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The relationship between positive and negative affect in the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

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Abstract

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) is one of the most widely used affect scales. Nevertheless, the relation between its two scales, positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), is still controversial. Previous results that suggest independence between NA and PA were limited to manifest variables. In this study, the relation between PA and NA for both state and trait instructions was analyzed by means of structural equation modeling. Two hundred ninety-two participants responded to the PANAS at three occasions of measurement. No association was found between trait PA and NA, but significant negative correlations between state PA and NA emerged. In the second step, the observed variance of state PA and NA was decomposed into a dispositional component, an occasion-specific component, a method-specific component, and a component due to measurement error by employing a multi-construct latent state–trait model. This analysis confirmed and extended the results of our first analysis: the dispositional components of state PA and NA were unrelated. In contrast, the situation-specific components were negatively associated. Thus, the negative correlation between state PA and NA could be traced back to situation-specific effects. © 2002 Elsevier Science (USA). All rights reserved.

Keywords: Positive affect; Negative affect; PANAS; Structural equation modeling; Latent state–trait analysis

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1. Introduction

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) is certainly one of the most widely used affect scales. It has been successfully employed in a variety of studies, concerning, for instance, perceived stress and health complaints (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989), social activities (Watson, Clark, McIntyre, & Hamaker, 1992), anxiety and depressive disorders (Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988), job-search behavior (Burger & Caldwell, 2000), and cigarette consumption (Becona, Vasquez, Fuentes, & Lorenzo, 1999). The PANAS scales have been translated into different languages (see, e.g., Krohne, Egloff, Kohlmann, & Tausch, 1996, for a German version, and Sandin et al., 1999, for a Spanish version) and have been adapted for children (PANAS-C; Laurent et al., 1999). Although the PANAS has been extensively used for over 10 years, its structure, that is, the relation between its two scales, positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), is still controversial.

Watson et al. (1988) as well as Watson and Clark (1997) showed that the correlation between positive and negative affect is very low and stable across different time frames when using the PANAS. It should be stressed, however, that these analyses were limited to manifest variables. Green, Goldman, and Salovey (1993) showed that measurement error may lead to an underestimation of the correlation between positive and negative moods. Consequently, Tellegen, Watson, and Clark (1999) could show that the correlation between the two PANAS scales was actually higher when taking measurement error into account. However, this correlation was still low enough to suggest relative independence. In this study, time frame was not varied as participants consistently indicated how they felt today.

The magnitude of the relationship between PA and NA could also depend on the time frame: Diener and Emmons (1984) showed that measures of momentary affect suggest higher correlations between PA and NA than measures of affect that capture longer time periods. Although this study used other affect descriptors than the PANAS items—and the relation between PA and NA certainly depends on the affect measure (Egloff, 1998)—higher correlations might especially be found for the state PANAS when measurement error is considered. Unfortunately, an investigation of the structure of the PANAS for different time intervals by using latent variables has not yet been published. In our first analysis, we aim at filling this gap by analyzing the relation between the latent variables PA and NA given two different instructions, a state and a trait one.

In the second part, the state PANAS is further analyzed. Watson et al. (1988) showed that even *state* PA and NA exhibited a significant level of stability ($r \approx .50$, time interval: 8 weeks). This result reflects the strong dispositional component of affect. That is, even momentary moods are, to a certain extent, reflections of one's general affective level. By using latent

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