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Psychopathic and antisocial, but not emotionally intelligent

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ABSTRACT

Psychopaths are characterized as skilled manipulators, yet they are also said to be deficient in recognizing others' emotions. These two depictions suggest opposing predictions for the relation of ability-based emotional intelligence (EI) to psychopathy. The current study investigated EI, psychopathy, and antisocial behavior in a sample of 429 undergraduate students from three universities. Results indicated that, as expected, EI was negatively correlated with antisocial behavior, and psychopathy was highly positively correlated with antisocial behavior. Total EI was significantly negatively correlated with all psychopathy scales for both sexes. There were no positive correlations between any EI subscales and psychopathy in either sex, suggesting that psychopathy is not related to high ability in any aspect of EI.

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1. Introduction

Psychopathy refers to a pattern of manipulative, callous, erratic, and antisocial characteristics. Harris, Rice, Hilton, Lalumière, and Quinsey (2007) hypothesized that psychopathy reflects an evolutionarily plausible life history strategy, characterized by high short-term mating effort. In order for psychopathy to have evolved as a viable life history strategy involving the self-serving manipulation of others, one might expect psychopathic individuals to possess high levels of abilities that are related to understanding the emotions of others in order to use them effectively for personal gain. However, the suggestion that a psychopathic strategy depends on sophisticated interpersonal skills would seem to contradict the research indicating that psychopathy is related to deficits in the recognition and/or processing of emotions in others.

Shallowness of emotions has long been considered a hallmark of psychopathy (Cleckley, 1941/1988), with psychopaths described as lacking in empathy and callous in their emotional responses to others (Cleckley, 1941/1988; Hare, 2003). What is less certain is whether this blunted experience of emotion comes with a corresponding deficiency in the ability to detect and understand the emotions of others. For example, although lack of empathy is a definitional feature of psychopathy, there is evidence that psychopathic individuals show no deficits in theory of mind tasks (Blair et al., 1996; Richell et al., 2003), which assess

the ability to determine what others are thinking, feeling, or believing and are positively associated with Emotional Intelligence (Barlow, Qualter, & Stylianou, 2010). These findings suggest that psychopathy-related deficits in empathy might be affective rather than cognitive. Furthermore, there is a substantial literature related to psychopathy and accuracy in the identification of emotions from facial expressions. The results have been mixed, with some studies finding no psychopathy-related deficits in recognition of facial expressions (e.g., Book, Quinsey, & Langford, 2007; Glass & Newman, 2006) but with a number of studies supporting such a deficit, particularly in the recognition of sad affect (e.g., Dolan & Fullam, 2006; Hastings, Tangney, & Stuewig, 2008) and fearful affect (e.g., Blair, Colledge, Murray, & Mitchell, 2001; Montagne et al., 2005). These psychopathy-related deficiencies are sometimes related largely or entirely to Factor 2 psychopathy (Erratic Lifestyle, Antisocial Behavior), whereas Factor 1 (Interpersonal Manipulation, Callous Affect) has sometimes been positively correlated with accuracy of recognition of facial expressions (Blair et al., 2001; Habel, Kuehn, Salloum, Devos, & Schneider, 2002).

Given the importance of emotions to psychopathy, emotional intelligence (EI) would seem to be a significant construct in relation to psychopathy. EI has been defined by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) as four related abilities: *Perceiving* emotions accurately in oneself and others; *Understanding* emotions as well as associated emotional language; *Facilitating* thinking and problem-solving with the use of emotions; and *Managing* emotions or regulating moods in oneself and others to attain goals. Some aspects (subscales) of EI could be expected to relate to psychopathy in

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different ways. Given that psychopathy, by definition, involves the use of interpersonal manipulation, psychopathic individuals could be hypothesized to score highly on the managing subscale, which assesses the management of emotions to attain goals. However, the observed psychopathy-related deficits in the recognition of sad affect would suggest that highly psychopathic individuals might score poorly on the perceiving EI scale, which includes an assessment of the ability to accurately identify the emotions expressed in faces, photographs, and artwork.

1.1. Ability vs. (personality) Trait EI

EI is a relatively new concept that has yet to be fully developed in the research literature. One issue in EI relates to its conceptualization. Salovey and Mayer (1990) described the construct of EI as a cognitive ability, but other researchers and many writers in the popular press have defined EI by listing a number of personality characteristics that do not relate to general intelligence (or IQ) but can be assumed to be important to high performance both in the business environment and in the personal realm. Petrides and Furnham (2001) argued for a distinction between Trait EI (by which the authors seem to be referring to *personality* traits, in particular) and Ability EI, with Trait EI including diverse characteristics such as self-esteem, optimism, happiness, low impulsiveness, and assertiveness, as well as more clearly EI-related characteristics such as emotion appraisal and management.

The two different definitions of EI have resulted in different types of assessment instruments. Ability-based measures of EI, such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002), tend to correlate positively with measures of intelligence (e.g., Schulte, Ree, & Carretta, 2004), as well as with Agreeableness and Openness to Experience (e.g., Brackett & Mayer, 2003), and might reflect individuals' capacity for EI as opposed to their typical expression of EI. Trait EI has been more often measured using self-report instruments which tend to correlate with self-reports of other personality traits. Petrides and Furnham (2003) reported substantial correlations between their measure of Trait EI and four of the five (i.e., all but Agreeableness) NEO-PI personality factors, with significant correlations ranging from .34 for Conscientiousness to $-.70$ for Neuroticism. Scores on measures of Ability EI and Trait EI are only modestly correlated with each other ($r = .21$ in Brackett & Mayer, 2003), suggesting they may represent different constructs.

The personality correlates of psychopathy have been explored in a number of investigations (Lee & Ashton, 2005; Miller, Lynam, Widiger, & Leukefeld, 2001; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Given that Trait EI is so strongly associated with personality characteristics, an exploration of the relationship between self-reports of Trait EI and of psychopathy is unlikely to add much to our understanding of either construct. Moreover, to the extent that psychopathic individuals show an "egoistic bias" (Paulhus & John, 1998), those persons might overestimate their levels of Trait EI, thereby distorting any relations between the two constructs. In contrast, however, the degree to which highly psychopathic individuals possess Ability EI is an unanswered question of scientific interest. Although the willingness of psychopathic individuals to manipulate others has been well established, it remains to be seen whether these manipulative tendencies are associated with exceptional abilities in understanding and using the emotions of themselves and others.

To the authors' knowledge, there has been only one published investigation to date of the relations between psychopathy and emotional intelligence. Malterer, Glass, and Newman (2008) explored the relations between psychopathy and the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995), which they described as Trait EI, in a sample of Caucasian male inmates. Malterer et al. found that Psychopathy Checklist Re-

vised (PCL-R; Hare, 2003) Factor 1 was modestly but significantly negatively correlated with the TMMS Attention subscale, a self-report measure of ability to allocate attention to one's own feelings. Austin, Farrelly, Black, and Moore (2007) investigated the relations of Ability EI to Machiavellianism, a construct which would seem to have a great deal of overlap with sub-clinical psychopathy (Lee & Ashton, 2005; McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). Austin et al. (2007) reported a pattern of negative correlations between Machiavellianism and all EI subscales, with correlations for total EI, Facilitating Emotions, and Managing Emotions reaching significance. The authors noted that high scorers on Machiavellianism endorsed items on a self-report scale of emotionally manipulative behaviors, although their EI scores suggested they would not be highly skilled in these behaviors.

1.2. Antisocial behavior

One indication of a relation between psychopathy and Ability EI is that both have been linked to antisocial behavior. Psychopathy has been shown not only to predict violent recidivism in male offenders (Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1991), but also to predict antisocial behavior in college samples (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995; Nathanson, Paulhus, & Williams, 2006). In addition, there is some evidence of a relation between low Ability EI and antisocial behavior. Brackett, Mayer, and Warner (2004), for example, reported an association between low EI (primarily in the subscales related to perceiving and using emotions) and illegal drug use and deviant conduct in college men but not women, whereas Brackett and Mayer (2003) reported that MSCEIT scores were negatively correlated with deviant behavior but not drug use in college men and women. This evidence of a negative correlation between Ability EI and antisocial behavior might suggest that psychopathy and Ability EI would also be negatively correlated, but an examination of correlations at the subscale level (of both psychopathy and EI) could shed further light on the relations between the constructs.

1.3. Sex differences

Prior research provides evidence that there are sex differences in all three constructs employed in this study. The MSCEIT manual indicates that women typically score about half a standard deviation higher than men on total EI and also score higher on all subscales (Mayer et al., 2002). With regard to psychopathy, the base rate of male psychopaths is considerably higher than that for female psychopaths in forensic settings (Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1997; Vitale & Newman, 2001) and men typically score about one standard deviation higher than women in non-clinical samples (Levenson et al., 1995; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Men also report higher levels of antisocial behavior than do women, even in student samples (e.g., Levenson et al., 1995). The substantial sex differences in these variables highlight the importance of conducting separate analyses for men and women, or otherwise controlling for sex in any investigation of these variable inter-relations.

1.4. Current study

The current study investigates the relations between psychopathy, Ability EI, and antisocial behavior (subsequently referred to as "student antisociality" to distinguish it from the SRP-III Antisocial Behavior subscale). It is hypothesized that, in keeping with previous research, psychopathy will be strongly positively correlated with student antisociality, and that Ability EI will be negatively correlated with student antisociality. It is hypothesized that, consistent with their differential relations with antisocial behavior,

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