



Caught in the act: How extraverted and introverted friends communally cope with being recorded

Avril Thorne^{a,*}, Lauren Shapiro^a, Kim Cardilla^a, Neill Korobov^b, Paul A. Nelson^a

^a Department of Psychology, University of California at Santa Cruz, 1156 High St., Santa Cruz, CA 95064, USA

^b Department of Psychology, University of West Georgia, 1601 Maple St., Carrollton, GA 30118, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 8 April 2009

Keywords:

Extraversion
Introversion
Communal coping
Interpersonal behavior
Friendship
Person–situation interactionism
Conversation

ABSTRACT

This study explored how close friends who were similar or opposite on extraversion communally coped with being put on the spot to produce a recorded conversation. Participants were 50 pairs of same-sex college-age friends (54% female) who explicitly discussed the fact that their conversation was being recorded. The initial 'on-stage' episode emerged consistently earliest for extraverted dyads, and the majority of their episodes quickly diverted the on-stage moment. Dyads that included at least one introvert engaged in more extensive assortments of on-stage maneuvers, including research talk, soothing, and joking. In introvert–extravert dyads the extravert usually initiated and ended these episodes. Implications are discussed for understanding how personality is reciprocally implicated in managing shared everyday problems.

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1. Introduction

Eva: Where did you eat at?
Inez: Um, just the bagel place.
Eva: Oh. Was it good? *This feels really weird.*
Inez: *Yeah, I know. I don't like this.*
Eva: *Okay.*
Inez: *Like with the FBI or something*
Eva: *I know, well.* So, yeah, did you have a good time last night?

In our recordings of conversations between friends we have encountered plenty of brief exchanges about being recorded, like the above example. Such exchanges seemed a stark departure from the natural sounding dialogue that characterized most of the conversations, which were replete with gossip and stories about romantic concerns (Korobov & Thorne, 2006, 2007; Thorne, Korobov, & Morgan, 2007). Another way of viewing such talk is that it is a natural way of coping with a shared stressor and of using the stressor as an interactional resource (Speer & Hutchby, 2003).

Communal coping refers to the process by which a stressful experience is collaboratively managed in the context of close relationships (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). The concept of communal coping was designed to rectify an individualistic bias in the coping literature. Like much personality research, coping

research traditionally has viewed individuals as independently appraising and managing problematic situations. However, regardless of whether a stressor initially is experienced individually or collectively, coping is often a social process, embedded in particular relationships (Berg, Meegan, & Deviney, 1998; Lyons et al., 1998). For example, a mother's stress at work can be experienced by her children at home, and a student's impending classroom presentation can impact a roommate's peace of mind.

Being thrust into the recording spotlight can produce a mild form of stress that may engender communal coping. Although communal coping research has mostly focused on momentous life events such as losing a job or a loved one, coping with daily stressors has been found to be more highly associated with emotional and physical health than is coping with major life events (e.g., DeLongis, Coyne, Dakof, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1982). For example, in a longitudinal study of college students, daily hassles such as interruptions while working were more highly correlated with psychological symptoms than were more momentous events such as the loss of a friend or a romantic breakup (Wagner, Compas, & Howell, 1988). Such findings have led to heightened interest in studies of communal coping with mundane stressors and the role of personality differences therein (Berg et al., 1998).

The personality dimension of extraversion–introversion would seem to be a good candidate to explore how personality is reciprocally implicated when coping with the problem of being put on the spot to produce a recorded conversation. Past research suggests that individuals on the introverted end of the continuum ("introverts") would experience such situations as particularly intrusive, because introverts describe themselves and are described by

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 831 459 3519.
E-mail address: avril@ucsc.edu (A. Thorne).

others as private, quiet, and reserved (Costa & McCrae, 1985; Stone, 1986; Thorne & Gough, 1991). People on the extraverted end of the continuum (“extraverts”) generally are more comfortable being put on the spot. For example, in a study that asked undergraduates to rate their level of embarrassment while imagining a series of hypothetical scenarios, extraversion correlated negatively with embarrassment at being thrust into the spotlight (Sabini, Siepmann, Stein, & Meyerowitz, 2000).

How might friends who are similar or different with regard to level of extraversion communicatively cope with being thrust into the spotlight? Because introverted people are less prone to self-disclose in general (Levesque, Steciuk, & Ledley, 2002), they might avoid talking about the fact that they are being recorded and just try to proceed with a ‘regular’ conversation. Extraverted people, on the other hand, may more readily communicate the fact that they are being observed as a way of clearing the air before moving on to a regular conversation. Because extraversion–introversion tends to be contagious, these differential tendencies toward open disclosure may be amplified when talking with a dispositionally similar friend (Eaton & Funder, 2003; Thorne, 1987). In other words, two introverted friends may be particularly likely to delay talking about feeling exposed, whereas two extraverted friends will be particularly prone to talk about the exposure right away. And what about an extravert with an introvert? Prior research has found that friends tend to converge over time with regard to emotional responses and that the responses of the more socially powerful friend tend to be adopted by the less powerful friend (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). Because extraverts generally are more socially powerful than introverts, their response to a situation of shared exposure may prevail; that is, the extraverted friend may more readily address the fact that they are being observed and the introverted friend will then join in.

These expectations are tentative because no studies to our knowledge have examined extraversion and communal coping in general or in recorded conversations, in particular. Our coding system measured the latency of the first comments about being observed, and attended to the length of any such exchanges. We then devised quasi-inductive categories to capture particular kinds of on-stage maneuvers. We also examined interviews about the conversations to understand the phenomenology underlying such maneuvers.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The on-stage sample consisted of 50 pairs of same-sex friends. Seventeen pairs were extremely extraverted (8 male, 9 female), 14 pairs were extremely introverted (10 male, 4 female), and 19 pairs were mixed (one extremely extraverted, the other extremely introverted; 5 male, 14 female). Dyads were undergraduate students attending a public university in Northern California. Their mean age was 19.5 ($SD = 0.97$) and they had been friends a median of one year. They were selected from a larger sample of 66 pairs of friends because they produced at least one on-stage episode in their conversation.¹ One partner was recruited through pre-testing in a large psychology course and earned credit toward a course requirement by participating in the study. Each recruit brought along a friend whom they had known for at least six months and who was compensated \$20. For socio-linguistic purposes,

participants were required to be native speakers of English; 90% self-identified as white or European American.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Extraversion–introversion scale

Participants were recruited on the basis of scores on 10 items from the extraversion–introversion (E–I) scale of the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Form M (Briggs & Myers, 1998). The internal consistency of the 10-item scale was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.83$). The MBTI E–I scale correlates robustly with other commonly used extraversion scales (see McCrae & Costa, 1989; Thorne & Gough, 1991). The forced-choice items (1 = introverted direction; 2 = extraverted direction) mainly refer to sociability versus reserve in general social settings. Scale scores ranged from 10 to 20, with higher scores indicating extraversion.

2.2.2. Friendship ratings

Participants completed a survey about the quality of their relationship, including the length of their friendship in months, and friendship closeness (“How close do you feel to this friend, compared to your closest same-sex friend?”). Friendship closeness was rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very). These two variables also were analyzed in a prior study drawn from the same data archive, which compared storytelling practices of extraverted versus introverted dyads (Thorne et al., 2007).

2.3. Procedures

2.3.1. Pre-test

One member of each dyad was part of a pre-test group, averaging 250 students per quarter, recruited between Fall, 1999, and Spring, 2002. Students were administered a survey in large psychology courses; the survey included 10 E–I items and demographic questions (gender, age, ethnicity, native language). To determine cut-offs for recruiting extraverts and introverts, E–I scores in the Fall, 1999 pre-test sample were compiled into a distribution ($M = 15.2$; $SD = 2.9$, range = 10–20), and students scoring in the upper and lower quartiles were identified as candidates. The scores for extraverted candidates ranged from 18 to 20, and for introverted candidates ranged from 10–12. These cut-offs were maintained for subsequent pre-test samples, which showed very similar distributions.

2.3.2. Recruitment

Candidates falling within the designated ranges on the E–I scale were contacted by telephone approximately one week after pre-testing and invited to participate in a “friendship study.” Students who expressed interest were asked to bring along a same-sex friend whom they had known for at least six months, and were informed that the study would take approximately 2 h. Candidates were told they could receive credit toward a course requirement and that their friend would be compensated \$20. The nature of the study was not revealed until after the participants arrived.

2.3.3. Catch-up conversations

Each dyad was greeted by a same-sex undergraduate research assistant who escorted them to a comfortable room decorated with children’s art and seated them on couches positioned at a right angle. The study was described as an exploration of conversations between friends and consent was received to audio-record a 10 min conversation that would be kept anonymous. The instructions for this conversation were intentionally kept vague so as not to restrict conversational topics; participants were simply told to catch up and talk about anything they chose. At no point were the participants given information suggesting that the study concerned per-

¹ The original sample ($N = 66$ dyads) consisted of 19 introverted (11 male, 8 female), 22 extraverted (10 male, 12 female), and 25 mixed pairs of friends (7 male, 18 female). Despite our intensified, albeit covert, recruitment efforts for male mixed dyads, we fell considerably short.

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