



Positive orientation and interpersonal styles



Valeria Castellani *, Enrico Perinelli, Maria Gerbino, Gian Vittorio Caprara

Department of Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Via dei Marsi 78, 00185 Rome, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 February 2016
Received in revised form 7 April 2016
Accepted 11 April 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Positivity
Positive orientation
Life satisfaction
Optimism
Self-esteem
Adult attachment
Anxious
Avoidant

ABSTRACT

This study examined the longitudinal reciprocal relationships between positive orientation (i.e. the common latent variable at the core of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and optimism) and anxious and avoidant relationship styles in young adulthood. Four hundred and sixty-seven youths (52% girls) were assessed three times, at intervals of 4 years. The results showed that, while positive orientation was negatively associated with anxious and avoidant styles at each time of measurement, the model in which positive orientation significantly contributed to both anxious and avoidant styles fitted the data better than did alternative models. Self-esteem, life satisfaction and optimism did not show any relevant impact on interpersonal styles after controlling for positive orientation.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Positive orientation and secure interpersonal style

Studies of different cultures, such as those of Italy, Canada, Japan, and Germany (Caprara, Steca, Alessandri, Abela, & McWhinnie, 2010b) have shown that self-esteem, life satisfaction and optimism can be traced to a common latent dimension named positive orientation or positivity (henceforth POS), thereby inaugurating a program of research that has spanned different fields of psychological inquiry (Caprara et al., 2012a). Twin studies show that heritability accounts for about the 50% of the variance of this latent dimension, whereas unshared environment accounts for the remaining portion (Fagnani, Medda, Stazi, Caprara, & Alessandri, 2014). Other studies have demonstrated the stability of POS over the course of development and its positive effect on people's lives across different domains of functioning such as health, psychological well-being and adjustment (Alessandri, Caprara, & Tisak, 2012).

Psychometric studies have corroborated the same factorial model across languages, cultures and continents (Caprara et al., 2012b). Longitudinal studies of twins have pointed to POS as a stable and basic evaluative predisposition (Caprara et al., 2009). Longitudinal findings have further attested to the contribution of POS to well-being and well-adjustment by corroborating a model in which POS contributes to chronic positive affect in a cross-lagged autoregressive model from

late adolescence to adulthood (Caprara, Eisenberg, & Alessandri, in press).

The reasoning underlying POS benefited of earlier intuitions of Beck (1967), who posited that a negative view of oneself, the world, and the future at the core of social cognitive processing of depressed versus non-depressed persons. Similarly, Caprara et al. (2009, 2010b) and Caprara, Alessandri, & Barbaranelli (2010a) hypothesized the existence of a positive cognitive triad that leads people to hold a positive view of themselves, their life, and the future (Alessandri et al., 2012).

The basic tenet of POS theory is that viewing oneself, life, and the future with a positive outlook rests upon a common basic evaluative predisposition that pervasively affects the attitude of people towards life and existence. This predisposition is needed, at the beginning and throughout life, to cope with the limitations of human nature, the frailties of the human condition, and the prospect of death. This, however, should not lead us to underestimate the importance and impact of other constructs with which POS may operate in concert.

In this regard, much of the recent literature on adults' attachment as a secure interpersonal style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012) shows relevant similarities with findings on POS. Human development is profoundly influenced by social relationships, and the quality of interpersonal relationships people establish with others exerts a significant impact over their development, social adjustment, and attitude towards life (Caldwell & Shaver, 2012). Whereas the literature on attachment has mostly focused on interpersonal relationships, the literature on POS has focused on judgments people hold about their life and experience; and the points of intersection are noteworthy.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: valeria.castellani@uniroma1.it (V. Castellani).

Secure attachment, similarly to POS, has been positively associated with desirable traits and habits viewed as crucial in fostering positive affect, and has proved to contribute to satisfying friendships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). It is likely that both POS and a secure interpersonal style exert a protective function by predisposing to positive encounters, to recruiting others' sympathy, and to capitalizing upon one's confidence in oneself and in others. The present contribution is the first, to our knowledge, that addresses the relationship between POS and interpersonal styles.

1.2. Anxious and avoidant interpersonal styles

The seminal studies and intuitions of Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall (1978) on children's attachment have spurred a large body of empirical research that, over the course of time, has made interpersonal orientations an important domain of research investigation. The basic tenet of attachment theory, that places trust and security at the core of a healthy relationship of a child with his or her caretaker, has provided a model with which to address interpersonal relationships, and to trace consistent individual differences in the ways people relate to others to stable interpersonal styles (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Studies on adults' interpersonal orientations, based on the assumption that people possess a predominant interpersonal orientation, and adopting the same typology of Bowlby and Ainsworth (including secure, avoidant, and anxious attachment), have multiplied over the years (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

Most studies have focused on a person's *orientation style*, defined as the systematic pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and behaviors resulting from internalization of a particular history of attachment experiences (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). Secure orientation resulted from the most common style in all examined populations, and was generally associated with a variety of desirable features of personality and outcomes. However, anxious and avoidant orientations, although predominant in smaller segments of the examined population, were more frequently associated with a variety of problems and undesirable outcomes.

Recent findings have pointed to Anxiety and Avoidance as two continuous dimensions that reflect variations in the functioning of two key control processes respectively related to the way in which people monitor and appraise the availability and accessibility of attachment figures, and to the way in which people regulate attachment-related thoughts, feelings, and behavior (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley, Hudson, Heffernan, & Segal, 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

Individuals who show low levels of Anxiety and Avoidance in interpersonal orientation have higher levels of self-esteem (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), are more frequently in a positive mood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012), react more effectively to stressful events (e.g., Berant, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2008), and report less depressive symptoms (e.g., Hankin, Kassel, & Abela, 2005).

Both Anxiety and Avoidance styles have been associated with pessimistic views of life (Heinonen, Räikkönen, Keltikangas-Järvinen, & Strandberg, 2004; Wei, Heppner, & Mallinckrodt, 2003; Wei, Mallinckrodt, Russell, & Abraham, 2004), with rumination on past negative events/thoughts that continuously intrude into the present (Lanciano, Curci, Kafetsios, Elia, & Zammuner, 2012), and with underappreciation of positive emotions and experiences, such as sharing positive experiences with others (Goodall, 2015). While avoidant individuals may experience positive emotion as destabilizing, anxious individuals are most prone to dampening positive emotions.

Overall findings from research on interpersonal relationships converge with findings from research on POS in pointing to the negative association of Anxious and Avoidance styles with the three major expressions of POS, namely self-esteem (Foster, Kernis, & Goldman, 2007), life satisfaction (Hinnen, Sanderman, & Sprangers, 2009), and optimism (Heinonen et al., 2004), as well as correlating strongly with

elements of POS, such as positive affectivity (Meyer, Jones, Rorer, & Maxwell, 2015). It is probable that people's interpersonal orientation reflects and influences their beliefs and expectations about themselves, as well as about others and life in general. However, the extent to which POS contributes to interpersonal style (or vice versa) needs to be clarified.

As POS theory rests upon the hypothesis of a basic predisposition to view life and experience using a positive outlook that exerts a pervasive influence across all domains of psycho-social functioning, one may guess that Avoidant and Anxious interpersonal styles largely reflect a weakness in the basic assets and equipment that enable people to cope with life, despite adversities, failures, and loss (Caprara et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, viewing interpersonal styles as an extension of the primary bonds of children with their caretakers that even antecede birth, one cannot exclude that earlier experiences, involving acceptance, trust, and responsiveness from significant others, may pervasively affect the expression of people's potential and their attitude towards existence from the beginning of life.

1.3. Aims of this study

Previous studies have associated both Anxiety and Avoidance interpersonal styles with poor self concept, high vulnerability, exaggerated negative emotional responses, and depression (Fraley, Roisman, Booth-LaForce, Owen, & Holland, 2013; Hankin et al., 2005; Lanciano et al., 2012). Likewise, POS has been found to be negatively associated with emotional instability, negative affectivity and depression (Caprara et al., 2012a).

The present study therefore has been conceived to examine the reciprocal relationships among POS and Anxiety and Avoidance styles in intimate relationships in a sample of young adults, by using a multi-wave design. We expected to corroborate a model in which POS contributes to low levels of both Anxiety and Avoidance. We did not underestimate the reciprocal influence that POS and interpersonal styles may exert over each other.

Indeed, on the basis of previous studies, POS might be considered as a part of humans' biological equipment that predisposes people to benefit from positive events (Caprara, Eisenberg and Alessandri, *in press*), therefore, it is likely that POS may have a higher impact in experiencing good interpersonal relationships, rather than vice versa. Yet, in viewing at POS as a basic component of human equipment's towards life and experience, we assumed that its influence would be conducive to well adjusted interpersonal styles.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited in Genzano, a residential area near Rome (Italy), and were from families involved in an ongoing longitudinal project in that community that started in the early 1990s (Caprara, Pastorelli, Regalia, Scabini, & Bandura, 2005).

The composition of the original family, and the occupational socioeconomic distribution of our sample, matched the national profile (Istituto Italiano di Statistica, 2002). The community represented a socioeconomic microcosm of the larger society: 16% were in professional or managerial ranks, 42% were merchants or employees in various types of businesses, 12% were skilled workers, 22% were unskilled workers, 3% were retired, 2% were temporarily unemployed but with a salary, and 3% were unemployed.

The study design included three data collection points. Four hundred and sixty-seven youths (52% girls; mean age at Time 1 = 21.31 years, $SD = 1.09$; Time 2 = 25.50 years, $SD = 1.65$; Time 3 = 28.98 years, $SD = 1.69$) were included in this study and assessed every four years. Because of the availability of measures, we used two of the four cohorts

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7250031>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7250031>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)