# Emotional intelligence as a unique predictor of individual differences in humour styles and humour appreciation

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ABSTRACT

A small amount of research to-date has examined the association between emotional intelligence (EI) and humour styles, however, none of this research has controlled for the effects of personality and socially desirable responding. Furthermore, none of the research has examined the possible associations with humour appreciation, as distinct from humour styles. Thus, a novel audio-visual humour appreciation measure (AVHAM) was developed based on responses to ostensibly humorous video clips. The AVHAM was found to be associated with factorial validity, as three, positively correlated factors emerged (aggressive, children, and animals). Additionally, convergent validity was observed for the AVHAM, as theoretically consistent and moderately sized correlations were observed between the AVHAM and the Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ). Finally, incremental predictive validity was found to be associated with self-reported EI and humour styles, but not humour appreciation. The results are discussed in light of the distinction between humour styles and humour appreciation, as well as the unique role of EI in understanding individual differences in humour.

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## 1. Introduction

Humour has been implicated with several psychological functions, including cognitive and social benefits, interpersonal communication, and coping mechanisms (Martin, 2003; Yip & Martin, 2006). Emotional intelligence (EI) has also been shown to be associated with a number of social and psychological benefits, including relationship satisfaction, optimism, and high self-esteem (Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2007). Despite the similar correlates associated with individual differences in humour and EI, only a small amount of research has examined the potential links between EI and humour.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been defined as the "ability to purposely adapt, shape, and select environments through the use of emotionally relevant processes" (Gignac, 2010a, p. 132). It is important, however, to distinguish between two approaches to the conceptualization of EI: (1) ability-based, and (2) trait-based (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Ability-based measures attempt to measure an individual's knowledge or skill at identifying and/or using emotions to solve inter-personal problems. Some ability-based measures do so from a maximal performance perspective

(e.g., Mayer–Salovey–Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test; MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003), while others do so from a typical performance perspective (TEMT; Freudenthaler & Neubauer, 2005; Genos EI; Palmer, Stough, Harmer, & Gignac, 2009). Maximal ability EI inventories tend to be based on tasks, while typical performance EI inventories are based on self- and/ or rater-report. In contrast to the ability-based measures (both maximal and typical), trait-based conceptualizations of EI (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007) amalgamate a constellation of self-perceived lower level competencies and personality characteristics into a single model. Although differentially conceptualised to some degree, self-report typical EI and trait-based EI measures tend to correlate to a moderate degree (e.g., Freudenthaler, Neubauer, Gabler, Scherl, & Rindermann, 2008).

## 2. Previous EI and humour research

Greven, Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche, and Furnham (2008) tested the hypothesis that trait-EI (TEIQue; see Petrides et al., 2007) would be correlated with the scales of the Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). The HSQ is associated with four subscales: (1) affiliative (the tendency to engage in humour to promote healthy relationships and reduce inter-personal stress); (2) self-enhancing (the tendency to keep a humorous outlook on life as a coping strategy, whether with others or alone); (3) aggressive (the tendency to

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engage in humour that is likely to hurt or alienate others), and self-defeating (the tendency to amuse others by disparaging oneself excessively). Greven et al. (2008) reported positive correlations between total trait-EI scores and the two adaptive humour styles (affiliative $r = .41$; self-enhancing $r = .48$) and negative correlations with the two maladaptive humour styles (aggressive $r = -.18$; self-defeating $r = -.35$). These results suggest that individuals who are higher on trait-EI tend to engage in humour to enhance their social relationships with others, but not to the detriment of others or in a self-defeating manner.

Yip and Martin (2006) examined the association between ability-EI (MSCEIT) and the HSQ. A positive correlation ($r = .24$) between emotional management and self-enhancing humour was observed, which suggests that individuals who manage their own emotions may use humour as a coping mechanism. No other statistically significant effects were reported. Perhaps the paucity of effects was due to some of the questionable psychometric properties associated with the MSCEIT (Palmer, Gignac, Manocha, & Stough, 2005). Alternatively, it may be that a maximal ability-EI orientation may not be as congruent theoretically with individual differences in humour styles, in comparison to a typical EI or a trait-EI orientation. Humour styles, as measured by the HSQ, have been framed within the context of a trait, which is more consistent with typical behaviour.

One of the limitations associated with the Greven et al. (2008) and the Yip and Martin (2006) investigations is that they did not examine the unique effects associated with trait-EI as a predictor of humour styles. That is, trait-EI is known to be associated with both personality and socially desirable responding (SDR; Matthews et al., 2007). In fact, one of the key criticisms of the EI construct is that it is redundant with existing individual differences constructs (Landy, 2005). Thus, the hypothesis that a self-report measure of EI can predict humour styles, independently of the effects of personality and SDR, may be considered useful to test.

## 3. Humour style versus humour appreciation

In addition to not testing the effects of EI independently of personality and SDR, the existing EI and humour research has examined humour strictly as a style. A person's humour style may be considered to be the manner in which an individual uses or exhibits humour on a day-to-day basis (Martin et al., 2003). In addition to humour as a style, humour may be conceptualised in terms of appreciation (Thorson & Powell, 1993). That is, the degree to which individuals consider particular stimuli to be differentially humorous. Studies typically operationalise humour appreciation as either the subjective ratings of humorous stimuli, or an observed response (e.g., smiling/laughing; Kozbelt & Nishioka, 2010). Theoretically, one's enjoyment of certain types of humour is considered to be related to one's personality (Martin, 2007).

Perhaps the most frequently used measure of humour appreciation in the literature today is the 3WD, which was designed to measure three humour dimensions (incongruity resolution, nonsense, and sexual) based on individuals' ratings of funniness and aversiveness toward an exhaustive taxonomy of jokes and cartoons. Although scores from the 3WD have been reported to be associated with respectable levels of reliability and validity (Ruch, 1992), the measure may be suggested to be associated with three limitations.

Firstly, it is approximately 20 years old, thus, the content may be of questionable humorousness to individuals younger than 30 years of age. For example, one item within the 3WD includes the caption of a single-panel comic which depicts an elderly couple conversing: 'You have mistaken a worm for your shoe lace again',

with the reply: 'No, surely not'. Secondly, the humour content originated from Austrian and German media. Given that jokes, like idioms, are often culture and language specific, it may be difficult for English-speaking individuals to relate to or understand the humour even after translation. Finally, the 3WD does not take into account the appreciation of aggressive or hostile humour which has been shown to be a relevant construct in the broader study of humour (Koestler, 1964; Martin et al., 2003; Weinstein, Hodgins, & Ostvik-White, 2011). In light of the above, it was considered potentially useful to develop a measure of individual differences in humour appreciation that may be appealing to individuals of all adult ages, relatively devoid of cultural context, and that includes items relevant to aggressive humour.

Consequently, in this investigation, an inventory based on short video clips derived from America's Funniest Home Videos (AFHV) was developed to measure individual differences in humour appreciation. The use of AFHV video clips in a psychological research study is not unprecedented. For example, Weinstein et al. (2011) selected a series of hostile and non-hostile video-clips selected from AFHV to facilitate a priming effect. The humour appreciation measure was developed based on total of 35 video clips selected from several AFHV DVDs. Based on the qualitative evaluations of the first author of this paper, 15 video clips were identified as aggressive and, thus, were considered potentially indicative of maladaptive humour. Aggressive humour appreciation was defined as the tendency to find humorous the viewing of other people's misfortune, typically as a relatively unexpected event that involves a loss of composure and/or the experience of physical pain. An example from this group of clips included a man falling off an exercise bench in a public gym. Another 10 video clips were selected based on content relevant to children. An example from this group of clips included a small child who switched between happy and mad expressions intentionally at the instruction of an adult. Finally, an additional 10 video clips were selected based on content relevant to animals. An example from this group of clips included the depiction of several bear cubs that simultaneously formed a congo-style line in an almost human-like manner. The primary focus in this investigation was on the aggressive humour appreciation dimension. The inclusion of the child and animal video clips was principally for the purposes of evaluating divergent validity.

As the child and animal video clips did not include any aggressiveness or hostility, they were considered unlikely to be associated with the HSQ aggressive subscale. Thus, it was hypothesized that the aggressive AVHAM subscale would correlate more substantially with the HSQ aggressive subscale than with the other HSQ subscales. It was not expected that the AVHAM aggressive subscale would correlate with the other maladaptive HSQ subscale (self-defeating), as no clear theoretical connection was apparent. The possibility that the child and animal AVHAM subscales might correlate with the HSQ affiliative and self-enhancing subscales was also explored, although no specific hypotheses were formulated. Again, the inclusion of the child and animal video clips was considered important for the purposes of establishing divergent validity. Finally, it was hypothesized that typical EI performance would be negatively associated with the AVHAM aggressive subscale. Typical EI performance was also explored as a correlate of the AVHAM child and animal subscales.

In summary, the purpose of this investigation was to evaluate the incremental predictive validity associated with typical EI as a predictor of individual differences in humour style and humour appreciation, independently of the effects of personality and SDR. Additionally, a newly developed measure of humour appreciation will be evaluated for its basic psychometric properties via exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, and convergent/divergent validity with the HSQ.