



The distinctiveness and utility of a measure of trait emotional awareness

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Abstract

There has been a proliferation of new measures of individual differences in emotional processing, but too little research that evaluates the distinctiveness and utility of such measures. We critically evaluated the Level of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS), which is a measure of people's awareness of emotions in both the self and others. Across two studies, university students ($N=124$ and 107 for study 1 and 2, respectively) completed the LEAS, as well as a battery of personality measures and ability tests, and a mood-induction task. The LEAS was statistically distinct from a wide variety of personality measures, emotional intelligence tests, and self-report ability measures. In addition, both studies demonstrated that people high in emotional awareness were less likely than others to show mood congruent biases in their judgments (e.g. when bad moods lead to negative judgments and good moods to good judgments). The LEAS appears to be both distinctive and useful in understanding mood-relevant processes.

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1. Introduction

People have long been interested in how individuals differ in their emotions and emotional processing (Galen, 193/1997¹; Jung, 1921/1983). Recently, there has been an explosion of interest in measuring such individual differences. For example, measures have been created to assess differences in emotional labelling (Swinkels & Giuliano, 1995), emotional creativity (Avervill &

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¹ The exact date that Galen published his work, "The souls dependence on the body," is estimated to be between 193 and 210 AD; Galen, 1997).

Thomas-Knowles, 1991), emotional awareness (Lane, Quinlan, Schwartz, Walker, & Zeitlin, 1990), meta-experience of moods (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988), emotional expressiveness (Gross & John, 1995), and emotional intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This list represents only a small subset of the available measures related to emotional processing differences (for a review see Ciarrochi, Chan, Caputi, & Roberts, 2001).

Almost all of these measures fall into one of three categories: Self-report personality measures (e.g. “How frequently do you experience anger?”), performance based ability tests (e.g. “identify the emotions in a particular face;” Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000), and self-reported measures of ability to understand one’s own emotions (e.g. “I am often confused about what emotion I am feeling;” Bagby, Taylor, & Parker, 1994). One interesting test, however, does not fit easily into any of these categories: the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS; Lane et al., 1990). This scale is intended to assess the extent to which people are aware of emotions in both themselves and others. It is based on participants’ productions, which seems to exclude it from the two self-report categories. It also does not seem to fit well in the ability test category, since it does not require people to either solve problems or otherwise to perform at their optimal levels.

What construct does the LEAS measure, and what is the test useful for? The measure is still fairly new and further work is needed to fully evaluate it. One major goal of the present studies is to examine the extent that the LEAS correlates with measures from each of the three major categories described above: self-report personality measures, ability tests, and self-reported ability measures. This correlational analysis with potentially related scales will help us to understand what the LEAS measures, and what it does not. Our second area of validation concerns an experimental test. Awareness is an important concept in the experimental study of mood-congruent judgment (e.g. when a bad mood leads to negative judgments). Generally, mood congruent judgment does not occur when awareness is high. Thus, we expected that people who score high in level of emotional awareness (high on the LEAS) will be less likely than others to show mood congruency effects.

1.1. The LEAS

Recently, there has been an increase of interest in various measures of emotional intelligence, awareness, and related concepts (Ciarrochi, Chan, Caputi et al., 2001). It is still unknown, however, how all these scales interrelate. What is known is that self-report measures appear correlated with measures of well-being, whereas ability measures of emotional intelligence (EI) are distinct from other measures (Ciarrochi, Chan, Caputi et al., 2001). Where, however, would a scale such as the LEAS fit in? The LEAS claims to measure “Level of Emotional Awareness.” To do so, it presents scenes that involve two people (one’s self and another), which are followed by two questions, which ask, “How would you feel?,” and “How would the other person feel?” (Lane et al., 1990). Corresponding to these questions, each person’s answer receives two separate scores for the emotion described: one for the self and one for others. People also receive a total score, which is derived from the two separate scores.

The LEAS is based on a developmental theory proposed by Lane and colleagues (1990). Emotional experience is said to become more differentiated and integrated with development, such that the representations of emotional states move from implicit to explicit forms. Lane et al. (1990) posited five levels of emotional awareness, each level representing a hierarchical increase in

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