A new day, a new me: Daily event domain and valence interact in relation to daily personality

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ABSTRACT

Does daily personality relate to the daily positive and negative events people report? And do interpersonal (extraversion, agreeableness) and intrapersonal (conscientiousness) traits relate more closely to daily social and achievement events, respectively? In a diary study, 133 undergraduates provided measures of daily events and daily Big Five personality. A three-level model examined daily event items as functions of their valence (negative vs. positive), domain (social vs. achievement), and their interaction (level 1); and the extent to which daily personality moderated these effects (level 2) for the average person (level 3). It revealed 4 three-way interactions. For extraversion and agreeableness, valence × personality interactions emerged for social—but not achievement—events. For neuroticism, valence × personality interactions emerged for both domains, but social was stronger. For conscientiousness, a valence × personality interaction emerged for achievement—but not social—events. We discuss whether daily personality shapes daily event experiences or vice versa.

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1. Introduction

Although classic models of personality have focused on trait-level assessment, recent approaches highlight the importance of understanding short-term fluctuations in state personality. Methodological advances including diary studies, experience sampling, and multilevel modeling have made it easier to study state personality (West, Ryu, Kwok, & Cham, 2011). In the present research, we focus on day-to-day fluctuations in Big Five personality and daily experiences. Specifically, we examine whether daily fluctuations in personality relate to the valence (positive or negative) and type (social or achievement) of daily events that people report experiencing.

1.1. State personality

Whole Trait Theory (Fleeson, 2012; Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015) attempts to integrate trait and state personality. State personality is defined as experiencing an affect, behavior, or cognition that corresponds to a given personality trait over a shorter duration (Pytlik Zillig, Hemenover, & Dienstbier, 2002). A primary proposition of Whole Trait Theory is that personality traits are best understood as density distributions of momentary personality states aggregated over time (Fleeson,

2012; Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015). Thus, trait personality reflects people's central tendency in state personality over time and situations (Fleeson & Gallagher, 2009). This conceptualization is similar to definitions of state emotion, affect (e.g., Watson, 1988), and self-esteem (e.g., Kernis, 2005), but is a relatively novel concept regarding personality (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015).

1.2. Big Five and daily experiences

Drawing on Whole Trait Theory, we propose that state personality should relate to differences in the types of events and behaviors people report (i.e., situational contact; Rauthmann, Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2015; Sherman, Rauthmann, Brown, Serfass, & Jones, 2015). More specifically, the social-cognitive mechanisms underlying state personality—goals, beliefs, values—should influence the types of situations people seek out or encounter and vice versa. In addition, state personality derived from these social-cognitive mechanisms should be related to the interpretation of events and behaviors (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015; Mischel, 2004; Rauthmann et al., 2015; Sherman et al., 2015). Thus, state personality may influence aspects of an event that people notice, and experiencing a particular event may similarly shape a person's daily personality. For example, experiencing negative events may lead to temporarily higher emotional instability and neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Thus, there may be bidirectional effects linking daily personality with the events people seek or recall experiencing. Such an interpretation is consistent with the growing

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acceptance of dynamic personality–situation interactions rather than a personality–situation debate (Funder, 2009; Webster, 2009).

What kinds of daily events might Big Five state fluctuations relate to? First, daily events can vary by *domain*. One useful domain distinction is that between social- and achievement-oriented events (Nezlek, 2002, 2005). For example, extraversion and agreeableness are primarily interpersonal factors and thus, people scoring high on those traits may be more likely to seek out or recall social events (McCrae & Costa, 1989). In contrast, conscientiousness reflects concern with achievement and self-discipline, whereas openness to experience reflects desire to explore (McCrae & Costa, 1987). As such, these factors are less interpersonally oriented, and may orient someone toward achievement events on a given day (e.g., achieving a good test score, completing a piano sonata). Whereas agreeableness and extraversion are often associated with relationship qualities (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001), conscientiousness and openness are often associated with achievement-domain life events and status attainment (Goldberg, Sweeney, Merenda, & Hughes, 1998; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Neuroticism is less domain-specific, but is concerned with experiences of unpleasant emotions regardless of the situation (McCrae & Costa, 1989). Previous research suggests that there is a bidirectional positive feedback loop linking neuroticism and negative life experiences; increases in one often precede increases in the other (Jeronimus, Riese, Sanderman, & Ormel, 2014).

Second, the Big Five personality traits may also influence the *valence* of events that people seek out, attend to, or recall. That is, people's state-based personality may color the degree to which they notice or remember an event as positive or negative. At the trait level, Big Five personality factors differentially predict positive and negative life experiences. Agreeableness and extraversion relate to more positive life experiences such as better relationships (Anderson et al., 2001), whereas conscientiousness and openness relate to better work and academic achievement (Goldberg et al., 1998), and higher status in groups (Mount et al., 1998).

Personality factors that orient people toward more positivity, such as agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness, may lead people to both experience and notice more positive aspects of events. In contrast, high neuroticism may make the negative aspects of daily events more salient (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Not all research, however, has found consistent relationships between trait levels of the Big Five and experiencing valenced events. For example, a multi-wave study showed that neuroticism was related to experiencing fewer positive events, but no other Big Five traits related to experiencing either positive or negative events (Rauthmann et al., 2015).

1.3. Overview

In the present research, we examined the relations among state Big Five personality traits and people's experiences of daily events. Specifically, we examined daily fluctuations of Big Five in relation to the types of events people reported (social vs. achievement domain, positive vs. negative valence, and their interaction). We reasoned that state personality may systematically shape—and be shaped by—people's perceptions of daily experiences in predictable ways. Specifically, we expected interpersonal state personality dimensions (agreeableness, extraversion) would relate more closely to daily event valence in social domains, whereas intrapersonal dimensions (conscientiousness, openness) would relate more closely to event valence in achievement domains. Because people with high state neuroticism likely react to daily events in both domains, we expected that neuroticism would relate to event valence across domains.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

We recruited participants from psychology classes at a large public university in the southeastern U.S. Participants were 133 students (39 males, 92 females, 2 non-responders; aged 18–41 years). Most participants identified as White/Non-Hispanic (77%) or Black/African American (17%).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Daily events

To assess daily experiences, participants rated 28 events using an established scale: 0 = *did not occur*, 1 = *occurred and not important*, 2 = *occurred and somewhat important*, 3 = *occurred and pretty*

Table 1
Items adapted from the daily events survey (Butler et al., 1994).

Daily event item	Valence	Domain
1. Had especially good interactions with friend(s) or acquaintances.	+	Social
2. Completed work on an interesting project or assignment.	+	Achievement
3. Did poorly on schoolwork task (e.g., test, assignment, job duty).	−	Achievement
4. Did something awkward or embarrassing in a social situation.	−	Social
5. Was excluded or left out by my group of friends.	−	Social
6. Fell behind in coursework or duties.	−	Achievement
7. Went out socializing with friends/date (e.g., party, dance club).	+	Social
8. Met a daily fitness goal.	+	Achievement
9. Performed well (sports, music, speaking, drama, etc.).	+	Achievement
10. A disagreement with a close friend or steady date was left unresolved.	−	Social
11. Classmate, teacher, co-worker, or friend criticized me on my abilities.	−	Achievement
12. Did something special for a friend/steady date, which was appreciated.	+	Social
13. Flirted with someone or arranged a date.	+	Social
14. Got caught up (or ahead) in coursework or work duties.	+	Achievement
15. Got along poorly with peers (e.g., classmates, co-workers, roommates).	−	Social
16. Failed to meet a daily fitness goal.	−	Achievement
17. Classmate, teacher, co-worker, or friend complimented me on my abilities.	+	Achievement
18. Went out to eat with a friend/romantic partner	+	Social
19. Tried to do homework and couldn't understand it.	−	Achievement
20. Did well on a school or work task (e.g., test, assignment, job duty).	+	Achievement
21. Had plans fall through to spend time with someone special.	−	Social
22. Had especially good interactions with my romantic partner.	+	Social
23. Thought about the meaning of life or other philosophical issue.	+	Spiritual
24. Attended a religious service or prayed.	+	Spiritual
25. Had other type of pleasant event (not listed above) with friends, family, or romantic partner.	+	Social
26. Had other type of unpleasant event (not listed above) with friends, family, or romantic partner.	−	Social
27. Had other type of pleasant event (not listed above) concerning performance at school, work, or another activity.	+	Achievement
28. Had other type of unpleasant event (not listed above) concerning performance at school, work, or another activity.	−	Achievement