

Recollecting the Past: Association of Mood and Personality with Types of Autobiographical Memories

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Abstract: This study explored the impact of induced mood (positive and negative) and personality traits (extraversion and neuroticism) on the characteristics of autobiographical memories (AMs), specifically their type (specific, generic) and visual perspective (field, observer). Thirty participants (18-20 years old) were randomly allocated to positive mood, negative mood, or control conditions. Mood induction utilized video stimuli, with affect measured by the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). Personality was assessed using the Big Five Inventory (BFI). Autobiographical memories, elicited through a subjective recall task, were categorized via content analysis. Results indicated that positive mood was associated with a higher frequency of generic and field memories, whereas negative mood correlated with more specific and field memories. Extraversion significantly negatively correlated with observer memories in the positive mood condition and positively correlated with specific and observer memories in the negative mood condition. These findings highlight the intricate relationship between transient affective states and enduring personality dispositions in shaping AM retrieval.

Keywords: *Autobiographical Memory, Positive Mood, Negative Mood, Extraversion, Neuroticism, Field Memory, Observer Memory.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Autobiographical memory (AM) represents a sophisticated cognitive system that synthesizes episodic experiences with semantic self-knowledge, crucial for maintaining a cohesive sense of personal identity and guiding future actions [6] [7]. This form of memory fulfills vital social, directive, and self-representational roles [7]. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that AM retrieval is an active process, significantly modulated by an individual's current affective state and enduring personality traits [3] [5].

The retrieval of AM is primarily modulated by two key factors: mood and personality. The phenomenon of mood-congruence posits that individuals exhibit a heightened tendency to recall memories whose emotional valence aligns with their current affective state [4] [5]. Concurrently, stable personality traits, particularly extraversion and neuroticism, are associated with distinct patterns of emotional processing, which can systematically bias the nature of retrieved memories [9] [10]. For example, extraversion is typically linked to higher levels of positive affect, whereas neuroticism

is characterized by increased susceptibility to negative emotional experiences [9].

The current investigation sought to elucidate the interactive effects of experimentally induced mood states and the personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism on the phenomenological characteristics of recalled autobiographical memories, specifically examining their specificity (i.e., specific versus generic) and visual perspective (i.e., field versus observer).

II. METHOD

➤ *Participants*

The study sample consisted of 30 participants (15 males, 15 females) from the Delhi/NCR region, with an age range of 18-25 years ($M = 20.07$). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: positive mood induction ($n=10$), negative mood induction ($n=10$), or a control group ($n=10$).

➤ *Measures*

- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): Affective states were measured using the PANAS [13], a self-report questionnaire administered both pre- and post-mood induction.
- Big Five Inventory (BFI): Personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism were assessed using relevant subscales from the BFI [10].
- Subjective Memory Task: Participants were instructed to provide a written account of a childhood or early life memory within a 10-minute timeframe. The resulting narratives were subjected to content analysis, categorizing memories into specific, generic, field, and observer types, based on established classification systems [12] [168] [170].

➤ *Procedure*

The experimental procedure commenced with participants completing the PANAS as a pre-test measure. Subsequently, mood was induced through a 6-minute video stimulus: a Mr. Bean video for the positive mood condition, a violent video for the negative mood condition, and no video

for the control group. Following mood induction, the PANAS was re-administered as a post-test. Participants then engaged in the subjective memory task, followed by the completion of the BFI. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

III. RESULTS

➤ *Mood Induction Check*

Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the mood induction procedures. Although not statistically significant at the conventional $p < .05$ level (likely attributable to the small sample size), observed mean ranks indicated shifts in the anticipated directions: positive mood induction was associated with an increase in positive affect, and negative mood induction with an increase in negative affect.

➤ *Frequency of Autobiographical Memory Types*

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution of autobiographical memory types (specific, generic, field, and observer) across the three experimental conditions.

Table 1: Percentage Frequency of Autobiographical Memory Types by Condition

Condition	Specific AM (%)	Generic AM (%)	Field AM (%)	Observer AM (%)
Positive Mood	17.31	32.70	46.15	3.84
Negative Mood	27.20	22.82	34.80	15.21
Control	31.60	18.40	43.40	6.60

➤ *Personality and Autobiographical Memory Recall*

Spearman rank-order correlations were computed to examine the associations between personality traits (extraversion and neuroticism) and the types of autobiographical memories recalled under different mood conditions. Significant correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Spearman Correlations Between Personality Traits and Autobiographical Memory Types

Condition	Trait	Specific AM	Generic AM	Field AM	Observer AM
Positive Mood	Extraversion	.05	-0.03	.52	-0.68*
	Neuroticism	-0.13	.43	.30	-0.25
Negative Mood	Extraversion	.72*	.18	.32	.67*
	Neuroticism	-0.62	-0.05	-0.04	-0.52

*Note: * $p < 0.05$.

In the positive mood condition, extraversion exhibited a significant negative correlation with observer memories ($r_s = -0.68, p < .05$). Conversely, in the negative mood condition, extraversion was significantly positively correlated with both specific memories ($r_s = .72, p < .05$) and observer memories ($r_s = .67, p < .05$). Neuroticism did not show any significant correlations with memory types in either mood condition.

In the positive mood condition, extraversion was significantly negatively correlated with observer memories ($r = -0.68$). In the negative mood condition, extraversion was

significantly positively correlated with specific ($r = .72$) and observer memories ($r = .67$).

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that both transient mood states and stable personality traits significantly influence the retrieval characteristics of autobiographical memories. Specifically, positive mood induction appeared to facilitate the recall of field memories (first-person perspective), particularly among individuals scoring high on extraversion. This observation is consistent with theoretical

frameworks suggesting that positive affect promotes greater self-engagement and immersion in pleasant past experiences [5].

Conversely, the induction of a negative mood state was associated with an increased recall of specific and observer memories. The heightened prevalence of the observer perspective (third-person) during negative affective states may serve as a psychological distancing mechanism, enabling individuals to regulate the emotional intensity associated with distressing memories [3]. The significant positive correlations between extraversion and both specific and observer memories in the negative mood condition suggest that extraverted individuals, even when experiencing negative affect, might engage in more detailed memory retrieval, potentially adopting a more detached, third-person perspective as a coping strategy.

This study is subject to several limitations, most notably the small sample size, which may have constrained the statistical power of the mood induction effects and some correlational analyses. Future research should endeavor to employ larger, more demographically diverse samples and investigate a broader spectrum of personality traits to provide a more comprehensive understanding of these complex interactions. Longitudinal designs would also be beneficial to explore the dynamic interplay between mood, personality, and autobiographical memory over time.

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