Correlations between Emotional Expressivity and Emotion Management

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Abstract

Does emotional expressivity correlate with emotion management? Emotional expressivity is the tendency to express emotions through non-verbal actions such as tone of voice, posture, and facial expression (Kring, Smith, & Neal, 1994). ? Emotion management is the ability to regulate emotions to accomplish personal and social goals (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004). This study examined whether people who are very emotionally expressive have a hard time managing their emotions. A total of 383 participants completed two tests: the Emotion Management subscale of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003) and a measure of Emotional Expressivity that includes scales for each of six emotions: Affection, Happiness, Amusement, Anger, Fear, and Sadness (Barchard & Matsumoto, 2006). As expected, there was a statistically significant negative correlation between anger expressivity and emotion management. However, there were no significant correlations between the other five emotions and emotion management. Two factors may have contributed to the lack of correlation between emotion management and emotional expressivity. First, people do not usually need to control positive emotions (e.g., Affection, Happiness, and Amusement). Management of emotions is consequently focused upon the management of negative emotions, which may not be related to the tendency to express positive emotions. Second, the MSCEIT Emotion Management scale focuses on the ability to manage other people's emotions, whereas the Emotional Expressivity Scale focuses on expressing one's own emotions. These two factors may have caused the very low correlations between emotion management and the expression of most emotions in the present study. Future research should examine the expression and management of each emotion separately, and should measure the expression and management of both positive and negative emotions.

Introduction

Emotional expressivity is defined as the expression of emotions through non-verbal actions (Kring et al., 1994). These include tone of voice, posture, actions, and facial expressions. Emotion management is the ability to change one's emotion from an undesired emotion into a desired emotion in order to accomplish personal and social goals (Mayer et al., 2004). Typically, people want to change a negative emotion into a positive one, although in some rare circumstances the reverse may be true.

Both emotional expressivity and emotion management are crucial for everyday life. Being able to regulate one's emotions may enable a person to think and react more clearly than they would otherwise (Mayer et al., 2004). In addition, people must express both negative and positive emotions to communicate effectively with other people (Sloan & Marx, 2004), and sometimes must prevent the expression of emotions to make communication easier (Gross & John, 1997). However, it is easier to control the expression of some emotions than others. For example, it is easier to control the expression of happiness than anger (Mayer, Salovey, Gomberg-Kaufman, & Blainey, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional expressivity and emotional management. While both are important for communication and success in everyday life, a high level of emotional expressivity may indicate that a person is unable to control both the expression of the emotion and the emotion itself. We therefore hypothesized that people with very high levels of emotional expressivity would have low levels of emotion management – that they would be unable to control both the expression and the experience of their emotions. Based upon previous research, we also hypothesized that this relationship might differ for different emotions: that negative emotions might harder to control than positive emotions, and this might lead to a stronger relationship between emotional expressivity and emotion management.

Method

Participants
A total of 383 undergraduate students (227 female, 156 male) participated in this study in return for course credit at a large western university. Ages ranged from 18 to 56 (M = 20.54, SD = 5.15). Participants identified themselves as follows: 9.8% White, 13.1% Asian, 10.7% Hispanic, 9.4% Other, 6.0% Black and 0.8% Native.

Measures
The Emotional Expressivity Scale (Barchard & Matsumoto, 2006) consists of six scales: Affection, Happiness, Amusement, Fear, Sadness, and Anger. Items are rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

The Emotion Management subscale of the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002a, 2002b; Mayer et al., 2003) presents several vignettes featuring emotional problems (Mayer, et al., 2002b). For each vignette, participants rate each of four possible responses to the situation, using a 5-point scale that ranges from Very Ineffective (1) to Very Effective (5). Items were scored using the general consensus scoring method, which has an internal consistency reliability of .81 (Mayer et al., 2002b).

Procedures
Participants completed two 90-minute group testing sessions, as part of a larger study.
Statistical Analysis
Pearson correlations were calculated to investigate the relationships between emotional management and the expression of six different emotions.

Table 1
Correlations between Emotion Management and Emotional Expressivity

	Affection	Happiness	Amusement	Fear	Sadness	Anger
Emotion Management	.09	.09	.08	.06	.10	-.11*

* $p < .05$.

Results

As can be seen from Table 1, anger expressivity and emotion management had a significant negative correlation (r (381) = -.11, p = .04). There were no significant correlations between emotion management and any other emotional expressivity scale, and all of these remaining correlations were .10 or less.

Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between emotional expressivity and emotion management. There was a single significant negative correlation: the correlation between anger expressivity and emotional management. We hypothesized that people may find it more difficult to regulate negative emotions than positive ones, and that this might lead to stronger relationships between the expression of negative emotions and emotion management. Thus, it makes sense that the expression of anger had the largest correlation with emotion management. None-the-less, the correlation was quite small.

Expression of the other five emotions (Affection, Happiness, Amusement, Fear, Sadness, and Anger) did not correlate with emotion management. This may be due to the scales we used. The Emotion Management subscale of MSCEIT focuses on the management of emotions in other people. Each vignette asks the participant how another person should act to maintain or change an emotion; no vignette asks the participant how they would manage their own emotions. However, some individuals may be good at controlling their own emotions but not be good at helping other people manage their emotions. Thus, when a participant scores high (or low) on the MSCEIT Emotion Management subscale, we cannot assume that this score directly reflects their ability to manage their own emotions.

In addition, although we used separate scales to assess the expression of six different emotions, we did not use separate scales to assess the management of distinct emotions. The MSCEIT Emotion Management subscale provides a single measure of emotion management skill. Future research should use an emotion management measure that assesses skill at controlling several different emotions. It may be that some the expression of some emotions are easier to control than others. For example, it might be that people find it easy to pretend that they are not happy (Mayer et al., 1991) or to pretend that they are happy, and so regardless of how much happiness they tend to express on an everyday basis, they can still manage the expression of happiness whenever the need arises. If so, the correlation between the happiness expressivity and the management of happiness may be close to zero. On the other hand, it may be that people find it hard to disguise real anger (Mayer et al., 1991) or to pretend they are angry when they aren't, and so there may be a strong negative correlation between anger.

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