Original Article

The Role of Personality in the Initiation of Communication Situations

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Abstract. Whereas a small number of studies have focused on the impact of extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism on the way people communicate, little is known about how the big five personality traits relate to individual differences in the specific types of communication-related situations selected in daily life. For a period of five days, people were asked to report on the types of conversations they initiated earlier that day (N = 168). Multilevel negative binomial regression analysis showed that the specific types of conversations initiated in daily life can be predicted by individual differences in extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. As such, the results show that individual differences in personality are not only reflected in the way people behave once they communicate, but also in the situations that people report to select in daily life.

Keywords: Big Five, individual differences, communication, situation selection

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In the communication domain there is a profound interest in how individual difference variables affect the way in which people communicate. For example, studies have shown that cognitive dispositions (e.g., locus of control; Rotter, 1996), social-personal dispositions (e.g., self-esteem; Joinson, 2004), and communication dispositions (e.g., communication apprehension; Daly, Caughlin, & Stafford, 1997) affect how people communicate in various interpersonal settings. In addition, it has also been demonstrated that broad personality traits, and especially the interpersonal traits of extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness, influence various aspects of interpersonal communication. For example, extraverted people have been shown to have higher speech rate (Dewaele & Furnham, 2000) and look more at their partner (Exline & Fehr, 1978); neurotic persons complain more (Buss, 1991) and have higher negativity (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000); and agreeable persons from their part engage more in positive conversations (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001), and have the ability to control anger and frustration in conflict situations (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996).

One limitation is that previous studies have almost exclusively focused on the role of personality when people are already involved in a communication situation. Yet, personality does not only affect how people behave once they find themselves in a communication situation, but it also influences which communication situations people select and avoid. Indeed, research on the concept of situation selection has shown that people do not only passively end up in situations, but instead are actively involved in the selection and avoidance of them (Buss, 1987). Moreover, the kind of situations that people select and avoid differ considerably between persons (Ickes, Snyder, & Garcia, 1997), and personality appears to be an important determinant of such interindividual differences in situation selection and avoidance (Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1986).

Given the impact of broad personality traits on the way people communicate, one may wonder whether these variables also relate to the specific types of communication-related situations people select. In the present study, we addressed this issue by examining whether the Big Five personality traits relate to the types of conversations people initiate in daily life. To this end, we hypothesized that individuals tend to seek out communication situations that are congruent with their personality (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998; Emmons et al., 1986; Hampson, 2012). Indeed, there is "compelling evidence that people choose to enter and spend time in situations that will foster, promote, and encourage the behavioral manifestations of their own traits and dispositions" (Ickes et al., 1997, p. 177). The reason for such a congruency effect may be found in the fact that people experience more negative affect when they engage in behavior that is discordant with their traits and more positive affect when they perform behavior in concordance with their personality traits (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998).

To test the congruency hypothesis in the communication domain, we focused on the congruency between the Big Five personality traits and three features of the conversation situation, that is, (1) familiarity with the conversation partner, (2) contribution of the partner, and (3) certainty about the conversation topic. These features cover both interpersonal (i.e., pertaining to the conversation partner)

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and intrapersonal (i.e., pertaining to the self) characteristics of the conversation. Moreover, they can be linked to situation taxonomies of social interactions (e.g., the intimacy, self-confidence, and pleasantness dimensions of Forgas, 1976) and recent research has identified them out of a larger set of situational features to play a key role in the selection and avoidance of communication situations (Frederickx & Van Mechelen, 2012). Below, we will elaborate one these features.

First, familiarity with the conversation partner has been shown to increase feelings of sympathy (Tschan, Semmer, & Inversin, 2004) and decrease feelings of uncertainty and anxiety (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996). As a consequence, this feature is linked to a higher interaction quality (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996) and frequency (Tschan et al., 2004). Second, a small contribution of the conversation partner to the conversation is known to yield an increase in negative affectivity (Vittengl & Holt, 2000) and is associated with avoiding to start the conversation (Frederickx & Van Mechelen, 2012). Finally, uncertainty in general leads to the avoidance of interpersonal interactions (Duronto, Nishida, & Nakayama, 2005). Because of these reasons, we expect familiarity with the conversation partner, contribution of the partner, and certainty about the conversation topic to be associated with a higher probability of initiating a conversation. In what follows, we will elaborate on our specific hypotheses regarding the relationship with the Big Five personality traits.

First, extraversion is often referred to as the outgoing and sociable dimension of personality, with persons high on extraversion being characterized by a high need for social contact and attention (Costa & McCrae, 2011). Because of their strong behavioral approach orientation, extraverted people spend more time in social interactions (Hampson, 2012), even if these interactions have a negative potential (John & Gross, 2007). Therefore, we expect people high in extraversion to select more interpersonal communication situations as compared to people low in extraversion, regardless of the specific feature constellation of the situation (Hypothesis 1). This is in line with the congruency hypothesis as engaging in communication situations creates the opportunity to show extraverted behavior, regardless of the specifics of this situation.

Second, agreeable persons are considerate, friendly, generous, and eager to help others. Also, agreeable persons engage more in conversations with a positive focus (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001), they are motivated to maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001), and they experience more unpleasant affect than low-agreeable people when engaging in quarrelsome behavior (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998). Given the interpersonal focus associated with agreeableness, we expect to find a moderation effect for the two interpersonal situational features (i.e., familiarity and contribution). Along the lines of the congruency hypothesis, we hypothesize that, as compared to people low on agreeableness, people high on agreeableness will more often select conversation situations with acquaintances (Hypothesis 2a) who contribute to the conversation (Hypothesis 2b). The reason is that such situations are generally pleasant and positive in nature, which allows agreeable people to behave in a sympathetic, friendly way.

Third, trait neuroticism can be characterized as the chronic tendency to experience negative feelings and thoughts, to be emotionally unstable, and to feel insecure (Hampson, 2012). While Costa and McCrae (2011) have argued that neuroticism is not intrinsically interpersonal, it seems to be related to the submissiveness pole of the interpersonal trait circumplex (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998). Research has shown that people high on neuroticism tend to complain a lot (Buss, 1991), and that neuroticism predisposes people to experience more stressful (Bolger & Schilling, 1991) and negative events (Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Payot, 1993). Moreover, it has been shown that neurotic people engage more in submissive and quarrelsome behavior because they experience little unpleasant effect when performing such negative behaviors (Côté & Moskowitz, 1998). Therefore, and in line with the congruency hypothesis, we hypothesize that people high in neuroticism will more often select situations that are characterized by uncertainty and anxiety than people low in neuroticism. That is, they will be more inclined to select conversation situations with strangers (Hypothesis 3a) that are characterized by uncertainty about the topic (Hypothesis 3b) because such situations allow neurotic people to express their trait-relevant insecure and anxious behavior.

Fourth, we also test how the big five traits of openness (i.e., being imaginative, cultured, broad-minded, and artistically sensitive) and conscientiousness (i.e., the tendency to be careful, thorough, organized, planful, and responsible) relate to the selection of the different types of communication situations. Because openness and conscientiousness are generally considered to be intrapsychic – rather than interpersonal – traits (Costa & McCrae, 2011), we have no specific hypotheses regarding their effects. Yet, it is interesting to evaluate the effects of openness and conscientiousness as well because there is initial evidence that even the more intrapsychic traits can have effects on the interpersonal sphere (Costa & McCrae, 2011).

Finally, we also examine whether the relationships between the big five traits and the initiation of communication situations change when controlling for self-esteem. This test will allow us to identify the relative importance of the big five traits in comparison to self-esteem, a trait that has been shown to relate to communication-related measures such as communication apprehension (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, & Falcione, 1977) and a preference for face-to-face communication (Joinson, 2004).

Method

Participants

Participants were 168 students from the University of Leuven. On average, the respondents were 18.52 years old (SD = 1.18); 146 participants were women and 22 were men.

Materials

Big Five Personality Traits

We assessed extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness by means of the Dutch version of the NEO-FFI questionnaire (Hoekstra, Ormel, & De Fruyt, 1996). This questionnaire consists of 60 items, with each of the five-factor personality dimensions being measured by a set of 12 items. Cronbach alpha's for neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness were .86, .79, .75, .63, and .82 respectively.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem was measured using the 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The Cronbach alpha for this scale equaled .90.

Daily Questionnaire

To obtain data on the frequency with which persons started several types of interpersonal conversations, a daily questionnaire was developed. Eight situational descriptions were created by producing all possible combinations of three binary variables (i.e., a full-factorial design):

(1) certainty versus uncertainty about the conversation topic,
(2) an acquaintance versus a stranger as conversation partner, and
(3) yes or no contribution from the conversation partner.

An example of a situation description is: ''A conversation about a topic you feel certain about, with an acquaintance who contributes to the conversation.''

Procedure

On the first day of the study participants were invited to the psychology department to take part in a study about the types of conversations people have throughout the day. They were told that for five consecutive days they had to fill out a short questionnaire before going to bed. They were further informed about the specific details of the questionnaire; that for each of eight conversations types they would have to indicate how often they initiated it that day, and that these conversation types were defined by the characteristics ''certainty versus uncertainty about the conversation topic,'' ''an acquaintance versus a stranger as conversation partner,'' and ''contribution versus no contribution from the conversation partner.'' They were given a concrete example of such a conversation type. In the questionnaire, they were first instructed to reconstruct their day by thinking carefully about everything they did from waking up until the moment they filled out the questionnaire and by dividing the day into discrete episodes (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwartz, & Stone, 2004). Next, they had to indicate, for each of the eight conversation types (representing the crossing of the three binary conversation characteristics), whether they initiated it that day; if this was the case, they had to specify how many of these conversations they initiated. The order of the situations was randomized, with a different randomization per person and per day.[1] As participation was in partial fulfillment of course credit, we obtained 6,544 of the 6,720 possible data points (168 participants × 5 days × 8 conversation categories), which equals a response rate of 97.38%. At the last day, participants completed the NEO-FFI and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.[2]

Analysis

Because the dependent variable is a count variable (i.e., the number of times a conversation was initiated), we modeled the data using a negative binomial regression model (see Equation 1). Similar to the Poisson model, the negative binomial regression model is a statistical model for count data with the difference that in the former model the variance of the outcome is equal to the mean whereas this constraint does not hold in the negative binomial model (Hox, 2010). An additional complexity of our data is that they have a nested structure with conversations nested within days, and days nested within persons. To account for this, we analyzed the data using a three-level negative binomial regression model in which the number of initiated conversations of type i on day j by person k was predicted by the three situational features (i.e., certainty, acquaintance, and contribution), with a value of -1 referring to the absence of the features and 1 to the presence of it.[3] To test whether the slopes of the features certainty, acquaintance, and contribution varied across persons, we tested each individual slope for randomness by comparing a random intercepts, fixed-slopes model to a random intercept model in which one particular slope was specified as random. If the latter model provided a better fit to the data than the random-intercepts, fixed-slopes model using the Likelihood-ratio test, we specified that particular slope as random in the final model. If this was not the case, the slope was fixed on the grounds of model parsimony (Hox, 2010; Nezlek, 2008). Using this procedure, we found the slopes of all three features to be random over persons. Subsequently, we followed the same procedure to test whether the different slopes vary across days. Results showed that only the slope

[1] For each of the situations participants also rated their affective forecasts, interpersonal expectations, expected level of goal achievement, and their self-efficacy using self-constructed scales.
[2] Dispositional behavioral activation and inhibition (BIS/BAS) was also measured.
[3] By using effect instead of dummy coding (i.e., values -1 and 1 instead of 0 and 1), we are able to calculate predicted values for each of the situational features regardless of the values for the other two features.

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Table 1. Coefficients and standard errors (*SE*) associated with the multilevel negative binomial models

	Model 1			Model 2		
		Variance			Variance	
	Coeff. (*SE*)	Person	Day	Coeff. (*SE*)	Person	Day
Intercept (γ_{000})	−.99 (.06)***	.32	.00	−.98 (.06) ***	.32	.00
Extraversion (γ_{010})	.32 (.15)*	–	–	.32 (.15)*	–	–
Agreeableness (γ_{020})	−.20 (.15)	–	–	−.21 (.15)	–	–
Neuroticism (γ_{030})	−.01 (.11)	–	–	−.04 (.13)	–	–
Openness (γ_{040})	.06 (.14)	–	–	.08 (.14)	–	–
Conscientiousness (γ_{050})	−.01 (.13)	–	–	.01 (.13)	–	–
Self-esteem (γ_{060})	–	–	–	−.06 (.14)	–	–
Certain – Intercept (γ_{100})	.43 (.03)***	.06	–	.43 (.03)***	.06	–
Extraversion (γ_{110})	−.19 (.08)*	–	–	−.19 (.08)*	–	–
Agreeableness (γ_{120})	.09 (.08)	–	–	.09 (.08)	–	–
Neuroticism (γ_{130})	−.11 (.06)†	–	–	−.12 (.07)†	–	–
Openness (γ_{140})	.08 (.07)	–	–	.08 (.07)	–	–
Conscientiousness (γ_{150})	.06 (.07)	–	–	.06 (.07)	–	–
Self-esteem (γ_{060})	–	–	–	−.00 (.08)	–	–
Acquaintance – Intercept (γ_{200})	.77 (.05)***	.21	.02	.77 (.05)***	.19	.02
Extraversion (γ_{210})	−.11 (.13)	–	–	−.13 (.13)	–	–
Agreeableness (γ_{220})	.39 (.13)**	–	–	.41 (.13)**	–	–
Neuroticism (γ_{230})	.08 (.09)	–	–	.20 (.10)†	–	–
Openness (γ_{240})	.06 (.11)	–	–	.00 (.11)	–	–
Conscientiousness (γ_{250})	−.12 (.10)	–	–	−.19 (.10)†	–	–
Self-esteem (γ_{060})	–	–	–	.28 (.12)*	–	–
Contribution – Intercept (γ_{300})	.26 (.03)***	.03	–	.26 (.03)***	.03	–
Extraversion (γ_{310})	−.09 (.07)	–	–	−.10 (.07)	–	–
Agreeableness (γ_{320})	.12 (.07)†	–	–	.13 (.07)†	–	–
Neuroticism (γ_{330})	−.05 (.05)	–	–	−.01 (.06)	–	–
Openness (γ_{340})	.07 (.06)	–	–	.06 (.06)	–	–
Conscientiousness (γ_{350})	−.04 (.05)	–	–	−.06 (.06)	–	–
Self-esteem (γ_{060})	–	–	–	.08 (.06)	–	–
Lagged conversation frequency (β_4)	.06 (.01)***	–	–	.06 (.01)***	–	–

Notes. ***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$; †$p < .10$ (all p-values are two-tailed).

of acquaintance is random across days, with the slopes of the other features being fixed across days.

To sum up, we fitted a model that included (1) the three situational features (Equation 1), (2) the grand-mean centered extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness scores, and (3) the cross-level interactions between the three situational features and the five personality traits. Moreover, we included random intercepts at the day- (see the error term r_{0jk} in Equation 3) and person-level (see the error term u_{00k} in Equation 4), and random slopes for certainty, acquaintance, and contribution at the person-level (see the error terms u_{10k}, u_{20k}, and u_{30k} in Equations 5, 7, and 8 respectively), and for acquaintance at the day level (see the error term r_{2jk} in Equation 6). In a second analysis, we added the grand-mean centered self-esteem score and the cross-level interactions between the three situational features and self-esteem to this model (see Equations 1–8). Finally, because of the small time intervals between the measurement periods, our data may show serial dependency or autocorrelation (i.e., the phenomenon where the current state is influenced by its previous state). To test this, we assessed whether the dependent variable could be predicted from its time-lagged effect. As this turned out to be the case (see Table 1), we removed the serial dependency by including the person-centered time-lagged effect as a control variable in all models (Beal & Weiss, 2003). All analyses were performed using the glmmADMB package in R (Bolker, Skaug, Magnusson, & Nielsen, 2012).

$$\Pr(y) = \frac{\exp(-\lambda)\lambda^y}{y!}, \tag{1}$$

$$\log(\lambda_{ijk}) = \beta_{ojk} + \beta_{10k}\text{certain}_i + \beta_{2jk}\text{acquain}_i + \beta_{30k}\text{contrib}_i + \beta_4 y_{i(j-1)k} + \varepsilon_{ijk}, \tag{2}$$

$$\beta_{ojk} = \beta_{00k} + r_{0jk}, \tag{3}$$

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$$\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{010}E_k + \gamma_{020}A_k + \gamma_{030}N_k + \gamma_{040}O_k + \gamma_{050}C_k + \gamma_{060}SE_k + u_{00k}, \quad (4)$$

$$\beta_{10k} = \gamma_{100} + \gamma_{110}E_k + \gamma_{120}A_k + \gamma_{130}N_k + \gamma_{140}O_k + \gamma_{150}C_k + \gamma_{160}\mathrm{SE}_k + u_{10k}, \quad (5)$$

$$\beta_{2jk} = \beta_{20k} + r_{2jk} \quad (6)$$

$$\beta_{20k} = \gamma_{200} + \gamma_{210}E_k + \gamma_{220}A_k + \gamma_{230}N_k + \gamma_{240}O_k + \gamma_{250}C_k + \gamma_{260}SE_k + u_{20k}, \quad (7)$$

$$\beta_{30k} = \gamma_{300} + \gamma_{310}E_k + \gamma_{320}A_k + \gamma_{330}N_k + \gamma_{340}O_k + \gamma_{350}C_k + \gamma_{360}SE_k + u_{30k}. \quad (8)$$

Results

The analysis revealed that all features significantly predicted the reported frequency of initiating conversations; with certainty ($\gamma_{100} = .43$; $p < .001$), acquaintance ($\gamma_{200} = .77$; $p < .001$), and contribution ($\gamma_{300} = .26$; $p < .001$) being associated with a higher reported frequency of conversation initiation (see Model 1 in Table 1). In terms of predicted values, people are predicted to initiate .57 (resp., .24) conversation situations when they are certain (resp., uncertain) about the situation. When the conversation partner is an acquaintance (resp., stranger), people start .81 (resp., .17) conversations. Finally, when this partner contributes (resp., does not contribute) to the conversation, the predicted number of initiated conversations is .48 (resp., .29).

Regarding extraversion, the results showed that people high on extraversion more often report to initiate an interpersonal communication as opposed to people low on extraversion ($\gamma_{010} = .32$; $p = .035$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. In particular, people scoring one *SD* above (resp., below) the average on extraversion are predicted to initiate .43 (resp., .32) communication situations. We also found that extraversion moderated the impact of certainty about the conversation topic. In particular, extraverted people reported to be more inclined than introverts to select conversation situations in which they were uncertain about the topic ($\gamma_{110} = -.19$; $p = .025$). That is, when people are certain about the topic, people scoring one *SD* above (respectively, below) the average on extraversion are predicted to initiate .61 (resp., .54) communication situations, whereas this decreases to .31 (resp., .19) when they are uncertain about the topic. Finally, we found no cross-level interaction between familiarity of the conversation partner ($\gamma_{210} = -.11$; $p = .379$) and contribution of the partner ($\gamma_{310} = -.09$; $p = .184$) on one hand and trait extraversion on the other hand, which implies that these features are equally important for introverts and extraverts.

Agreeableness was unrelated to the reported number of conversations initiated ($\gamma_{020} = -.20$; $p = .193$). However, as compared to non-agreeable people, agreeable people reported to be more inclined to initiate conversations when the conversation partner was an acquaintance ($\gamma_{220} = .39$; $p = .002$) and when the conversation partner contributed to the conversation ($\gamma_{320} = .12$; $p = .073$), thereby supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2b. In terms of predicted values, when the conversation partner is an acquaintance, people scoring one *SD* above (resp., below) the average on agreeableness are predicted to initiate .96 (resp., .68) communication situations, whereas in case of a stranger the predicted values are .15 (resp., .20). When the conversation partner contributed, people scoring one *SD* above (resp., below) the average on agreeableness are predicted to initiate .51 (resp., .46) communication situations, whereas this dropped to .27 (resp., .30) when the conversation partner did not contribute. Certainty about the conversation topic ($\gamma_{120} = .09$; $p = .304$) was not moderated by agreeableness.

Regarding neuroticism, results showed that there was no difference between neurotics and emotionally stable people with respect to the number of conversations they reported to have initiated ($\gamma_{030} = -.01$; $p = .920$). However, in support of Hypothesis 3b ($\gamma_{130} = -.11$; $p = .052$), the level of neuroticism did negatively moderate the impact of certainty about the conversation topic. That is, as compared to people low on neuroticism, neurotics select more situations in which they are uncertain (i.e., predicted value of .26 (resp., .23) for people scoring one *SD* above (resp., below) the average on neuroticism), and fewer situations in which they are certain about the conversation topic (i.e., .52 (resp., .61) for people high (resp., low) on neuroticism). Finally, the effect of familiarity of the conversation partner ($\gamma_{230} = .08$; $p = .415$) and contribution of the partner ($\gamma_{330} = -.05$; $p = .319$) were not affected by individual differences in neuroticism.

For openness, we found no association with the reported number of initiated conversations ($\gamma_{040} = .07$; $p = .605$). Moreover, people who scored high on openness reported to react similarly on certainty about the conversation topic ($\gamma_{140} = .08$; $p = .286$), familiarity of the conversation partner ($\gamma_{240} = .06$; $p = .621$), and contribution of the conversation partner ($\gamma_{340} = .07$; $p = .244$) as compared to people low on openness.

Regarding conscientiousness, no relationship was found with the reported number of conversations started ($\gamma_{050} = -.01$; $p = .932$). Also, conscientiousness did not moderate the impact of certainty about the conversation topic ($\gamma_{150} = .06$; $p = .369$), familiarity of the conversation partner ($\gamma_{250} = -.12$; $p = .229$) and contribution of the conversation partner ($\gamma_{350} = -.04$; $p = .432$).

Finally, controlling for self-esteem had no substantial impact on the results (see Model 2 in Table 1). The only noteworthy difference is that the cross-level interactions between familiarity of the conversation partner on one hand and neuroticism ($\gamma_{230} = .20$; $p = .055$) and conscientiousness ($\gamma_{250} = -.19$; $p = .067$) on the other hand became (marginally) significant. As such, our results revealed that

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the big five personality traits predicted the reported initiation of communication situations over and beyond self-esteem.

Discussion

We examined the relationships between individual differences in the types of conversations that people report to have initiated and individual differences in extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness. Several meaningful links were found in this regard, and these relationships were generally in line with the congruency principle that states that individuals seek out situations that are congruent with their personality. As such, our results supported the finding that personality does not only affect behavior once people are involved in a situation, but that it is also an important determinant of interindividual differences in situation selection and avoidance (Emmons et al., 1986).

Regarding extraversion, the results revealed that people high in extraversion reported to initiate more conversations than people low in extraversion, regardless of the characteristics of the conversation situation. This result links up with the well-known finding that people high on extraversion have a high need for social contact and attention (Costa & McCrae, 2011), which is reflected in the fact that extraverted people spend more time in social interactions than introverts (Hampson, 2012). It is also in line with the congruency hypothesis as social interactions promote the manifestation of extraverted behavior. Moreover, extraversion negatively moderated the impact of certainty about the conversation topic, which implies that certainty about the conversation topic increased the likelihood of initiating a conversation more for introverts than for extraverts. Whereas this relationship was not predicted, it is in line with previous research that showed that extraverted people also tend to actively in social interactions with a negative potential (John & Gross, 2007). Introverted people, in contrast, avoid such negative situations (John & Gross, 2007).

With respect to agreeableness, results showed that highly agreeable persons reported to initiate conversations especially when they were characterized by positive interpersonal features. In particular, familiarity of the conversation partner and contribution of the partner were more determinative for the reported initiation of interpersonal communication for people high on agreeableness than for people low on agreeableness. This is in line with previous research that showed that agreeable people try to maintain positive interpersonal relations (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001) and often engage in positive conversations (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001). The findings also supported the congruency hypothesis as positive conversations (i.e., with an acquaintance) allow agreeable people to be considerate and friendly, which is central to the agreeableness dimension.

Concerning neuroticism, we found that people high on neuroticism reported to engage more often in interpersonal communications when they were uncertain and less often when they were certain about the conversation topic than people low on neuroticism. These findings are in line with the congruency hypothesis, as people high in neuroticism have the chronic tendency to experience negative thoughts and feelings, to be emotionally unstable, and to feel insecure (Hampson, 2012), and these communication situations allow for the manifestation of such feelings. Moreover, the findings are also in line with previous research that has shown that people high on neuroticism experience more stressful (Bolger & Schilling, 1991) and negative events (Magnus et al., 1993). We also found that, when controlling for self-esteem, people high on neuroticism reported to engage more frequently in communications when the conversation partner was an acquaintance. This result is counter to our expectations and requires further research.

Finally, individual differences in openness and conscientiousness had little effect on the communication situations that people report to initiate. As such, our results were in line with the observation that openness and conscientiousness are intrapsychic rather than interpersonal in nature (Costa & McCrae, 2011).

In terms of study limitations, it is important to stress that we measured self-reported and not actual initiations of communication situations. Previous research has shown that self-reported measures of behavior and actual behavior are related but that both sources of information cannot be interchanged (Gosling, John, Craik, & Robins, 1998; Riggio & Riggio, 2002). Because a central goal in personality psychology pertains to predicting interindividual differences in behavior, future research should test whether the relationships that we found with self-reported initiation of communication situations also hold for the actual initiation of communication situations (for a discussion of self-reported vs. actual behavior see e.g., Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2009; Borkenau, Mauer, Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004; Eaton & Funder, 2003; Mehl, Gosling, & Pennebaker, 2006).

A second limitation of the self-reported nature of our data is that memory biases may have affected the end-of-day reports. Whereas research has shown that these biases only influence people's judgments substantively with delays that exceed one day (Dockray et al., 2010), future research may choose to rely on event-based experience sampling because with such this method people report on their behavior when they are actually performing it.

Third, it is possible that the individual differences in the reported initiation of communication situations result from individual differences in the way people reflect on what they experienced rather than from individual differences in their actual behavior. For example, it may be that, when reflecting on their interactions of the previous day, people high in neuroticism tend to perceive the same situation as more negative than people low in neuroticism, thereby reporting more interactions in "negative" situations.

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This limitation again stresses the need to replicate our findings with real, rather than self-reported, behavioral measures.

Fourth, we focused on a few situational features only. Obviously, there are many other situational features that have been advanced by different situation taxonomies (e.g., Edwards & Templeton, 2005) and these features were not included in our study while they may have affected the initiation of conversations in the participant's everyday life. For example, the fact whether the conversation is role-described or not might interact with the impact of personality or may even override its influence. As such, future research should investigate the role of a wider range of (possibly taxonomy-based) situational features. Moreover, studying interactions between situational features may also be an interesting avenue for future research, although it might be challenging to develop well-grounded theoretical expectations with respect to such interactions.

Fifth, we only measured the number of conversations people initiated themselves, thereby neglecting conversations that they did not initiate. However, it may well be that people who initiated more conversations did so because they ended up more often in social situations, which gave them more opportunities to initiate conversations. Therefore, it may be interesting for future research to also measure overall social activity level and to study the number of initiated conversations relative to the total amount of conversations encountered.

Finally, the situational features were conceptualized as binary categories (i.e., present or absent). However, familiarity with the conversation partner, expected contribution of the partner, and certainty about the conversation topic are often not simply absent or present but exist to some degree. Therefore, future research should test whether measuring the situational features in a continuous way would affect the results. This could be done by asking the participants to rate each conversation they have initiated that day on a number of criteria. Such a design would differ from the one we used in that participants would not be required to classify the conversations according to an a priori defined classification system, but rather rate them on a one-by-one basis, which may be more natural.

By examining the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and the types of conversations that people report to have initiated in daily life, we contributed to the understanding of the link between personality and interpersonal communication. We showed that individual differences in personality are not only reflected in the way people behave once they communicate, but also in the types of communication situations that people report to select in daily life. In particular, people reported to spend time in communication situations that fostered, promoted, and encouraged the behavioral manifestations of their personality (Ickes et al., 1997). As such, we demonstrated that a full understanding of the role of personality in communication can only be reached if its impact on the type of situations that people select and avoid is studied as well.

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