Journal of Research in Personality 63 (2016) 67–71

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Research in Personality

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrp

Brief Report

A social relations examination of neuroticism and emotional support

Julie A. Brunson [a,*], Camilla S. Øverup [b], Paras D. Mehta [c]

[a] The Pennsylvania State University, United States
[b] Fairleigh Dickinson University, United States
[c] University of Houston, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 14 November 2015
Revised 17 May 2016
Accepted 23 May 2016
Available online 24 May 2016

Keywords:
Neuroticism
Emotional support
Social relations model
Life satisfaction

ABSTRACT

Personality factors have been linked to perceptions of the self and others. We examined the extent to which self and other-perceptions of neuroticism and emotional support were interrelated and related to self-reported life satisfaction. Members of sororities and fraternities completed self-ratings and other-ratings on neuroticism, emotional support, and life satisfaction. Using a social relations model framework, we found evidence of perceptual biases and behavioral expression of both neuroticism and emotional support. Additionally, there was self-other agreement in terms of both neuroticism and emotional support. Viewing others as neurotic was associated with lower life satisfaction. Results are discussed in light of research on interpersonal relationships and perception.

1. Introduction

It is known that personality shapes individuals' perceptions of the world around them (e.g., Allport, 1937), and this is particularly true when considering neuroticism. Neuroticism is linked to a negative attitude toward events (e.g., Rafienia, Azadfallah, Fathi-Ashtiani, & Rasoulzadeh-Tabatabaiei, 2008) and has interpersonal consequences; for instance, neurotic people tend to experience less satisfying friendships (Wilson, Harris, & Vazire, 2015). It may be that the negative views and feelings that neurotic individuals experience cause them to struggle interpersonally and therefore perceive emotional support from others differently than those who are less neurotic.

Traditionally, self-report is used to examine neuroticism and its associations with various outcomes, such as social support (e.g., Swickert & Owens, 2010). However, self-reported perceptions may be biased, and thus, it is unclear whether self-reported interpersonal struggles are a figment of perception or whether neurotic people do indeed experience less emotional support. In the current manuscript, we explore the associations between perceptions of neuroticism and emotional support while accounting for potential perceptual biases. Additionally, we examine the extent to which self-perceptions align with other-perceptions.

1.1. Social relations model

The social relations model (SRM; Kenny, 1994) represents a theoretical model for examining perceptions of others, where each person rates every other person in the group. In an SRM, perceptions of others are decomposed into several components, namely the perceiver, target, and relationship (or residual) effects. The *perceiver effect* indicates whether people tend to see others as similarly more (or less) neurotic or emotionally supportive (also called *assimilation*; Kenny, 1994). The *target effect* indicates whether a person tends to be perceived in the same way by others (also called *consensus*; Kenny, 1994). The perceiver and target effect make up the main part of a person's perceptions. However, given the interpersonal nature of person perception, there is typically something unique to each dyad. Thus, the SRM separates out a *relationship effect* that indicates whether ratings are due to the idiosyncratic dyadic relationships.[1] In other words, something about the relationship between two individuals may influence how neurotic those individuals view each other, beyond their general tendency to see others as neurotic and the general tendency to be seen by others as neurotic.

Additionally, a correlation between one person's ratings of another and that other's ratings of the first person can be estimated (indicating *dyadic reciprocity*). For example, Alice may see Bob as neurotic, just like Bob sees Alice as neurotic. It is also possible to examine if there is *general reciprocity*, or a correlation between

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, United States.
E-mail address: jub56@psu.edu (J.A. Brunson).

[1] It should be noted that the relationship variance component also includes residual variance; only in cases where there are multiple indicators can the variance due to the dyad be separated from the residual variance (Kenny, 1994).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2016.05.012
0092-6566/

the perceiver and target effects. For instance, a correlation between the perceiver effect for neuroticism and the target effect for neuroticism would suggest that individuals who view others as neurotic also tend to be seen by others as neurotic.

Correlations between the perceiver/target effects and self-reports may be especially interesting, as they indicate whether our world view influences our self-views (i.e., association between a perceiver effect and self-reports; *assumed similarity*), and whether our self-views are a reflection of how others see us (i.e., association between a target effect and self-report; *self-other agreement*; Kenny, 1994)? To date, little research has examined these questions. However, with new methodological and statistical advances, such questions can be explored. Recent developments in multi-level structural equation modeling software allows for the simultaneous estimations of all dyadic, perceiver, and target effects, and self-reports, while also estimating disattenuated correlations between the various effects (Mehta, in press; please see https://osf.io/auxf6/ and http://xxm.times.uh.edu/ for further discussion).

1.2. The current study

Previous research has examined associations between neuroticism and emotional support (e.g., Swickert & Owens, 2010; Wilson et al., 2015) and separate work has focused on associations with life satisfaction (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Garcia, 2011). However, research has primarily utilized self-report measures, and only little has utilized observer or other-reports. The current study sought to examine associations between perceptions of neuroticism and emotional support using the social relations model, a framework that uses multiple informants.

We had multiple aims with the current research. First, we sought to examine the presence of perceiver and target effects in perceptions of neuroticism and emotional support; that is, do people have perceptual biases, such that they typically see others as more (or less) neurotic and emotionally supportive (perceiver effects), and are some people consistently seen as more (or less) neurotic and emotionally supportive (target effects)?

Secondly, as little research has examined self-other agreement in these constructs, we were interested in examining associations between self-reports and target effects. That is, we explored whether those who self-report being neurotic (or emotionally supportive) were perceived as neurotic (or emotionally supportive) by others. Similarly, we were interested in examining whether self-reports were associated with perceiver effects, indicating whether our self-reports reflect our view of the world (i.e., assumed similarity). We also examined whether the perceiver and target effects for neuroticism were associated with less self-reported life satisfaction, given their negative outlook on life.

Finally, we wished to examine associations between perceiver and target effects. Given previous research (e.g., Berry, Willingham, & Thayer, 2000; Lincoln, Taylor, & Chatters, 2003), those who see others as neurotic may also see them as providing less emotional support. These individuals may also be seen by others as neurotic, as they may express their negative view of the world to others. Similarly, those who are seen by others as neurotic may be seen as providing less emotional support. However, it is unlikely that those who see others as emotionally supportive are in turn seen by others as neurotic, given that neurotic individuals tend to perceive less emotional support from others.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

Seven fraternities and sororities participated in the study with some organizations further divided into cohorts. Thus, there was a total of 21 groups, with an average of 22 persons per group. The sample consisted of 115 individuals (90 men and 23 women; two individuals did not complete the question), with 114 serving as perceivers and 164 as targets, giving a total of 448 dyadic ratings. The median number of perceivers per target was three; the median number of targets per perceiver was four. Participant age ranged from 18 to 39 (M = 21.09 years, SD = 2.66). The sample was ethnically diverse, with 8% of individuals being African American, 31% Asian, 30% Caucasian, 26% Hispanic, and 5% being "other." The sample consisted of 10% freshmen, 39% sophomores, 28% juniors, and 23% seniors.

2.2. Procedure

A research assistant contacted sororities and fraternities via their chapter presidents to recruit for the study. The chapter presidents were told that the 45-min study concerned interpersonal perceptions in groups and that participants would be compensated with a $10 gift card. Prior to the study session, the chapter president sent a roster of members to the research assistant, who created customized lists of the targets, such that each participant received a list of persons about whom he or she was to answer questions; the pairing of perceivers and targets was random within cohort/group. Individuals could serve as targets of ratings without being a perceiver, or as perceivers without being a target, depending on meeting attendance.

For data collection, a group of 4–6 research assistants met with the sorority/fraternity. A research assistant described the study protocol to the participants and the study questionnaires were distributed, along with the person-specific lists of targets. Each person received a list of at most six individuals; participants were told to complete as many as possible during the time allotted. Upon completion of the study, research assistants collected the study materials, distributed the gift cards, and thanked the group.

2.3. Measures

Participants completed a series of self- and other-report measures assessing personality, basic need satisfaction, life satisfaction, conditions of self-worth, self-monitoring, organizational information, and basic demographics (please see the full questionnaires on the following link: https://osf.io/auxf6/). Because of the complexities and computational limitations of the multivariate SRM model, only three items were included in the current study. In measuring perceptions of others, participants completed a series of items, all of which shared the stem "I see this person as…" To measure perceptions of neuroticism, individuals reported on the extent to which they see the person as "… anxious, easily upset" (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003) and to assess perceptions of emotional support provision, participants rated the extent to which they see the other as "…willing to provide emotional support in a time of need." This item was created for the purpose of this study. Both items were rated using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much).

Self-perceptions of neuroticism, provision of emotional support, and satisfaction with life were also examined. These questions shared the stem "I see myself as…" The same neuroticism and emotional support items and rating scale as described for above were used to examine self-perceptions. One item from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used; participants responded to the item "I am satisfied with my life," using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree).

It is important to note that although each construct was assessed with only one item, reliability in the SRM derives from having multiple targets and multiple perceivers, which allows for