distinct emotional and behavioral characteristics (Depue & Collins, 1999; Depue & Morrone-Strupinsky, 2005; Morrone, Depue, Scherer, & White, 2000; Morrone-Strupinsky & Depue, 2004). We prefer the term *affiliation* rather than *communion* to maintain a conceptual bridge to animal neurobehavioral work. Affiliation is characterized by agreeableness, gregariousness, warmth, and social closeness. Agency reflects surgency, assertion, endurance, persistence, achievement, social dominance, exhibitionism, ascendancy, and ambition. When higher-order traits were derived in joint factor analyses of several multidimensional personality questionnaires, affiliative and agentic traits were identified (Depue & Collins, 1999). Church (1994) demonstrated that Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) Agentic Positive Emotionality is significantly correlated with NEO-PI Assertiveness and Activity ($r = .33$ for both), whereas MPQ Communal Positive Emotionality is significantly correlated with NEO-PI Warmth, Gregariousness, Positive Emotions, and Assertiveness ($r_s = .53, .49, .51, \text{ and } .34$, respectively). The latter association is likely due to the common factor of positive emotion, as the correlation between MPQ Social Closeness and NEO-PI Assertiveness was .08.

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