

## ON THE ASSESSMENT OF EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES

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The idea to devote a special issue on the assessment of emotional functioning and emotional competence arose during the preparation of the 10 European Conference on Psychological Assessment that took place from the 16<sup>th</sup> till the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 in Ghent. The conference theme was “The assessment of emotions and emotional competencies”. Emotions have become a cross-cutting theme of research across theoretical and applied domains in psychology. The academic interest is especially voiced by scientific journals focussing on emotion, such as *Motivation and Emotion*, *Cognition and Emotion*, and more recently *Emotion*. Moreover, there has been a longstanding interest in emotions in the applied domains, especially in clinical psychology. Several psychotherapeutic approaches explicitly pay attention to how affect is regulated and how changes in affect-regulation can be brought about (e.g., Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002; Koole, 2009), and more globally, emotional distress is frequently seen as a key indicator of mental disorder (e.g., Cooper, 2005). Since the popularizing book on emotional intelligence by Daniel Goleman (1995), emotional functioning and the competence to deal with emotions has penetrated other applied domains of psychology, like for instance in leadership research (e.g. Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010).

Psychological assessment has an important role to play in the further development of the research domain of emotional functioning and emotional competence. It can contribute both to theoretical developments as well to the practical applications. Through its focus on investigating validity psychological assessment contributes to the clarification of the emotion constructs. There are for instance vigorous debates in the literature on the conceptualization of emotional intelligence that emerge from the contradicting assessment results (e.g. Matthews, Roberts, & Zeider, 2004). Moreover, through its focus on score computation, reliability, and standardization it generates instruments that can be applied in practice. The instruments form the basis for guidance and intervention.

The present special issue reports on five selected papers that have been presented at the 10 European Conference on Psychological Assessment. Each of these five contributions report on recent developments in the assessment of emotional functioning and emotional competence. They span very different domains of psychology and very different approaches, ranging from clinical psychology to industrial psychology, from self-report to other-report, and from instrument development and validation to psychometric methods.

The first two papers focus on issues from clinical psychology. The paper by Meganck and colleagues (Meganck, Inslegers, Vanheule & Desmet, 2012) addresses the difficult question of how alexithymia, which literally means having no words for emotions (a-lexos-thymos), is best assessed. The authors report on the convergent validity between various assessment methods for alexithymia in a clinical population. They offer positive evidence for the convergent validity of very different assessment approaches going from self-report, scoring of an interview, through ratings by treating psychologists. Factor analyses of these measures and their subscales, however, indicate that they do not tap into one underlying factor. In line with earlier discussions (Vanheule, 2008; Waller & Scheidt, 2004) it is concluded that two interview-based measures provide the best measurement of alexithymia.

The second paper (Dimaggio et al., 2012) addresses the question of how alexithymia relates to broader problems at the level of theory of mind (Brüne, 2005). Positive evidence is found for lack of understanding of irony in patients that are high in alexithymia, thereby offering evidence for a broader meta-cognitive problems underpinning affective disorders.

The third paper bridges the clinical and non-clinical domains by studying the CBCL in a normal population of children and adolescents (Braet et al., 2010). The CBCL is both world-wide as well as in the Flemish-Belgian context one of the most used instruments to screen for psychopathology in children and adolescents. The most important finding of this study is that the American norms are not adequate for the Flemish context, the general trend being that the American norms underestimate psychopathological functioning in a Flemish population. The research underscores the need to validate and standardize a psychological assessment instrument in the population for which it is going to be used.

The fourth contribution, by Groenvynck and colleagues (Groenvynck, Dillen & Fontaine, 2012) shifts from the clinical to the work and organizational context. It reports on the construction of a new instrument to assess guilt and shame proneness in the work context. In the wake of the research on guilt and shame proneness by Tangney and colleagues (e.g. Tangney and Dearing, 2002) guilt and shame have received a lot of attention in social psychology, personality research as well as clinical psychology. With the construction of a new assessment instrument that is focused on and relevant for the work context, new perspectives are opened to study the role of guilt and shame in the work context.

The last contribution (Rijmen, 2012) is a psychometric contribution on the scoring of situational judgement instruments. The situational judgment methodology is often used for the assessment of emotional competence. Participants receive descriptions of daily emotional situations together with a number of possible reactions in those situations. The participants are asked to

identify the most optimal reaction in those situations. While the situational judgement approach offers good predictive validity, it is often characterized by low internal consistencies. The classical linear psychometric models is inadequate for the situational judgement approach. The last contribution offers an innovative approach to score situational judgement tests in a psychometric sound way on the basis latent class analysis.

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