Is Self-Uncertainty Associated with Established Affective and Emotional States?

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Abstract

The purpose of the current work was to examine if self-uncertainty impacts the affective states of people. Participants (N₁=130) in the first study were randomly assigned to one of four writing tasks (high/low self-uncertainty, fear, or disgust) and then completed the PANAS-X. Results from the first study indicated that there were significant differences between the emotion conditions and self-uncertainty conditions, and further significant differences between the high/low self-uncertainty conditions. The second study (N₂=201) focused on the affective states activated by self-uncertainty using the writing task prime and PANAS-X. Participants in the high self-uncertainty condition in both studies were lower in serenity and related emotions (i.e., at ease, calm, relaxed) compared to the low self-uncertainty condition.

Introduction

• Uncertainty is aversive, motivating people to reduce the uncertainty.
• The drive to reduce self-uncertainty is especially motivating to identify with groups.
• However, uncertainty-identity theory does not explain why uncertainty leads to identification.
• We propose integrating research on emotions and affect with uncertainty-identity theory to explain why uncertainty leads to identification.
• The purpose of the current work was to examine if self-uncertainty impacts affect/emotions.

Methods

Study 1

• Participants (N₁=130) were randomly assigned to one of four writing tasks (high/low self-uncertainty, fear, or disgust) and then completed the PANAS-X.

Study 2

• Participants (N₂=201) were randomly assigned to an affective state writing task and then completed the serenity and self-assurance PANAS-X subscales.

Results

Study 1

• Participants in the high self-uncertainty condition were lower in serenity (M=8.81, M=10.52, p=.002) compared to the low self-uncertainty condition.
• Within the serenity item composite participants in the high self-uncertainty conditions were significantly less calm (M=3.07, M=3.72, p=.001) and less relaxed (M=2.79, M=3.19, p=.054) compared to the low self-uncertainty condition.

Study 2

• Participants in the high self-uncertainty condition were less relaxed (M=2.95, M=3.30, F[1, 199]=6.04, p=.015) than participants in the low self-uncertainty condition.

Discussion

• Self-uncertainty was associated with a less relaxed, lower serenity, and less calm emotional state.
• Implications: These findings demonstrate an emotional effect associated with self-uncertainty, which suggests potential mechanisms for why self-uncertainty leads to group identification.
• Limitations: We only used the PANAS-X to measure affective states. We also did not measure identification.
• Future Directions: Identify further mechanisms linking self-uncertainty to group identification and measure affective states with multiple affective measures.

References:

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Study 1 Participants’ Scores on Items from the PANAS-X

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uncertainty</th>
<th>Certainty</th>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Disgust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serenity</td>
<td>8.81 (2.33)a</td>
<td>10.51 (2.46)b</td>
<td>9.92 (2.55)b,c</td>
<td>9.38 (2.65)a,b,c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Ease</td>
<td>2.79 (1.02)a,b</td>
<td>3.19 (1.03)b,a,b</td>
<td>3.08 (1.08)a,b</td>
<td>2.70 (1.15)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>3.07 (0.92)a</td>
<td>3.72 (1.01)b</td>
<td>3.50 (0.80)b</td>
<td>3.46 (0.90)a,b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>2.95 (1.01)a</td>
<td>3.60 (0.98)b</td>
<td>3.34 (1.05)a,b</td>
<td>3.22 (1.06)a,b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Study 1: Participants’ average scores on PANAS-X items and the serenity subscale with SD in parentheses. Conditions not sharing the same letter differ at p < .05.

Study 2 Participants’ Scores on Items from the PANAS-X

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>At Ease</th>
<th>High vs. Low Self-Uncertainty</th>
<th>Relaxed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Average PANAS-X Scores</td>
<td>2.98a</td>
<td>3.27a</td>
<td>3.39a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Study 2: Participants’ average scores on PANAS-X items from the serenity subscale. Conditions not sharing the same letter differ at p < .05. A between-groups ANOVA indicated that high self-uncertainty participants were significantly less relaxed than low self-uncertainty participants (F[1,199]=6.04, p=.015).