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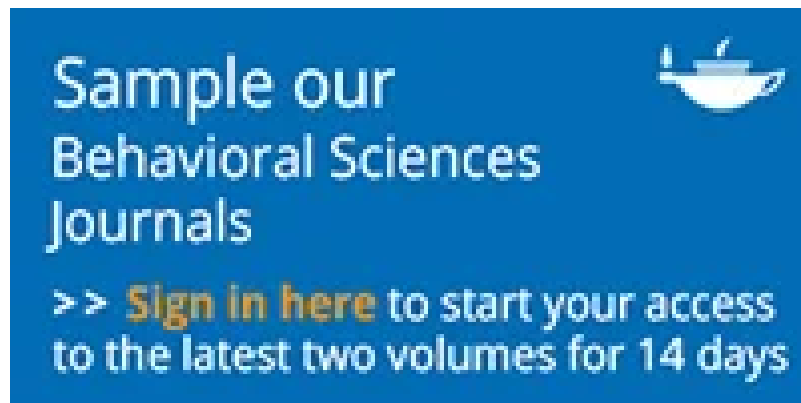
# On the valence of surprise

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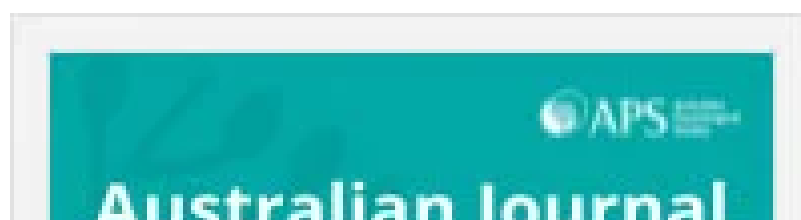


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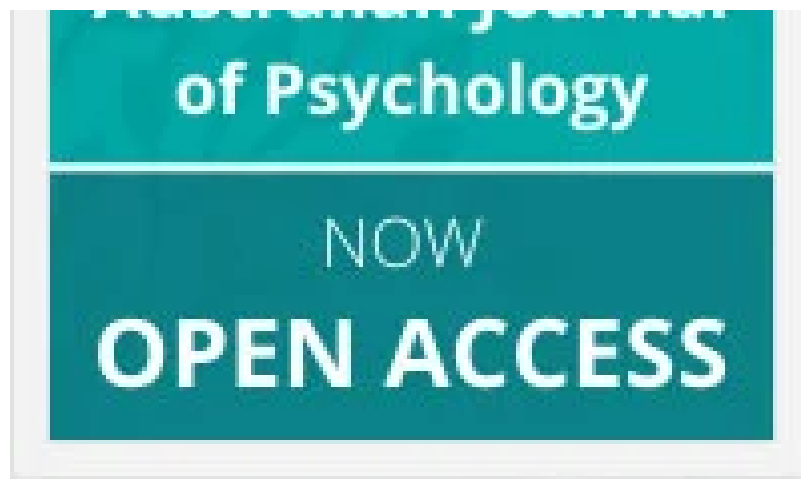
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# Abstract

While surprise is a common emotion in everyday life, some of its fundamental characteristics are still unclear. For example, what does surprise feel like, positive or negative? The emotion literature has been somewhat unclear about the experiential valence of surprise. Surprise has been depicted as a pre-affective state, or as an emotion that can be both positive and negative, depending on the goal conduciveness of the surprising event. Based on recent work on cognitive consistency and neuroscientific/psychophysiological studies on surprise, we explored the possibility that surprise may be a (mildly)

negative emotion in a study of autobiographical recall of unexpected and surprising events (Experiment 1) and in two studies of facial expressions of surprise (Experiments 2 and 3a/b). The studies show that experience of surprise and the perception of surprise in others may indeed be initially negative. We furthermore show how linguistic features of surprise and the temporal dynamics may have contributed to previous confusion regarding its valence.

**Q Keywords:** Surprise Valence

Cognitive consistency Facial expression

Autobiographical recall


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