Emotional expressivity measured through self and partner ratings

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INTRODUCTION

Affective communication in face-to-face conversations is a result of both how expressive a person is as well as the perceiving of their partner. Previous research has shown that positive expressivity is related to agreeableness and extroversion while negative expressivity and impulse control are related to neuroticism. These personality traits appear within the first few moments of a conversation.

Previous research has also shown that zero acquaintance ratings are as accurate as those of friends or relatives. While personality traits are equally identifiable by both acquaintances and strangers, there is little evidence regarding the ability of strangers to identify emotional states in another. Based on research supporting the accuracy of personality traits by zero-acquaintances, this study sought to test how accurate people can rate their partners emotions compared to how people rate themselves.

METHODS

Participants
- 29 men, 42 women
- 36 college students (M = 19.5, SD = 2.08 years of age)
- 35 community volunteers (M = 70.45, SD = 6.47 years of age)

Videoconference conversations
- Reminisced alone, with a student and a community volunteer
- Discussed an angry, happy, and sad memory
- Rated self and partner’s feelings after each conversation
- Younger dyads (n = 15), mixed-age (n = 26), older (n = 14)

Variables
- 16 emotion words (0-very inaccurate to 9-very accurate)
- Averaged into 4 composites: happy, astonished, sad, irritable
- Positive and Negative Expressivity (Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire)

Analyses
- R v. 2.15, nlme libraries
- Multilevel models accounted for nesting of persons within dyads, within quads
- Analyses were run separately for experienced (4 models) and perceived emotions (4 models).

DISCUSSION

Higher self-rated positivity resulted in higher positivity ratings by their conversational partner. In addition, people who perceived themselves as being happy are perceived as less sad when talking about happy events. Also, those who rated themselves with a low level of positivity are perceived as more irritable by their conversation partner especially in an angry conversation. Though the events were prompted, the partner ratings agreed with the self ratings.

Additional analyses will consider the type of remembered event (e.g., happy vs. sad) and the relation between partner-rated emotions and self-rated expressivity. For example, some may be better at conveying emotions or understanding their own emotional experience. Also, some may be better at interpreting their partner’s experienced emotion. Overall, the ratings enforce the importance of first impressions because zero acquaintance ratings are accurate. People who perceive themselves as expressive of positive emotions are viewed as happier. This suggests that there may be a correspondence between everyday situations (e.g., a job interview) and first impressions, which may have implications for a variety of social interactions.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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