THE EFFECT OF JOY AND ANXIETY ON EGOCENTRIC DECISIONS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract. *Background.* Adult egocentrism is described as a tendency to assess a situation or object based on personal experience, opinion or attitude, regardless of a different another person's perspective. Scientists argue that this phenomenon is one of the major sources of interpersonal conflicts and disagreements. Knowing that the daily functioning of young adults is based on social interactions accompanied by various emotions, it is important to understand how this may influence their egocentrism. The ***aim*** of the study is to investigate how egocentric decisions of young adults are influenced by the emotions of joy and anxiety. ***Methods.*** The experiment was carried out at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania. The sample consisted of 35 students from the department of Social Sciences (27 females, 8 males; average age 21.4). In order to cause emotions of joy and anxiety, an autobiographic memory task was used (Todd, Forstmann, Burgmer, Brooks, & Galinsky, 2015). In order to measure egocentric decisions, a perspective-taking task was created which consisted of 10 descriptions of the stories and the same number of voice messages belonging to each story. ***Results.*** All the subjects inside the different groups displayed a higher number of egocentric decisions when compared to non-egocentric ones. The results also showed that emotions of joy and anxiety did not increase the occurrence of the egocentric decisions. ***Conclusions.*** Our findings underline that emotions of joy and anxiety may not influence egocentric decisions of young adults (aged 18 to 29). The results also suggest that young adults may be essentially egocentric, regardless of such internal factors as emotions.

Keywords: egocentrism, young adults, emotions.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of adult egocentrism can be described as a person's tendency to assess the situation on the basis of his own experience, opinion or attitude regardless of a different another person's perspective (Epley, Boven, Keysar, & Gilovich, 2004). Foreign scientists began to explore adult egocentrism about 50 years ago (Looft, 1969), and recently this phenomenon attracts an increasing attention of scientists from all over the world (Surtees & Apperly, 2012; Todd et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be assumed that the study of adult egocentrism is not new in psychology. However, no similar studies conducted in Lithuania have been found. Therefore, it could be said that the phenomenon of adult egocentrism is a relatively new research object in the context of Lithuania.

Daily functioning of young adults is based on social interactions accompanied by various emotions. It is shown that the emotion of anxiety is one of the most common mental states (Brooks & Schweitzer, 2011) that has a negative influence on a person's cognitive functioning (Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007). Futhermore, positive emotions such as joy are also associated with poorer cognitive functioning (Phillips, Bull, Adams, & Fraser, 2002; Mitchell & Phillips, 2007). Since cognitive functioning is closely related to adults' egocentric thinking (Lin, Keysar, & Epley, 2010; Fizke, Barthel, Peters, & Rakoczy, 2014), it is assumed that the emotions of joy and anxiety can also influence the manifestation of egocentrism in young adulthood.

During interpersonal interactions people inevitably come across opinions, attitudes or beliefs of others which are contrary to the ones they have. According to Epley, Boven et al. (2004), adult egocentrism is one of the major source of interpersonal conflicts and disagreements. On the other hand, the ability to adopt others' perspectives, which is the opposite to egocentrism, is the main factor that determines the success of interpersonal relationships (Epley, Boven et al., 2004). and helps to build and strengthen social links (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005). Todd et al. (2015) also argues that the ability to adopt others' perspectives is a prerequisite for achieving high quality communication and social cohesion.

Adult Egocentrism

It is clear that adults view the world less egocentrically than children; however. they do not outgrow egocentrism completely. In contrary to children, adults are better able to subsequently correct an initial egocentric interpretation (Epley, Morewedge, & Keysar, 2004; Surtees & Apperly, 2012). Adult egocentrism is particularly evident in situations where individuals do not rule out their own attitude, but use it as a basis when assesing or accepting another's perspective (Surtees & Apperly, 2012, Epley, Bovenet al., 2004, Thomas & Jacoby, 2013). In other words, the information is initially processed in an egocentric bias, and then is corrected and coordinated with the perspective of another person (Epley, Morewedge et al., 2004; Savitsky, Keysar, Epley, Carter, & Swanson, 2011). However, it is quite difficult to ignore one's own knowledge while predicting and evaluating the information about others; therefore. such predictions are often misleading.

External Factors Related to Adult Egocentrism

People tend to be more egocentric when communicating with close friends than with strangers (Savitsky et al., 2011; Vorauer & Sucharyna, 2013). Egocentric biases are being increased under time pressure in decision making process (Epley, Boven et al., 2004). Egocentric thinking is more likely to arise in situations when people have more power compared to others (e.g. have more money, knowledge, experience, etc.) (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). On the other hand, clear evidence of others' perception of the world may reduce egocentric thinking (Epley, Boven et al., 2004), i.e. the exact knowledge may help people to adjust to others' perspectives (Abbate, Isgrò, Wicklund, & Boca, 2006; Abbate, Boca, & Gendolla, 2016).

Internal Factors Related to Adult Egocentrism

It is believed that self-focused attention fosters perspective-taking and, therefore, reduces egocentric thinking (Abbate et al., 2006; Abbate et al., 2016; Gendolla & Wicklund, 2009). Moreover, the phenomenon of adult egocentrism may be reduced by the large working memory capacity (Lin et al., 2010) and high abilities of executive functions (Fizke et al.,

2014). Unfortunately, there are only few studies about the direct impact of emotions on adult egocentrism (Converse, Lin, Keysar, & Epley, 2008; Todd et al., 2015). There was examined the influence of joy, sadness (Converse et al., 2008), anger, disgust, and anxiety (Todd et al., 2015). The results of these studies showed that the feelings of disgust and sadness were related to reduced egocentrism while the emotions of joy and anxiety increased the egocentric thinking of adults.

The Impact of Emotions of Joy and Anxiety on Adult Egocentrism

The results of previous studies suggest that people who experience the emotion of joy have a higher level of egocentrism (Converse et al., 2008). According to Converse et al. (2008), joy fosters the use of the most accessible information, i.e. personal experience, attitude, etc. during the decision-making process.

Moreover, having known that the process of overcoming egocentrism requires conscious efforts (Converse et al., 2008, Lin et al., 2010), it is assumed that the experience of joy might undermine this process. Therefore, this emotion is associated with increased egocentric thinking. Nevertheless, Converse et al. (2008) state that a tendency to make egocentric decisions about another person's perspective depends on the situation. If one's own perspective or knowledge at least partially overlap with the other's point of view, it might be expected that the person will assess the situation more accurately (Hoch, 1987, Lin et al., 2010), i.e. they will avoid mistakes of egocentric thinking. The emotion of joy can also indirectly affect the egocenrism. It can increase the egocentric thinking by reducing self-focused attention (Wood, Saltzberg, & Goldsamt, 1990; Green, Sedikides, Saltzberg, Wood, & Forzano, 2003) or impairing cognitive executive functioning (Phillips et al., 2002; Mitchell & Phillips, 2007).

Studies show that individuals who experience the emotion of anxiety tend to rely on contextual information when making conclusions about other's point of view even knowing that the others do not have that kind of information (Todd et al., 2015). Scientists hypothesize that the emotion of anxiety is typically associated with the feeling of uncertainty. And this feeling increases reliance on one's own egocentric perspective when reasoning about the mental states of others (Todd et al.,

2015). The emotion of anxiety as well as joy impairs cognitive executive functioning (Eysenck et al., 2007); therefore, it can also indirectly increase egocentric thinking.

To sum up, it can be assumed that both joy and anxiety directly and indirectly increase egocentric thinking of adults compared with other emotions such as anger, sadness, and disgust. Neveretheless, there are still only few studies in this field; therefore, the aim of this research was to investigate how egocentric decisions of young adults are influenced by the emotions of joy and anxiety. It was hypothesized that both joy and anxiety increase the manifestation of egocentric decisions among young adults.

METHODS

Participants

The students of Vytautas Magnus University participated in this study (N = 37). We excluded data from two participants who were older than 29 years old, leaving a final sample of 35 (77.1% of women, and only 22.9% of men). The participants were randomly assigned to the incidental emotion condition: joy, anxiety, or neutral. There were 11 participants in the anxiety group, and 12 participants in both neutral and joy groups.

Materials

To find out the influence of the emotions of joy and anxiety on egocentric decisions among young adults the experiment was conducted. The dependent variable was an egocentric assessment of the content of messages, and independent variables were the emotions of joy and anxiety.

Incidental emotion manipulation. As part of an "autobiographical memory" task (adapted from Todd et al., 2015), the participants wrote about an emotionally evocative experience from their own lives. The participants in the two emotion conditions were asked to write in detail the situation/event which evoked anxiety or joy. The participants in the neutral condition wrote about how they typically spend their Sunday evenings. The participants of all groups were ensured that the written

memories will be destroyed right after the experiment, only the participant has the right to read them; therefore, they did not have to focus on grammar or style mistakes. Prior research has shown statistically significant differences between the emotional state of participants in neutral, anger, and anxiety groups while using this task. Therefore, no additional check of this manipulation was used.

Perspective-taking task. The authors of this research created a material to measure egocentric decisions among young adults (adapted from Epley, Boven et al., 2004, Todd et al., 2015). It consisted of 5 short stories about Tom's life with a positive, and 5 stories with a negative ending, and 10 voice messages belonging to each story. For instance, one story described a recommendation about a comedy show that Tom received from his friend Jogaile: "Tom was having dinner with two of his friends, Jogaile and Adomas. Jogaile urged them to go to see a new comedian whose show just opened in the area". This story had a negative ending: "Tom followed her advice but hated the comedian. He thought the guy was arrogant and tedious. After returning home, he phoned his friend Adomas". After reading a story, the participants heard the voice message Tom left to Adomas: "Hi, this is Tom. Do you remember that comedian Jogaile mentioned at dinner? I just saw him yesterday. All I can say is that you have to see him yourself to believe how hilarious he really is" (Epley, Boven et al., 2004).

The situations were carefully constructed to make it clear that the listener (e.g. Adomas) would not have access to the clarifying information that is known for the participant who has just read the story. In this example, Tom left the voice message after the show, so it is obvious that only hearing the text of the message, Adomas would not be able to understand what Tom really thought about the show. In order to ensure there is no clarifying information in the content of voice messages, 20 independent evaluators were asked to assess whether the text of each negative and positive story did not match the content of the voice message belonging to that story. The results showed statistically significant differences between the text of each story and the content of voice messages.

All the participants received the same set of 10 stories (half with the positive ending and half with the negative ending), and 10 voice

messages recorded by a professional actor. To avoid the possible influence of the intonation on the participants' responses, 10 independent evaluators were asked to assess how emotional the speaker's tone sounded before the experiment. The results showed that the tone of the speaker sounded relatively monotonous in all messages, regardless of the positive or negative ending of the story.

On the basis of the number of stories given to the participants, there was created a scale containing 10 questions of how the listener would interpret the voice message. According to the previous studies, we assumed that the information of the situation which participants read would influence their prediction of how the message left on the answering machine would be interpreted by its receiver. That is, participants who read the negative version of the story would predict a message to be sarcastic, and vice versa, the participants who read the positive version of the story would predict a message to be sincere. According to this logic, as egocentric decisions were considered answers "as sarcastic" after reading the negative end of the story and answers "as sincere" after reading the positive end of the story. Meanwhile, the answers "it's impossible to say" were assumed as non-egocentric decisions, regardless of the positive or negative end of the story. The initial reliability of the scale was quite low ($\alpha = .539$), but it increased after eliminating one of the questions ($\alpha = .611$). Therefore, a 9-questions scale was used in further analysis.

Procedure

To ensure the compliance of this research with ethical standards, recommendations from Institutional Review board were received and utilized.

The experiment was conducted at Vytautas Magnus University in 2016, at the end of April. It consisted of 9 separate sessions (45 min each). No more than 6 participants could participate in one session. Before arriving to the lab, participants were randomized into the control and 2 experimental groups on a series basis: 3132213311321223, etc. In this series, "1" meant the participant was assigned to the control group (no effect), "2" – experimental group no. 1 (manipulation of anxiety), and "3" - experimental group no. 2 (manipulation of joy).

At the beginning of each session, the participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent which included the purpose of the study, procedure, conditions for participation and withdrawal, the potential risks, and research benefits. It was loudly emphasized that the participants have the right to quit the study or see a psychologist (who was on duty during all sessions) in case they felt strong negative emotions during the participation.

After signing the informed consent, each participant was given a blank with demographic questions and task instructions. While doing the perspective-taking task, the participants were asked to read a story with positive or negative ending, listen to a recorded voice message, and predict whether the listener of the message would interpret it as "sincere", "sarcastic" or "it is impossible to say". Before doing this task, the participants were asked to mark those answers of the first impression. They were also informed that there was no possibility to return and change the previous answers. There was a large emphasis on the importance of doing tasks in the order they were given. In order to ensure that the participants followed all the instructions, they where observed by the researcher while doing the tasks.

At the end of each session, the participants were given an oral debriefing. It included a disclosure of true purpose and the main idea of the study as well as an explanation why the deception was done. The participants were also allowed to express their feelings about what happened. After all, they were asked not to disclose the details of the study to other people before the study ended completely.

RESULTS

The data was coded and analyzed using SPSS Statistics version 16.00.

Expression of Egocentricity

Considering the very small number of male participants (n = 8), the expression of men and women egocentricity within different groups was analyzed together.

In order to measure the expression of egocentricity within control, anxiety, and joy groups, there were compared the sums of egocentric

and non-egocentric answers within the groups using the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test. As mentioned previously, egocentric decisions were considered the answers "as sarcastic" after reading the negative end of the story and the answers "as sincere" after reading the positive end of the story. Meanwhile, the answers "it's impossible to say" were assumed as non-egocentric decisions, regardless of the positive or negative end of the story.

As you can see in *Table 1*, the sums of egocentric and non-egocentric answers statistically significantly differed within the control, anxiety, and joy groups (p < .05).

Table 1. *Statistical Significance of Differences of Egocentric and Non-Egocentric Answers Within Control, Anxiety, and Joy Groups.*

	Group		
	Control	*Anxiety*	*Joy*
Negative ties	9	10	10
Positive ties	2	1	2
Z	-2.452	-2.732	-2.635
p value (two-tailed)	.014	.006	.008

As you can see in *Table 2,* the participants of all groups chose the higher number of egocentric answers when compared to the non-egocentric ones ($M_{egocentric\ answers} > M_{non-egocentric\ answers}$).

Table 2. *The Descriptive Statistics of Egocentric and Non-egocentric Answers Within Control, Anxiety, and Joy Groups.*

	n	*Egocentric answers*		*Non-egocentric answers*	
		M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Control	12	4.75	2.179	1.75	1.485
Anxiety	11	4.64	1.502	1.18	1.601
Joy	12	4.92	2.234	1.25	1.603

These findings suggest that all the participants expressed higher egocentrism during the perspective-taking task.

The Impact of Joy and Anxiety on Egocentric Decisions of Young Adults

The test of normality showed that the variable of the sum of egocentric answers was normally distributed (*skewness (.040) and kurtosis (-.861) are between -1 and 1; Shapiro Wilks Test = .954, p > .05*). Thus, in order to study the hypotheses, the differences of sums of egocentric answers between the control, anxiety, and joy groups were compared by using single factor analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The comparison of egocentric decisions between the control, anxiety, and joy groups is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Statistical Significance of Differences of Egocentric Answers Between Control, Anxiety, and Joy Groups.*

	n	M	Sum of Squares	DF	F value	p value
Control	12	4.75				
Anxiety	11	4.64	.459	2	.057	.945
Joy	12	4.92				

The table shows that the means of sums of egocentric answers did not significantly differ among control, anxiety, and joy groups (p > .05). Therefore, it might be assumed that emotions of joy and anxiety did not have a statistically significant influence on egocentric decisions among young adults.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the influence of emotions of joy and anxiety on egocentric decisions among young adults. It was expected that both anxiety and joy would increase participants' egocentric thinking. In other words, those in anxiety and joy groups would have a higher number of egocentric decisions compared to those in the control group.

The results of this study did not confirm the hypothesis: all the participants took a similar amount of egocentric decisions when intuiting what other people think (interpreting the perception of the one who

received the voice message). These results contradict past research findings which indicate that anxiety increases egocentrism when interpreting ambiguous messages (Todd et al., 2015), as well as emotion of joy which also leads to a higher number of egocentric decisions (Converse et al., 2008).

The possible reasons of the contradictory results may be found in the limitations of the material used in this study when compared to the original one (Todd et al., 2015). In this study, only 3 possible answers were given to the participants ("as sincere", "as sarcastic", "it's impossible to say"), requiring a very specific evaluation of the voice message. Meanwhile, in the study of Todd's et al. (2015), the participants had to choose 1 out of 7 possible answers (1 = *very sarcastic*, 7 = *very sincere*) when predicting how the recipient would interpret the message. The results showed that the means of messages evaluations were not higher than 6, what means that participants were not that categorical when assessing ambiguous messages. Knowing that further research could investigate whether the higher number of possible answer options would be relevant to the differences of egocentric decisions between the different groups.

Nevertheless, the results showed that all groups' participants took a higher number of egocentric decisions when compared to non-egocentric ones. As it was mentioned before, adults use their own perspectives and available information as a starting point while making decisions about other person's perspective, and thus, make egocentric mistakes (Surtees & Apperly, 2012; Epley, Boven et al., 2004; Thomas & Jacoby, 2013). It is also believed that it is easier to adjust to other's perspective when having clear evidence of another's perception of the world (Abbate et al., 2006; Abbate et al., 2016), and thus, avoid mistakes of egocentric thinking (Epley, Boven et al., 2004). Therefore, it might be assumed that the descriptions of the stories used in this study themselves provoked egocentric decisions. As well as the hint that the recipient of the voice message did not have that contextual information known to the one who read the story might have been not that obvious. According to the results, it also might be assumed that the participants of this study may have been essentially egocentric, regardless of various external or internal factors such as emotions of anxiety and joy.

The previously observed results (Todd et al., 2015; Converse et al., 2008) might not have been reproduced in this study because of such methodological issues as a small number of subjects participated or a failed manipulation of the independent variable. Since the results of this study did not confirm the results of the previous researches that analyzed the influence of joy and anxiety on egocentric decisions, further investigations in this field are still needed.

The priority for future work is to have a bigger sample. Considering the limitations of the perspective-taking task which were mentioned above, further investigators could give the participants a very clear evidence that the recipient of the voice message does not have that contextual information known for the participant. Moreover, there could also be more possible answer options when predicting how the recipient would interpret the message. Finally, scientists could use another type of emotion manipulation such as listening to music (Converse et al., 2008; Green et al., 2003) or watching movies (Converse et al., 2008).

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DŽIAUGSMO IR NERIMO EMOCIJŲ ĮTAKA JAUNŲ SUAUGUSIŲJŲ EGOCENTRINIAMS SPRENDIMAMS

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Santrauka. *Tyrimo tikslas.* Šio tyrimo tikslas – išsiaiškinti, kokią įtaką jaunų suaugusiųjų egocentriniams sprendimams daro džiaugsmo ir nerimo emocijos. ***Metodas.*** Tyrimas atliktas Vytauto Didžiojo universitete, Kaune. Tyrime dalyvavo 35 1–4 kurso socialinių mokslų studentai. Iš jų, 27 moterys ir 8 vyrai. Vidutinis tiriamųjų amžius – 21,4 m. ***Tyrimo metodas*** – eksperimentas, kuriame buvo manipuliuojama džiaugsmo ir nerimo emocijomis. Siekiant sukelti minėtas emocijas, naudota „autobiografinės atminties" užduotis. Egocentriškumo vertinimo metodiką sudarė 10 istorijų aprašų ir tiek pat, kiekvienai istorijai priklausančių, balso žinučių įrašų. ***Rezultatai.*** Visi tiriamieji kontrolinės, nerimo ir džiaugsmo grupių viduje pasižymėjo didesniu egocentrinių sprendimų kiekiu, lyginant su ne egocentriniais. Rezultatai taip pat parodė, jog nerimo ir džiaugsmo emocijos nepadidino egocentrinių sprendimų pasireiškimo tikimybės. Kitaip tariant, nepriklausomai nuo grupės, tyrimo dalyviai buvo linkę priimti panašų egocentrinių sprendimų kiekį. ***Išvados.*** Rezultatai leidžia daryti prielaidą, jog nerimo ir džiaugsmo emocijos neturi įtakos jaunų suaugusiųjų (18–29 m.) egocentriniams sprendimams. Taip pat, galima manyti, jog galbūt asmenys jauno suaugusiojo amžiuje apskritai linkę į egocentriškumą, nepriklausomai nuo tokių vidinių veiksnių, kaip emocijos.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: jauno suaugusiojo amžius, egocentrizmas, emocijos.