



## Five-Factor Model and alcohol outcomes: Mediating and moderating role of alcohol expectancies



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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between the Five-Factor Model of personality and alcohol expectancies (AEs) with different alcohol outcomes. The sample was composed of 738 participants (63.7% females). Path and regression analyses were performed to test the mediation and moderation effects. The results indicated that Neuroticism was related to alcohol consumption through Positive Alcohol Expectancies, and that Negative Alcohol Expectancies, but also Positive Alcohol Expectancies, partially mediated the relationship of Neuroticism to alcohol-related problems. In addition, Positive Alcohol Expectancies partially mediated the associations of extraversion and low conscientiousness with weekend Standard Drink Units (SDUs), and they completely mediated the associations of these personality variables with alcohol-related problems. Additional direct paths were found from low agreeableness to weekly SDUs and alcohol-related problems; and from low openness to weekend SDUs. Moderation effects of alcohol expectancies on personality and both alcohol use and alcohol-related problems were also found. The present research contributes new evidence on the influence of the five factors of personality on alcohol outcomes, and the mediation/moderation role of alcohol expectancies. These findings can be useful to develop prevention/intervention programmes.

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### 1. Introduction

Alcohol consumption is the world's third largest risk factor for disease and disability; indeed in middle-income countries, it is the greatest risk (World Health Organization – WHO, 2011). From a biopsychosocial perspective, drinking behaviour is caused by the complex interplay of multiple variables (Ibáñez, Ruiperez, Villa, Moya, & Ortet, 2008). Regarding psychological variables, it has been hypothesized that more distal and non-specific variables, such as personality, may influence the alcohol outcomes mediated and moderated by more proximal and specific variables, such as alcohol expectancies (Ibáñez et al., 2008; McCarthy, Kroll, & Smith, 2001; Smith & Anderson, 2001).

#### 1.1. Personality and alcohol outcomes

The most widely used, integrative model of personality is the Five-Factor Model (FFM; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). In

accordance with the fact that impulsivity-related traits are the most relevant for alcohol use and abuse (Ibáñez et al., 2008; Sher, Grekin, & Williams, 2005), low Conscientiousness (C) and low Agreeableness (A) have been consistently associated with alcohol consumption, alcohol-related problems (AP), and alcohol disorders (Kotov, Gamez, Schmidt, & Watson, 2010; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Rooke, & Schutte, 2007; Ruiz, Pincus, & Dickinson, 2003). However, these two disinhibition domains may influence alcohol use through different etiological pathways (Ibáñez et al., 2008; Sher et al., 2005). Whereas low A and low C would be associated with alcohol outcomes through a *deviance proneness pathway* (i.e., alcohol use is considered a part of a more general pattern of antisocial behaviour), only low C (together with high Extraversion, E) would be relevant in a *positive affect regulation pathway* (i.e., people who drink to experience positive alcohol reinforcement effects) (Mezquita, Ibáñez, Moya, Villa, & Ortet, 2014). In addition, Neuroticism (N) has proven relevant in problematic alcohol use patterns (Kotov et al., 2010; Malouff et al., 2007; Ruiz et al., 2003), probably through a *negative affect regulation pathway* (i.e., people drink alcohol to diminish negative affect) (Mezquita et al., 2014). Finally, although Openness to Experience (O) appears to play a minor role in alcohol use (Kotov et al.,

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2010; Malouff et al., 2007), some studies have found certain negative relationships (Gotham, Sher, & Wood, 1997).

### 1.2. Alcohol expectancies (AEs) and alcohol outcomes

AEs are defined as beliefs about the effects of alcohol on behaviour, cognition, moods and emotions (Leigh, 1989). Consequently, initiating a drinking episode is assumed to be driven partly by at least the individual's belief that alcohol results in certain desirable consequences (e.g., become funnier or less stressed); while beliefs about the undesirable effects of alcohol (e.g., making a fool of oneself or feeling sick) may predict abstaining from drink (Leigh, 1989; Leigh & Stacy, 2004).

Accordingly during adulthood, Positive AEs have been robustly associated with alcohol use in cross-sectional (Finn, Sharkansky, Brandt, & Turcotte, 2000; Fu, Ko, Wu, Cherng, & Cheng, 2007; Harnett, Lynch, Gullo, Dawe, & Loxton, 2013) and prospective studies, even when previous alcohol use is controlled for (Corbin, Iwamoto, & Fromme, 2011; Settles, Cyders, & Smith, 2010; Wardell, Read, Colder, & Merrill, 2012). In addition, Positive AEs have been related to AP (Corbin et al., 2011; Dunne, Freedlander, Coleman, & Katz, 2013; Finn et al., 2000; Fu et al., 2007), and studies in clinical samples have also shown higher Positive AEs in alcohol dependents than in samples of undergraduate students (Li & Dingle, 2012).

It has been hypothesized that Negative AEs relate negatively to alcohol use (Leigh & Stacy, 2004). However, there is evidence of reverse (Corbin et al., 2011; Leigh & Stacy, 2004), but also direct, or non-significant associations with alcohol consumption (Pabst, Kraus, Piontek, Mueller, & Demmel, 2014). Such discrepancies seem to be explained by differences in age. While the role of Negative AEs may be irrelevant in younger adults, the magnitude of the reverse association between Negative AEs and alcohol consumption seem to increase in middle-age participants (Leigh & Stacy, 2004; Nicolai, Moshagen, & Demmel, 2012). Furthermore, higher Negative AEs have been positively related to AP in young adult samples (Dunne et al., 2013; Pabst et al., 2014; Read & O'Connor, 2006), and also seem to be higher in clinical than in student samples (Li & Dingle, 2012).

### 1.3. Interrelationships among drinking predictors

Most of the studies on personality and AEs have been conducted within the Acquired Preparedness Model (APM) theoretical framework. The APM is an attempt to integrate social-cognitive learning and biodispositional personality risk factors to provide a more comprehensive account of risky alcohol use. Specifically, this model proposes that those reward-seeking and disinhibited individuals would be more prepared to acquire certain social-cognitive constructs, such as positive expectations regarding alcohol effects which, in turn, may result in increased drinking (McCarthy et al., 2001; Smith & Anderson, 2001). Accordingly, cross-sectional (Dunne et al., 2013; Finn et al., 2000; Gullo, Dawe, Kambouropoulos, Staiger, & Jackson, 2010; Harnett et al., 2013) and prospective (Corbin et al., 2011; Fu et al., 2007; Settles et al., 2010; Wardell et al., 2012) studies have shown that Positive AEs mediate, either totally or partially, associations of disinhibition (e.g., sensation-seeking, sensitivity to reward, fun seeking or impulsivity) with alcohol consumption and AP.

The APM has focused mainly on impulsivity and Positive AEs, so less attention has been paid to other personality characteristics or to Negative AEs. However, there is certain evidence that Positive AEs also mediate the relationship of N and E dimensions to alcohol outcomes (McCarthy et al., 2001; Read & O'Connor, 2006). Furthermore, Read and O'Connor (2006) found that Negative AEs partially mediate the association of N with AP. Corbin et al. (2011) and Fu

et al. (2007) failed to find any association between impulsivity-related scales and Negative AEs, while Spillane, Cyders, and Maurelli (2012) found that negative urgency predicts AP which, in turn, predict Negative AEs in males. Thus, the mediation role of Negative AEs is less clear and deserves further research.

Finally, and as an extension of the APM, moderation effects have also been hypothesized; i.e., disinhibited individuals with high Positive AEs would drink more than other equally disinhibited individuals without these expectancies (McCarthy et al., 2001). In line with this, Carlson and Johnson (2012) and Cyders et al. (2007) found that impulsivity-related scales interact with high Positive AEs in predicting alcohol-related outcomes, while Fischer, Smith, Anderson, and Flory (2003) found that E interacts with social facilitation AEs in relation to drinking behaviour. Another study found that high neurotic extraversion interacts with Positive AEs in predicting AP, but only in one of the two samples studied (McCarthy et al., 2001). Finally, Cyders et al. (2007) found that positive urgency (which is related mainly to low C, low A and N; see Cyders & Smith, 2008) interacts with Negative AEs to predict AP.

### 1.4. The present study

Previous studies have explored the association of different personality variables and AEs as predictors of alcohol use and misuse. However, only a few used the FFM, even after some studies have found that each personality dimension is related to different alcohol use patterns. Very few studies have focused on the study of both types of AEs (Positive and Negative) and effects (moderation/mediation). Thus, the aim of the present research was to study the mediation/moderation roles of AEs in the relationship of the FFM to drinking during the week, at the weekend and AP. Based on previous studies, we hypothesized that personality is related to alcohol outcomes through AEs, with the exception of low A and low O (see Fig. 1); and that AEs, mainly the positive ones, interact with disinhibition (low C and low A), E and N to predict alcohol outcomes.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

The sample was composed of 738 participants aged 18–53 years (63.7% females, mean age = 23.27,  $SD = 3.75$ ), 69.50% were students, 19.4% were active workers, 7.3% were unemployed and the remaining 3.8% presented other situations. All the participants provided informed consent to participate in the study and received a mean amount of 30 euros for their collaboration. See the additional information in [Supplementary material 1](#).

### 2.2. Materials

#### 2.2.1. Personality

We used the Spanish version of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1999), which comprises 240 items that are answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. It assesses 30 specific traits, or facets, that define the five personality factors or domains: N, E, O, A, and C.

#### 2.2.2. Alcohol expectancies

The Expectancy Questionnaire (EQ; Camacho et al., 2013) consists of 34 items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from *no chance to certain to happen*. It measures Positive AEs and Negative AEs about alcohol effects. Respondents indicate the likelihood of

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