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Emotional intelligence, Machiavellianism and emotional manipulation: Does EI have a dark side?

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Abstract

Associations of Machiavellianism (Mach) with self-report and performance emotional intelligence (EI) and with personality were examined. The possible existence of an emotional manipulation capability, not covered within current EI measures, was also examined by constructing an emotional manipulation scale. Mach was found to be negatively correlated with self-report and performance EI, and also with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Emotional manipulation was positively correlated with Mach but unrelated to EI. Thus high Machs endorse emotionally-manipulative behaviour, although the extent to which they are successful in this behaviour, given the negative Mach/EI association, remains to be established.

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1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is generally presented as encompassing a set of inter- and intra-personal capabilities which are beneficial to high-EI individuals (e.g., higher capability to manage

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stress and to manage the emotions of others). High EI is also generally described as beneficial to those with whom that person interacts, with managing the emotions of others being illustrated with examples giving a positive outcome for both parties, such as calming a colleague's angry mood. This perspective places EI under the umbrella of positive psychology (Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002). There is indeed substantial evidence for positive, life-enhancing aspects of EI, with positive associations being found with happiness, life satisfaction, psychological health, and social network quality and size (Austin, Saklofske, & Egan, 2005; Day, Therrien, & Carroll, 2005; Furnham & Petrides, 2003). There is similar evidence for negative associations of EI with stress, depression-proneness and loneliness (Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002). It is however possible that EI could relate to negative as well as positive outcomes. An obvious example would be an individual making use of high-level capabilities to read and manage the emotions of others to manipulate their behaviour to suit that individual's interests. There could also be negative aspects of intrapersonal EI (is attending to and understanding one's own moods always helpful, independent of situation?), but we leave this issue aside for future study and focus on interpersonal EI. Interestingly, the issue of emotional manipulation, and of other possible negative uses of EI has scarcely been raised within the individual differences literature, although De Raad (2005) notes that the use of EI in manipulative and non-prosocial ways is a neglected area of study. Possible negative aspects of EI have also been raised by Carr (2000) from a philosophical perspective. He argues that the value of EI is "dependent on the moral end which it serves", noting the existence of "something not always clearly distinguishable from emotional intelligence – emotional *cleverness* or *cunning*" (p. 31, italics as in original text). This viewpoint is not addressed in current EI research, and looking for evidence of emotional cunning or manipulateness from an individual differences/psychometrics perspective is clearly of interest.

Considering the possibility that individuals might have a dispositional tendency to emotionally-manipulative behaviour immediately brings to mind the trait of Machiavellianism (Mach). High Mach scorers exhibit manipulative behaviours towards others in order to promote their own interests (Christie & Geis, 1970). High Machs are however found to be emotionally detached in their interactions with others, with an interpersonal orientation which is described as cognitive as opposed to emotional, and with little tendency to focus on individual differences (Christie & Geis, 1970). In addition, correlations between Mach and empathy have been found to be negative (Barnett & Thompson, 1985; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Watson, Biderman, & Sawrie, 1994). Mach has also been found to be related negatively to the ability to read the emotions of others and positively to alexithymia, (Simon, Francis, & Lombardo, 1990; Wastell & Booth, 2003). The most robust Mach/personality associations are negative correlations with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Thus Mach shows a set of associations suggesting it would be expected to be negatively correlated with EI, meaning that Mach does not appear to be a strong candidate for the putative interpersonally manipulative aspect of EI.

In this paper EI/Mach associations are examined and the potential manipulative/dark side of EI is explored. In the first study, associations amongst Mach, personality and self-report and performance EI were examined. Consistent with the above review, it was hypothesised that Mach would correlate negatively with overall EI scores and with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Although the Mach/total EI correlation was predicted to be negative, EI subscale correlations

were also examined to determine if there was evidence that Mach plays any role as a manipulative aspect of EI. A finding of uniform negative or nonsignificant subscale correlations would suggest that it does not.

In the second study the idea of emotional manipulation was developed further by constructing a scale to specifically assess this and examining its associations with personality, Mach and self-report EI. This study was generally exploratory as regards the correlates of emotional manipulation, predicting its correlation pattern depends on whether it is or is not an aspect of EI/Mach, which is not known. There are generally not clear arguments regarding correlations with personality, although a negative association with Agreeableness appears plausible.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

The participants were 199 Edinburgh University students, 137 female and 62 male. The mean age of the group was 21.14 years, standard deviation 3.7 years.

2.1.2. Materials

Self-report EI. The Bar-On EQ-i:S (Bar-On, 2002) is a 51-item scale that provides a measure of total EI (designated as Emotional Quotient, EQ) and the five composite scales of Intrapersonal (associated with awareness of one's own feelings and positivity), Interpersonal (interpersonal/social skills), Adaptability (ability to cope flexibly with everyday problems), Stress Management and General Mood (happiness and optimism). Internal reliability for total EI was .91 in this sample, with reliabilities for the five composite scales being .82, .80, .76, .80, .89.

Performance EI. The MSCEIT version 2.0 (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) was used. This 141-item measure provides scores for overall EI, two area scores (Experiential and Strategic EI) and four branch scores (Perceiving, Facilitating, Understanding and Managing Emotions). The score structure is hierarchical: Perceiving and Facilitating scores are combined to give the Experiential area score, and Understanding and Managing are combined to give the Strategic area score, with the two area scores combining to give the overall EI score. Each branch is assessed by two sub-tests: Faces, Pictures (Perceiving); Facilitation, Sensations (Facilitating); Blends, Changes (Understanding); Emotion Management, Emotion Relationships (Managing). Scores are provided by the test company, Multi-Health Systems. The consensus scoring option was used in this study. Internal reliabilities (using the split-half method with Spearman–Brown correction to account for heterogeneous item content) were Perceiving .90, Facilitating .68, Understanding .63, Managing .62, Experiential .90, Strategic .72, Total .90.

Personality. A 50-item scale targeting the Big-Five personality factors derived from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg et al., 2006) was used. The scale has 10 items assessing each of the dimensions of Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C). The scale has been reported to have factorial and concurrent validity (Gow, Whiteman, Pattie, & Deary, 2005). In the present sample internal reliabilities were N .86, E.89, O .77, A .83, C .78.

Machiavellianism. The Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) was used. This scale has 20 items which cover the use of deceit in interpersonal relationships, and a cynical attitude to human nature. Where relevant, item wording was modified to be gender-neutral by replacing ‘men’ in the original item by ‘people’. Internal reliability in this sample was .74.

2.2. Procedure

The measures listed above were completed as part of a study on EI, cognitive ability and laboratory task performance, results from which are reported elsewhere (Farrelly & Austin, in press). Participants completed the MSCEIT and EQ-i:S on the web prior to attending a test session supervised by an investigator. The personality and Mach IV scales were completed at the end of this session.

2.3. Results

Performing *t*-tests for gender differences on the EI, personality and Mach scales, including a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, showed that males scored higher than females on Mach ($t(197) = 4.56, p < .001, d = .65$), whilst females scored higher than males on the EQ-i:S interpersonal scale, the MSCEIT managing emotions branch, A, and N ($t(197) = 4.83, 3.92, 5.38, 3.01, p = .003$ for N, $<.001$ for the remainder, $d = .67, .56, .77, .43$).

Table 1 shows correlations between Mach and personality scores; it can be seen that there is a large negative correlation with A and a smaller but significant negative correlation with C, as expected.

Table 2 shows correlations of personality and Mach with the two EI scales. It can be seen that Mach is significantly negatively correlated with full-scale self-report and performance EI as expected, and also with a number of EI subcomponents, with a particularly large association with self-report interpersonal EI. At the level of individual MSCEIT tasks, significant correlations of Mach with three tasks were found: Emotion Management ($-.34$), Sensations ($-.16$), Emotional Relations ($-.18$).

It can also be seen that, as found in previous studies (e.g. Austin et al., 2005), there are a number of medium to large correlations of personality traits with self-report EI (in particular a large negative association of EI and General Mood with N and a large positive association between Interpersonal EI and A). Associations of personality traits with MSCEIT scores can be seen,

Table 1
Correlations of Mach IV with personality for Study 1

N	.13
E	-.08
O	.08
A	-.51***
C	-.20**

$N = 199$. N = Neuroticism, E = Extraversion, O = Openness, A = Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Correlations of Mach IV and personality with self-report and performance EI for Study 1

	Mach	N	E	O	A	C
EQ	-.33**	-.56***	.43***	.12	.37***	.24**
Intra	-.11	-.34***	.51***	.17*	.11	.14
Inter	-.46***	-.17*	.41***	.14	.68***	.11
SM	-.22**	-.46***	-.05	-.10	.12	.17*
Adapt	-.13	-.28***	.03	.19**	.22**	.37***
GM	-.24**	-.64***	.45***	.05	.20**	.10
MSCEIT	-.22**	-.07	.03	.11	.21**	-.01
Exp	-.14	-.04	-.02	.03	.11	-.05
Strat	-.28***	-.13	.10	.18**	.31***	.09
Perc	-.10	-.07	-.01	.02	.05	-.11
Fac	-.18*	.00	.01	.06	.16*	.04
Und	-.11	-.14	.14*	.10	.15*	.03
Man	-.30***	-.03	.03	.17*	.35***	.06

$N = 198$. Intra = Intrapersonal EQ, Inter = Interpersonal EQ, SM = Stress Management, Adapt = Adaptability, Exp = Experiential area, Strat = Strategic area, Perc = Perceiving, Fac = Facilitating, Und = Understanding, Man = Management, Mach = Machiavellianism, N = Neuroticism, E = Extraversion, O = Openness, A = Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

as in previous studies (e.g. Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004), to be sparser and weaker, with the most consistent (positive) associations being found for A.

3. Study 2

The main finding of Study 1 was that, as expected, EI and Mach were negatively correlated. The hypotheses regarding the personality correlates of Mach were also confirmed. The negative Mach/EI association shows that high EI individuals self-report as having a low tendency to Machiavellian behaviour and beliefs, and that this association applies also to a number of EI subscales, with the remainder of these showing no significant correlation with Mach. Thus Mach does not appear to be a candidate measure for emotional manipulation tendency, although this statement needs to be qualified in the light of the fact that neither of the EI measures used has item content explicitly relating to emotional manipulation. In order to address this, and to endeavour to obtain some psychometric purchase on the idea of emotional manipulation, in Study 2 a scale specifically targeted at emotional manipulation was constructed.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 156 (99 females, 57 males) Edinburgh University undergraduates and 185 (133 females, 52 males) members of the departmental volunteer panel. The total sample size was thus 341 (232 females, 109 males); mean age was 40.0 years, standard deviation 19.9 years.

3.2. Materials

The measures for personality and Mach were as for Study 1. Internal reliabilities in this sample were N .88, E .88, O .76, A .80, C .81, Mach .73.

Self-report EI was assessed using the 30-item short version of the TEIQue (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). This scale is designed primarily as a brief measure of overall EI and only the full-scale EI score (internal reliability in this sample .89) is used in the analyses below.

The 41-item emotional manipulation scale was based on items generated in a series of discussions of this construct and how it might best be assessed involving one of the authors and a group of undergraduate Psychology students. Participants responded on a five-point scale with end-points ‘strongly disagree’, ‘strongly agree’.

3.3. Procedure

The undergraduate participants were contacted in a variety of ways. The two investigators who were themselves undergraduates distributed questionnaires to fellow students who they knew socially and also recruited additional participants from tutorial groups and at university student society meetings. Some questionnaires were completed in the presence of an investigator and returned to them immediately but the majority were returned later to a designated collection point. The questionnaire was mailed to the volunteer panel members, together with a letter explaining the study and a reply-paid envelope for questionnaire return.

3.4. Results

A factor analysis of the emotional manipulation items produced a scree plot which suggested the extraction of three or six factors, whilst parallel analysis suggested six factors. Examination of these showed that only the first three could be interpreted, so further analysis was confined to three factors explaining 36% of the variance. The three oblique-rotated factors and their internal reliabilities are shown in Table 3. (Only high-loading items loading on these factors are given; the full factor analysis and item list is available from the first author.) Factor 1 can be seen to describe a general emotional manipulation tendency, with the high-loading items having content relating to a range of manipulation strategies. Factor 2 suggests a self-perception of lacking emotional skills, whilst Factor 3 comprises items relating to concealing feelings from others. These factors will be termed emotional manipulation, poor emotion skills and concealment in subsequent discussion.

Two-way (gender \times group) ANOVAs on personality, Mach, EI and the factor scores showed a number of main effects of group and gender. Correcting for multiple comparisons, post-hoc tests showed males scored higher than females on Mach, O and emotional manipulation, and lower on A ($t(339) = 4.08, 2.96, 2.91, 5.75, p < .001, .003, .004, <.001, d = .44, .32, .32, .63$) Students scored higher than volunteer panel members on Mach, E and emotional manipulation ($t(339) = 3.30, 3.04, 5.07, p = .001, .003, <.001, d = .36, .33, .55$) and lower on A, C and poor emotion skills ($t(339) = 3.05, 5.87, 2.91, p = .002, <.001, .004, d = .33, .64, .32$). There was a significant gender \times group interaction for concealment, with female panel members scoring higher than males whilst male students scored higher than females.

Table 3

Factors from the emotional manipulation scale

I know how to embarrass someone to stop them behaving in a particular way.	.78	-.01	-.05
I know how to make another person feel uneasy.	.76	-.15	-.06
I know how to play two people off against each other.	.69	-.15	.08
I know how to make someone feel ashamed about something that they have done in order to stop them from doing it again.	.68	-.20	-.01
I know how to 'wind up' my close family and friends.	.68	.08	.00
I can use my emotional skills to make others feel guilty.	.67	-.08	-.03
I can make someone feel anxious so that they will act in a particular way.	.66	.01	.07
I can pay someone compliments to get in their 'good books.'	.49	-.01	.02
I am good at reassuring people so that they're more likely to go along with what I say.	.41	-.13	.03
I sometimes pretend to be angrier than I really am about someone's behaviour in order to induce them to behave differently in future.	.40	.21	-.07
I can simulate emotions like pain and hurt to make others feel guilty.	.39	.02	-.06
If someone has done something to upset me I think it is acceptable to make them feel guilty about it.	.39	.28	-.19
I sometimes use displays of anger as a method of controlling others' behaviour.	.35	.24	-.18
I can offer words of encouragement and reassurance to a friend to get them to do something I want.	.34	-.04	.02
In order to avoid a deadline or other commitment, I would consider exaggerating a minor personal problem.	.32	.20	.07
I think it is wrong to use emotional means such as acting distressed or angry to get others to change their behaviour.	-.30	-.02	.10
I am not very good at motivating people.	-.13	.68	.21
I feel that I lack emotional skills.	-.03	.61	.25
I'm not very good at changing someone's mood, even if doing so would make them more likely to behave in a way that I want them to.	-.26	.60	-.08
I am not very good at giving positive encouragement to others.	-.03	.50	.08
If a friend upsets me I sometimes sulk for a while so that s/he can see how much they've hurt me.	.23	.31	-.21
When someone has made me upset or angry, I tend to downplay my feelings.	-.03	-.04	.80
When someone has made me upset or angry, I often conceal my feelings.	-.08	.16	.76
I often conceal feelings of anger or distress from others.	.14	.09	.73
I don't believe in telling others about my problems – I keep them to myself.	.18	.23	.54
Internal reliability	.88	.66	.73

Pattern matrix coefficients of magnitude .4 and above are shown in bold.

Table 4 shows correlations amongst the scores. Correlations of Mach with personality and self-report EI are similar to those found in Study 1 but with the small correlation with N reaching significance for this larger sample. For the factor scores, the emotional manipulation factor is positively correlated with Mach, N, E and O and negatively correlated with A and C, and is not significantly correlated with EI, whilst the poor emotion skills factor is strongly negatively correlated with EI and E, negatively correlated with O, A and C, and positively correlated with Mach and N. The concealment factor is negatively correlated with EI and E. These correlations show that tendency to endorse statements about emotionally-manipulative behaviour is not related to self-report EI, but that high Machs do tend to endorse such statements. The poor emotion skills factor is related most strongly to self reports of introversion and low EI but also shows a weak

Table 4

Correlations amongst Mach, EI, personality and emotion manipulation scale factors for Study 2

	Mach	EI	F1	F2	F3	N	E	O	A
EI	-.25***								
F1	.40***	.03							
F2	.13*	-.57***	-.25***						
F3	.02	-.29**	-.16**	.29***					
N	.12***	-.58***	.11*	.17**	.00				
E	-.09	.43***	.19**	-.41***	-.37***	-.18**			
O	-.01	.22***	.15**	-.25***	.00	-.02	.14*		
A	-.43***	.27***	-.14*	-.30***	-.01	.09	.22***	.10	
C	-.24***	.26***	-.15**	-.17**	-.02	-.10	-.02	.05	.24***

$N = 341$. Mach = Machiavellianism, F1 = emotional manipulation, F2 = poor emotion skills, F3 = concealment, N = Neuroticism, E = Extraversion, O = Openness, A = Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

association with Mach, whilst the concealment factor associates only with introversion and low EI.

4. Discussion

The results of both studies confirmed the hypotheses on the correlates of Mach, which was found to be negatively correlated with both self-report and performance EI and, as found in previous work (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) negatively correlated with A and C. A small positive significant correlation of Mach with N was found in Study 2, consistent with the significant Mach/N correlation found in one previous study (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006).

Using the results to examine whether Mach could be a candidate for dark side EI suggests that it is not, given the patterning of EI/Mach correlations. From Study 1, the strongest negative subscale correlation was with interpersonal EI, showing that high Machs tend to report poor interpersonal abilities, consistent with previous findings on Mach/empathy associations (Barnett & Thompson, 1985; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Watson et al., 1994). For performance EI, negative associations were found with the following MSCEIT subcomponents in addition to MSCEIT total score: Strategic area, Facilitating Branch and Managing branch. Tracing the MSCEIT/Mach associations of Table 2 to the individual task correlations shows that both subtests of the Managing branch had significant correlations with Mach, but the correlation is stronger for Emotion Management (managing one's own emotions) than for Emotional Relations (managing others' emotions). Only the Sensations subtest of the Facilitating branch had a significant Mach correlation; this task involves identifying the 'feel' of an emotion and linking it to colour, sound etc., requiring identification of own emotions. This correlation pattern suggests, in contrast to correlations for self-report EI, that high Machs experience difficulty in managing/identifying their own emotions to a greater extent than managing those of others. The lack of association with the Per-

ceiving branch and its subcomponents indicates that high Machs do not experience particular difficulty with these emotion perception tasks.

For self-report EI, the correlation with Mach could be inflated by the effects of socially-desirable responding, but it seems unlikely that this could fully account for this association. The robustness of the EI/Mach correlation across performance and self-report EI measures also suggests that the association is non-artefactual. The negative correlation also indicates that EI measures are not value-free, i.e. EI aligns with the prosocial attribute of low Mach. This is unproblematic for self-report EI, but could be regarded as raising difficulties for interpreting the MSCEIT as an intelligence measure, if such measures are expected to not correlate with either desirable or undesirable traits. The correlation could reflect the design of the MSCEIT, which does not contain specific items on manipulative behaviour. It is also possible that consensus scoring produces a bias towards socially-appropriate responses being scored more highly.

As regards personality correlates of self-report EI, the current results confirm previous findings of medium-to-large associations of EI with the Big-Five (e.g. Austin et al., 2005; Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005). The Study 1 results for personality correlations of the MSCEIT also replicated previous findings of fewer and weaker associations with personality compared to self-report EI, with the strongest associations being with A and O (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett et al., 2004; Lopes et al., 2004; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003).

Factor analysis of the emotional manipulation scale produced an emotional manipulation factor which was positively correlated with Mach but unrelated to EI. Further factors relating to poor emotion skills and concealing emotions were associated with introversion and low EI. The finding that high Machs endorse emotional manipulation items is interesting, given that Mach and EI are negatively related and other studies suggest that high Machs actually lack emotion-related skills (Barnett & Thompson, 1985; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Watson et al., 1994). It is difficult to tease out exactly what is happening within the limitations of a study based on self-report. It could be that high Machs endorse emotion manipulation items, but are not very successful when they actually use these strategies, or that their emotion manipulation tactics are derived cognitively, without employing any detailed emotion-related knowledge or emotion reading of their target, whereas the true emotional manipulator would have access to and make use of such knowledge. By contrast, self-report EI was found to be uncorrelated with emotional manipulation, suggesting that these are independent dimensions, although the lack of item content relating to emotional manipulation in self-report EI scales may also be relevant.

More detailed studies of emotional manipulation going beyond self-report are clearly indicated, using laboratory tasks and interview data; in particular this would allow the success of high Machs and high emotional manipulation scorers in actually using emotional manipulation strategies to be compared. Examination of associations of the manipulation scale with the MSCEIT and other performance EI measures would also be of value. Further work on the item content of the emotional manipulation scale is also desirable, in order to clarify its factor structure. It is also important to examine test–retest reliability and further assess the scale's validity by examining correlations with other measures. Linking this scale to existing work on the use of specific manipulation tactics (Buss, Gomes, Higgins, & Lauterbach, 1987) would be particularly relevant.

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