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NEUROTICISM AND VALENCE OF NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL CONCEPTS

RADEK TRNKA

Prague College of Psychosocial Studies and Charles University in Prague

KAREL BALCAR AND MARTIN KUŠKA

Prague College of Psychosocial Studies

KAREL HNILICA

Charles University in Prague

Although neuroticism has been investigated in relation to emotional information processing (Rafienia, Azadfallah, Fathi-Ashtiani, & Rasoulzadeh-Tabatabaie, 2008), emotional regulation strategies (Wang, Shi, & Li, 2009), emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2010), affective priming (Robinson, Ode, Moeller, & Goetz, 2007), and well-being (Augusto-Landa, Pulido-Martos, & López-Zafra, 2010), the relationship between neuroticism and people's semantic perception of emotional concepts has, as yet, received little attention from researchers.

We explored the relationships of neuroticism with subjective assessments of 10 negative emotions using the dimension of valence (or pleasantness vs. unpleasantness). University students (males = 85, females = 102, $M_{(\text{age})} = 22.6$, $SD = 3.2$) completed the Eysenck Personality Scales (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1991; $\alpha = 0.664$) and were then given a list containing the emotions disgust, anger, sadness, fear, contempt, hate, disappointment, jealousy, envy, and guilt. On a 10cm line drawn next to each of the 10 words, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they experienced this emotion as pleasant/unpleasant.

We used Pearson's correlations to analyze both individual emotions and the whole scale of emotions ($\alpha = 0.781$). For the whole scale, neuroticism was

Radek Trnka, Science and Research Department, Prague College of Psychosocial Studies and Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague; Karel Balcar and Martin Kuška, Science and Research Department, Prague College of Psychosocial Studies; Karel Hnilica, Department of Psychology, Charles University in Prague.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Radek Trnka, Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, U Krize 10, Prague 5–Jinonice, 158 00, Czech Republic. Email: trnkar@volny.cz

negatively correlated with valence ($r = -0.231$; $p < .001$) and people who scored high for neuroticism (high-N) assessed emotions as more negative (unpleasant) than did people with low neuroticism (low-N scores). For the whole scale, males assessed emotions more positively than did females ($t(185) = 5.241$; $p < .01$).

Disappointment ($r = -0.306$; $p < .01$), guilt ($r = -0.259$; $p < .01$), disgust ($r = -0.183$; $p < .05$), jealousy ($r = -0.187$; $p < .05$), and envy ($r = -0.179$; $p < .05$) were negatively correlated with neuroticism. No significant single correlation with neuroticism was found for contempt, hate, sadness, anger, and fear.

Neuroticism may be a predisposition for individuals to experience negative emotions more (or less) intensely. This interpretation supports the Eysenck model, according to which high-N individuals have a lower threshold for activation in the limbic system, which is responsible for most negative emotions (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). High-N individuals may evaluate memories of negative experiences as more negative than do low-N individuals. This more negative evaluation may be explained by higher consequentiality of negative events in high-N individuals (Robinson et al., 2007) because each event primes negative thoughts within their semantic memory and these memory networks are likely to favor negative affect. Low-N individuals may have a more optimistic view about past emotional events than do high-N individuals and, thus, may evaluate them as less unpleasant than do high-N individuals.

Because the number of participants in our study was small, these findings should be considered as preliminary, rather than final, generalizations.

Keywords: neuroticism, emotional concepts, negative emotions, personality, valence.

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