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Associations of the managing the emotions of others (MEOS) scale with personality, the Dark Triad and trait EI

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ABSTRACT

The associations of the managing the emotions of others (MEOS) scale with the Big Five and the Dark Triad were examined. This extended previous research by using full-length rather than short-form personality measures and also by examining the separate associations of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, and primary and secondary psychopathy with MEOS factors. The pattern of personality correlations with the MEOS scales was similar to those found previously. The two non-prosocial factors of the MEOS (Worsen, Inauthentic) were found to be more strongly associated with primary than with secondary psychopathy. For vulnerable narcissism, an interesting pattern of associations with the MEOS Inauthentic factor and with Neuroticism emerged. The possibility of a pathway linking trait EI to the tendency to use non-prosocial mood management was examined using models in which Agreeableness (A) was a mediator or moderator. A was found to mediate the (negative) association between trait EI and both Worsen and Inauthentic, and some evidence was found that A could also act as a moderator, weakening the factors' association with EI at low levels of A.

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1. Introduction

Managing the emotions of others comprises part of the emotional intelligence (EI) domain. Whilst the primary focus of research in this area has been on emotion management in contexts where the target is intended to benefit (for example trying to raise the mood of a friend who is worried or anxious), both prosocial and non-prosocial versions of interpersonal mood management can occur, and can involve attempting to either improve or worsen the target's mood (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013; Niven, Totterdell, Stride, & Holman, 2011).

Preliminary work on the managing the emotions of others (MEOS) scale (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013) showed this 58-item scale to have four core factors relating to approaches to changing the moods and emotions of others, comprising a prosocial pair (Enhance and Divert) and a non-prosocial pair (Worsen and Inauthentic). Examination of the item content of the factors showed that Enhance included approaches such as offering help or reassurance, whilst Divert included using tactics such as humour or enjoyable activities to improve another's mood. The

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Worsen factor was characterised by the use of strategies such as criticism and undermining to worsen another's mood, whilst Inauthentic involved the use of displays such as flattery, sulking and inducing guilt. Two additional factors (Conceal, Poor skills) were found to be characterised respectively by a tendency to conceal one's own emotions and by self-assessed low capability to change another's mood. The Worsen and Inauthentic factors are of particular interest within EI research, as they cover an aspect (self-serving manipulation of the emotions of others) of the somewhat under-researched "dark side" of EI (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007; Kilduff, Chiaburu, & Menges, 2010; O'Connor & Athota, 2013).

The most notable features of the correlation pattern of the MEOS factors with the Big Five and the personality Dark Triad reported by Austin and O'Donnell (2013) were the strong associations of the prosocial pair of factors with Agreeableness (A) and of the non-prosocial pair with the Dark Triad. The factor/factor correlations were also of interest: the within-pair correlations were large, but correlations across the pairs were small, indicating that the use of the prosocial strategies does not strongly exclude the use of the non-prosocial ones, or vice versa. These associations all require replication, particularly the personality correlations, as short scales for both the Big Five and the Dark Triad were used in the preliminary study; such scales may not capture the full breadth of the relevant constructs. In particular, the brief Dark

Triad scale used (Jonason & Webster, 2010) did not allow the separate examination of widely-recognised subcomponents of narcissism and psychopathy. Grandiose narcissism is associated with aggression and dominance, whilst vulnerable narcissism has features of defensiveness and insecurity. The two forms of narcissism show divergent associations with self-esteem (positive for grandiose and negative for vulnerable narcissism) and also differing personality profiles. Both are negatively associated with Agreeableness, but with grandiose narcissism also showing a positive association with Extraversion and vulnerable narcissism a positive association with Neuroticism (Miller et al., 2011). Within the two-factor model of psychopathy, primary psychopathy is characterised by selfishness, uncaringness and manipulative behaviour, and secondary psychopathy by anti-social behaviour, impulsivity and self-defeating lifestyle (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995).

The initial MEOS study also examined the associations of its factors with trait EI. These were in the expected direction for the core factors, i.e. positive for the prosocial and negative for the non-prosocial pair (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013). As with consistent findings of negative associations of trait EI with Machiavellianism (O'Connor & Athota, 2013), these associations do not provide an obvious link to the “dark side” of EI, as they indicate that high EI is negatively rather than positively associated with self-serving and manipulative behaviour, even though EI in principle provides a capability for such behaviour. A recent study (O'Connor & Athota, 2013) has highlighted the key role of Agreeableness in a possible resolution of this issue. In this work, a mediation model showed that Agreeableness accounted for the association between trait EI and Machiavellianism. Further analysis showed that the association between a perceived emotional competence (PEC) EI subscale and Machiavellianism was also moderated by Agreeableness with an effect direction showing that PEC is positively related to Machiavellianism at low levels of A; this approach is potentially extendable to the non-prosocial MEOS scales. In the light of the above review, the objectives of the research presented here were:

- (1) To re-examine the associations of the MEOS factors with the Big Five and Dark Triad using longer scales. This includes examining associations with grandiose and vulnerable narcissism and with primary and secondary psychopathy.
- (2) To re-examine the associations amongst the MEOS factors.
- (3) To examine the role of Agreeableness as both a potential mediator and moderator of the association between EI and the non-prosocial aspects of managing the emotions of others.

It was expected that the MEOS/personality associations and the associations amongst the factors would be similar to those found previously (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013). As primary psychopathy is more strongly associated than secondary psychopathy with manipulative behaviour, it was expected that it would have stronger associations than secondary psychopathy with the non-prosocial factor pair.

2. Methods

Two online data collections were performed using the same set of measures. The Study 1 group comprised students at a Canadian university, whilst the Study 2 participants were a more heterogeneous group of web survey respondents.

2.1. Participants

The Study 1 participants were 369 university students (123, male 246 female); the mean age of the group was 18.63 years, standard deviation 2.03 years. There were 432 Study 2 participants

(105 male, 327 female), with mean age 22.25 years, standard deviation 7.72 years. Of this group 85% identified as students, with the remainder being working, unemployed or retired.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. MEOS (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013)

This scale comprises 58 items which provide scores on four core scales relating to managing the emotions of others (Enhance, Divert, Worsen, Inauthentic) together with scores relating to emotional concealment and self-assessed poor emotion skills.

2.2.2. Minimarkers (Saucier, 1994)

This 40-item set of trait-descriptive adjectives provides scores on the Big Five personality dimensions: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness, (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C).

2.2.3. Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970)

This 20-item scale covers the Machiavellianism domain of deceit in interpersonal relationships and a cynical attitude to human nature.

2.2.4. Narcissism

Narcissism scales were selected to assess both its grandiose and vulnerable aspects. The NPI-16 (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006) assesses grandiose narcissism; the scale comprises 16 forced-choice items. Vulnerable narcissism was assessed with the 10-item hypersensitive narcissism scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997), which comprises 10 Likert-scale items.

2.2.5. Levenson self-report psychopathy scale (Levenson et al., 1995)

This scale is designed to assess primary (16 items) and secondary (10 items) psychopathy in general population samples.

2.2.6. Trait EI

The short, 30-item, version of the TEIQue (TEIQue-SF; Petrides & Furnham, 2006) was used; this scale provides a measure of global trait EI.

2.3. Procedure

For both studies, data collection was conducted via an online survey. Study 1 participants were recruited through the psychology undergraduate subject pool of a large Canadian university. For Study 2 the link to the survey was submitted to research participation websites, and also publicised on the UK psychology department website. Both studies were approved by the ethics committee of their respective universities.

3. Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and internal reliabilities for the measures.

Tables 2 and 3 show the correlations amongst the MEOS factors and their correlations with the other measures. For both sets of data, the pattern of correlations amongst the factors was similar to that observed previously (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013); in particular the associations of Enhance with Divert and Worsen with Inauthentic were large, with associations of the Enhance/Divert pair with the Worsen/Inauthentic pair being weaker or non-significant. The correlations of the MEOS scales with the Big Five and the Dark Triad were also similar to those found with short form measures (Austin & O'Donnell, 2013). Enhance and Divert had their highest Big Five correlation with A and were negatively correlated with all the Dark Triad measures, whilst Worsen was strongly nega-

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