



Is there a “dark intelligence”? Emotional intelligence is used by dark personalities to emotionally manipulate others



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ABSTRACT

Potential “darker sides” of socio-emotional intelligence (SEI) have been repeatedly noted. We examine whether SEI is associated with emotional manipulation of others when used by dark personalities (Dark Triad: narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy). In $N = 594$ participants, narcissism was positively, Machiavellianism negatively, and psychopathy positively and negatively associated with SEI. Moreover, narcissism and psychopathy moderated links between facets of emotional intelligence and emotional manipulation. Findings are discussed in context of a “dark intelligence” used for malicious intents.

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1. Introduction

Are social and emotional skills always used for good intentions? Potential “dark sides” of socio-emotional intelligence (SEI), such as the emotional manipulation of others (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007), have garnered interest during the last years. Nonetheless, SEI is widely regarded as adaptive, desirable, and positive (Grieve & Mahar, 2010; Veselka, Schermer, & Vernon, 2012). Although SEI and emotional manipulation both involve the skill to influence others' emotions, no empirical association between these two variables could be asserted so far (Austin et al., 2007). We thus examine in this study *under which circumstances* SEI is associated with emotional manipulation. Due to its callous and manipulative character (e.g., Jones & Figueredo, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Veselka et al., 2012), the Dark Triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy was considered as a possible moderator of relations between SEI and emotional manipulation.

1.1. Socio-emotional intelligence

“Socio-emotional intelligence” serves as an umbrella term for various abilities, skills, aptitudes, and traits (Furtner, Rauthmann,

& Sachse, 2010), including communication competence (e.g., Diez, 1984), social intelligence (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Gardner, 1993; Guilford, 1967; Thorndike, 1920), and emotional intelligence (e.g., Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Not only interpersonal (e.g., encoding and decoding social information) but also the intrapersonal skills (e.g., regulating own emotions) are considered important. This is also reflected in Riggio's and Carney's (2003, p. 1) definition of social intelligence (see also Guilford, 1967; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) as socially intelligent individuals are “skilled in receiving, decoding, and accurately interpreting emotional and social information from both the self and from others, and ... in sending and regulating emotional and social information appropriate to the interpersonal and situational circumstances.” In this study, we consider these different types of socio-emotional skills.

Social intelligence (SI) dates back to Thorndike's (1920) distinction between perceiving and acting in social settings. According to him, social intelligence is “the ability to understand and *manage* men and women, boys and girls and to act wisely in human relations” (italics added). As can be gleaned from this early definition, the concept of SI already included the potential for manipulating others by referring to “managing” people. Thus, a potential “dark side” of social intelligence has already been hinted at.

Emotional intelligence (EI) was first defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as the ability to deal with emotions. It has since gained much attention in popular literature (e.g., Goleman, 1995) and academic research (e.g., Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). EI has been concretized and defined quite differently in psychological literature which has lent itself to controversial debates about its

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nature. For example, it has been defined as an ability or skill (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), trait (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer, & Veselka, 2011), or mixture of both (Mayer et al., 2008). Moreover, EI may pertain to the recognition, processing, interpretation, utilization, and regulation of either own emotions or of others (Mayer et al., 2008). Here, we conceptualize EI as a skill that can be self-reported (Mayer et al., 2008).

Recent research has started to uncover potential “dark,” dysfunctional, or maladaptive aspects of EI in interpersonal relations (e.g., Austin et al., 2007; de Raad, 2005) despite the fact that EI appears to be a widely valued and genuinely positive skill (Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002). Austin et al. (2007) have therefore introduced the concept of “emotional manipulation” as the “management” of others and their emotions: emotional skills are intentionally used to achieve a desired outcome (e.g., to get someone to do something for them). Therefore, emotional skills are utilized in a strategic and manipulative way to influence others’ emotions.

The constructs of SI and EI show conceptual and empirical overlaps. First, both are usually beneficial to navigating the social world (Lopes et al., 2004) and involve decoding others’ interpersonal signals (Mayer et al., 2008). Second, both have been shown to be positively intercorrelated (Riggio & Carney, 2003). Third, both have been linked to “managing” others or “cleverly” interacting in interpersonal contexts (Kafetsios, Nezlek, & Vassiou, 2011). This may point to a common “darker side” of both SI and EI. Due to these similarities, we speak of the macro-construct “socio-emotional intelligence.”

1.2. The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad consists of three conceptually distinct, but empirically overlapping personality traits (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002): narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The sub-clinical forms of these traits share a callous, manipulative, and exploitative nature (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012; Jones & Figueredo, 2013; Rauthmann, 2012a). *Narcissism* is characterized by an overly enhanced view of the self and feelings of grandiosity, paired with devaluation of others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Raskin and Terry (1988) described narcissism as excessive self-love and selfishness, with the tendency of disregarding others and a lack of empathy. *Machiavellianism* is characterized by cold and strategic manipulation of others (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellians possess an unemotional, pragmatic, and cynical perspective on life and interpersonal relationships which may be used as a justification for exploiting others and acting in immoral ways (Rauthmann, 2012b). *Psychopathy* is characterized by an anti-social behavioral style, impulsive thrill-seeking, cold affect (i.e., the lack of feeling guilt or empathy), and interpersonal manipulation (Hare, 2003; Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2003). Among the members of the Dark Triad, it can be regarded as the “darkest” (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013).

1.3. Relations between socio-emotional intelligence and the Dark Triad

A common thread among the Dark Triad traits is their exploitative social style at the expense or disregard of others’ welfare (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). As such, persons scoring high on the Dark Triad may be prone to manipulating others’ emotions to get their way and push through their self-beneficial agendas. However, are narcissists, Machiavellians, and psychopaths socially and emotionally intelligent?

Existing research has produced mixed findings. On the one hand, a positive relation between narcissism and EI has been established (Petrides et al., 2011; Veselka et al., 2012). On the other hand, narcissists have been described as low in empathy (e.g., Paul-

hus & Williams, 2002) which should be associated with less EI. Furthermore, Machiavellianism and EI are negatively correlated (Petrides et al., 2011; Veselka et al., 2012; Austin et al., 2007; Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009), while Machiavellianism has also been described as a social exploitation strategy that would require a minimum of interpersonal skills to successfully manipulate others (Jones & Paulhus, 2009; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Also, psychopathy was found to be positively (Petrides et al., 2011; Veselka et al., 2012) and negatively related to EI (Copestake, Gray, & Snowden, 2013; Ermer, Kahn, Salovey, & Kiehl, 2012). Moreover, a lack of empathy is considered as a hallmark of psychopathy (Furnham et al., 2013). Taken together, dark personalities should require SEI to get ahead, but their callous, exploitative tendencies may obstruct smooth interpersonal navigation. In this study, we thus investigate whether and how the SEI is associated with the Dark Triad.

2. The current study

2.1. Aims and scope

This study had several aims. First, we examine associations between SEI and the Dark Triad. Second, we examine associations between SEI and emotional manipulation. We also address under which circumstances this link exists: Do Dark Triad traits moderate associations between SEI and emotional manipulation? It might be the case that, on average, SEI is not associated with emotional manipulation (see Austin et al., 2007), but *only when* they are used by dark personalities. Investigating these issues may shed further light on the mixed findings in extant literature. On the one hand, dark personalities are deemed anti-social with little empathy and regard for others. On the other hand, however, they seem to be motivated and adept at deciphering who can be exploited in which ways (Buss & Chiodo, 1991) which suggests interpersonal skills. This also allows us to elucidate potential “dark sides” of SEI (Austin et al., 2007).

2.2. Hypotheses

We formed five hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that narcissism would show overall positive relations with SEI (Hypothesis 1) as narcissism seems to be the “brightest” member of the Dark Triad (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). Moreover, narcissists have been found to be charming, interesting, and even seductive (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2010; Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013) which suggests some form of interpersonal skills. Second, we hypothesized that Machiavellianism and psychopathy would show overall negative relations with SEI (Hypothesis 2) as both pertain to “darker” aspects of human personality (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). Both traits share strong similarities so that it has even proposed they reflect one and the same trait continuum (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). Both are characterized by callousness and a lack of empathy, suggesting less ability or motivation to attend to others. Third, we hypothesized that all three Dark Triad traits would show moderate to strong positive relations with emotional manipulation due to their exploitative nature (Hypothesis 3). Fourth, we hypothesized that SEI would show overall no or at best weak positive relations with emotional manipulation (Hypothesis 4). Lastly, we hypothesized that the Dark Triad traits may function as positive moderators of the link between SEI and emotional manipulation (Hypothesis 5). Specifically, the Dark Triad traits should yield or increase a positive association between SEI and emotional manipulation because dark personalities should utilize SEI to get their way.

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