

Sex Differences in Ability Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Ability Emotional Intelligence is a cognitive ability that includes the perception, understanding, and management of your own emotions and those of other people, and can be distinguished from Trait Emotional Intelligence, which includes a variety of personality dimensions related to emotions (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Past research has shown that men obtain lower scores than women, on average, on measures of Ability Emotional Intelligence (Bevacqua, 2002). The purpose of the current research is to replicate this finding using a wide variety of measures of Emotional Intelligence, and to determine if sex differences depend upon whether maximum-performance or self-report measures are used. In the first study, a total of 176 undergraduates were administered 24 Ability Emotional Intelligence measures: 7 self-report and 17 maximum-performance. In the second study, 416 undergraduates were administered 9 measures of Ability Emotional Intelligence: 4 self-report and 5 maximum-performance.

We used meta-analytic techniques to combine results across measures within each study. In the first study, we found no significant difference between men and women on the self-report measures. Women did score higher than men on the maximum-performance measures, although the magnitude of the effect was small. In the second study, women obtained higher scores than men, on average, on both self-report and maximum-performance measures. In both studies, the sex difference for self-report measures was slightly smaller than the sex difference for maximum-performance measures; however, in neither study did this difference reach statistical significance.

From these results, we may be tempted to assume that there are sex differences in Emotional Intelligence itself, but this conclusion is premature. It is possible that some measures of Emotional Intelligence are biased. Future research needs to determine the causes of this sex difference, and whether this difference reflects real differences in Emotional Intelligence.

Introduction

In just over one decade, Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become a popular concept in the business community and the popular press (see e.g., Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Hein, 1996; Stiner & Claude, 1997; Stein & Book, 2003; Time, 1995; Wessinger, 2000) and an exciting area for new research and instrument development (see, e.g., Davies, Stankov & Roberts, 1998; Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2000a, 2000b; Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2001; Roberts, Zeidner & Matthews, 2001). Emotional Intelligence can be divided into two domains, corresponding roughly to personality and ability. The first, called Trait EI (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), includes personality dimensions such as assertiveness, optimism, and impulse control, and is measured using self-report scales. The second domain, called Ability EI (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), focuses on cognitive abilities related to emotions, and is exemplified by the work of Mayer et al. (2000a, 2000b). Ability EI has been measured using both self-report and maximum performance measures.

Previous research has often found that women obtain higher scores than men, on average, on measures of Ability EI (Barchard, 2001; Bevacqua, 2002; Meyer & Geher, 1996; Mayer et al., 2000a; Mayer et al., 2000b; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers & Archer, 1979). However, previous research on this topic has typically assessed sex differences on only a single measure at a time, and has not attempted to determine the cause of these sex differences. Research is needed to determine if Emotional Intelligence tests are biased against men or if there

are real differences in the underlying skills involved. One step in this research is to examine if sex differences are dependent upon the type of measure used, such as self-report versus maximum-performance. The purpose of this research is to examine sex differences in self-report and maximum-performance measures of Ability EI in two separate studies, to determine if these differences are dependent upon the type of measure used.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 176 undergraduate students (116 female) at a large Canadian university. They ranged in age from 18 to 42 (mean 21.2, SD 2.9). They all spoke English as their first language or had been speaking English for at least 10 years and felt very comfortable reading and writing English. The sample was ethnically diverse with 44% Asian, 40% White and other ethnic groups making up the remainder.

Two groups of undergraduate students participated. The first group completed two one-hour testing sessions in return for course credit, and then later returned to complete a third one-hour testing session in return for a chance to win \$1,000. The second group consisted of students in an upper-division personality psychology course who completed this study in return for course credit. This group completed measures during two testing sessions and in two take-home packages. Both groups completed all maximum-performance measures under the supervision of trained research assistants.

Measures

Participants completed 23 measures intended to measure 7 aspects of Ability Emotional Intelligence. These measures are described in Tables 1, 2, and 3, along with descriptions of the measures used in Study 2. In the first study, all of the maximum-performance measures listed in Table 1, the first five maximum-performance measures listed in Table 2, and the first seven self-report measures listed in Table 3 were used. The measures used in Study 1 have been listed by category in Table 4, along with their internal consistencies.

Statistical Analyses

The average and standard deviation of the scores on each of the 23 measures of Ability EI were calculated separately for men and women. Hedge's g (1981, 1982) was then calculated to measure the magnitude and direction of the sex difference. The variances and covariances among these effect sizes were estimated using formula 22-22 from Gleser and Olkin (1994). Using standard formulas for the variance of a linear combination, a z -test was then constructed as the ratio of the observed average effect size to its standard deviation, as recommended by Gleser and Olkin (1994).

This procedure was repeated three times. First, we used this procedure to test the hypothesis that the average effect size for maximum-performance measures was zero. Second, we tested the hypothesis that the average effect size for the self-report measures was zero. Finally, we tested the hypothesis that the difference in the average effect sizes for the maximum-performance and self-report measures was zero (or that the average effect sizes for maximum-performance and self-report measures were the same).

Results

Effect sizes for the 23 measures of Ability EI are given in Table 5. On average, women scored higher than men on maximum-performance measures of EI: The average effect size for the 17 maximum-performance measures was $-.162$ ($z = -2.303, p < .05$). For the self-report measures, however, there was no significant difference. The average effect size on the 7 self-report measures was $.087$ ($z = 1.22, p > .05$). Finally, when the average effect size for maximum-performance measures was directly compared to the average effect size for self-report measures, this difference was not statistically significant ($z = 2.59, p > .05$).

STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the findings of Study 1, using a larger sample size to increase power, and using slightly different measures of Ability EI.

Method

Participants

A total of 416 (283 female) undergraduate students at a large American university completed this study in return for course credit. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 (mean 20.5, SD 4.9). Participants identified themselves as belonging to the following ethnic groups: 61.3% White, 9.1% African-American, 10.6% Hispanic, 11.8% Asian, .7% Native and 6.5% other.

Measures

Participants completed 9 measures of Ability EI. The 5 maximum-performance measures were Expression Grouping, Cartoon Predictions, Missing Cartoon, Social Translations, and the Chapin Social Insight Test (CSIT; Gough, 1965, 1993). See Table 2 for descriptions of these measures.

Four self-report ability subscales from Tett's Self-Report Questionnaire were used: Recognition of Emotion in Others, Regulation of Emotion in the Self, Regulation of Emotion in Others, and Emotions in Self: Verbal. See Table 3 for descriptions of these measures.

Procedures

Participants completed two sessions, each 1½ hours in length, held one week apart. During the first session, participants completed Expression Grouping, Cartoon Predictions, Missing Cartoon, and Social Translations along with other measures. The TEIS and CSIT were completed during the second testing session along with other measures.

Statistical Analyses

The same statistical analysis was conducted for this study as for the previous study. First, Hedge's g (1981, 1982) was calculated separately for the self-report and maximum-performance measures. Then we calculated the statistical significance of the average effect size for the self-report measures, the maximum-performance measures, and the difference between them.

Results

Effect sizes for the 9 measures of Ability EI are given in Table 6. The average effect size for the maximum-performance measures was $-.239$ ($z = -3.559$, $p < .05$). Thus, women obtained higher scores, on average, than men on these measures. The average effect size for self-report measures was -0.183 ($z = -2.467$, $p < .05$). Thus, there was a statistically significant difference between men's and women's average scores on the self-report measures, as well, with women obtaining slightly higher scores. On the other hand, the average effect size for maximum-performance measures was not significantly larger than the average effect size for the self-report measures ($z = .59$, $p > .05$).

The reader may notice that the largest difference between men and women in Study 2 was found on the TEIS Recognition of Emotion in Others scale. In Study 1, the sex difference on this scale was close to zero; yet here, the sex difference is quite large. This change may represent sampling fluctuations or the differences between the two locations in which the study was conducted.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of these two studies was to examine sex differences in Ability Emotional Intelligence. Significant differences in the average scores of men and women on both self-report and maximum-performance measures of Ability Emotional Intelligence were found, and in both cases women obtained slightly higher scores. No significant difference between the average effect sizes for maximum-performance and self-report measures was found. Thus, sex differences in Emotional Intelligence do not appear to be limited to just one type of measure – self-report or maximum-performance.

In interpreting these sex differences, readers should refrain from concluding that women are more Emotionally Intelligent than men, at this point. These differences might represent real differences in Ability Emotional Intelligence, or they might represent a form of test bias.

On logical grounds, two of the measures in particular might suffer from test bias. Previous analyses using the same dataset showed that one of the maximum-performance measures, the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS), might suffer from a small degree of sex bias. Scores on the LEAS are positively associated with the tendency to express positive emotions, and women scored higher than men, on average, on measures of positive expressivity (Barchard, 2002). A new study is currently being conducted to determine if the relation of LEAS scores to positive expressivity is a form of test bias that might result in sex differences.

Second, the MSCEIT is another Ability Emotional Intelligence measure that might possibly suffer from sex bias. The MSCEIT uses consensus scoring. In consensus scoring, the score that an individual receives on an item is equal to the proportion of the norm group who gave that response (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2000a, 2000b). If men and women respond differently to some of the MSCEIT items, and if there are more women than men in the norm group, then consensus scoring would be biased against men.

Future research should examine measures of Ability Emotional Intelligence in more detail to determine if any of these measures suffer from sex bias, and if so, if this bias can be corrected. If no evidence of sex bias is found, then we could conclude that women are more Emotionally Intelligent than men. However, this conclusion cannot be justified until the possibility of sex bias has been eliminated.

Future research should also examine the difference between self-report and maximum-performance measures using a larger sample size. In both of these studies, the sex differences on maximum-performance measures were slightly larger than the sex differences on self-report measures; however, this difference did not reach statistical significance. Future large-sample research with high power could clarify whether sex differences are in fact larger for the maximum-performance tests, and could explore the implications of this difference for the use of maximum-performance tests in employment and counseling situations.

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Table 1
Factors and Subscales of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) Version 1.1^a

Factor	Subscale	Description
Emotional Perception	Section A Faces	Five faces chosen to represent a variety of emotions are each followed by seven emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, disgust, excitement), which are each rated on a five-point scale, ranging from “No” (1) to “Extremely” (5).
	Section F Landscapes	Five landscape pictures are rated on each of seven emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, disgust, excitement) using a five-point scale.
	Section J Designs	Five graphic designs are rated on each of the seven emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, disgust, and excitement), using the five-point scale.
Emotional Integration	Section B Synesthesia	For each of five items, an emotion is described and participants are asked to rate the similarity of that emotion to five other sensations, including warmth, touch, and color. Each sensation is rated from 1 “Not Alike” to 5 “Very Much Alike”.
	Section G Facilitation	For each of seven situations, participants are asked to rate each of five emotions (different for each situation) for their helpfulness. Each emotion is rated on a five-point scale where 1 represents “Definitely Not Useful” and 5 represents “Definitely Useful”.
	Section K Sensation Translation	Five complex physical sensations are rated in terms of their similarity to five emotions (different for each item) using a five-point scale where 1 represents “Not Alike” and 5 represents “Very Much Alike”.
Emotional Understanding	Section C Blends	Thirteen multiple-choice items assess participant’s ability to analyze blended or complex emotions.
	Section D Progressions	Twelve multiple-choice items assess participants understanding of how emotional reactions proceed over time, with an emphasis on intensification of feelings.
	Section H Transitions	Twelve passages assess people’s understanding of how emotions change as situations change. For each, two emotions are given in the item stem. The participant must choose the situation (from five alternatives) that accounts for the change in emotions.
	Section L Analogies	For each of twelve items, an analogy between two emotions is given. Five possible emotion analogies are given as responses. Participants choose the analogy that captures the same relation as the analogy given.
Emotional Management	Section E Emotions in Relationships	For each of five interpersonal situations, participants evaluate five possible courses of action, in terms of effectiveness: “Extremely Ineffective” (1) to “Extremely Effective” (5).
	Section I Emotion Management	For each of six emotionally-charged situations, participants evaluate the effectiveness of five possible actions, using a five-point rating scale where 1 represents “Very ineffective” and 5 represents “Very effective”.

a. Mayer et al., 2000b

Table reproduced from Barchard and Hakstian (2001).

Table 2
Other Maximum-Performance Measures of Ability EI

Test	Construct Measured	Description
Expression Grouping ^a	Social Intelligence	This test measures the ability to abstract common attributes from behavior or expressive stimuli. Each item consists of a group of three line drawings of facial expressions, hand gestures, and body postures that show some thought, feeling or intention. Participants select one of four alternative drawings of expressions that belong with the given group of expressions.
Missing Cartoons ^a	Social Intelligence	This test measures understanding of behavior relationships. Each item presents a series of four cartoons that tell a story. One of these cartoons is missing, and must be selected from among a set of four alternatives.
Social Translations ^a	Social Intelligence	This test measures the ability to recognize changes in behavioral meaning based on context. The participant is given a verbal statement that is exchanged between two people. The participant must then choose one of three alternative pairs of people between whom the same verbal statement would have a different meaning.
Cartoon Predictions ^a	Social Intelligence	This is a test of the ability to predict behavior consequences. For each item, a cartoon depicts an interpersonal situation. The participant must choose one of three alternative cartoons to show what is most likely to happen next.
Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS) ^b	Emotional Understanding	Participants report how they would feel in each of five emotionally-evocative situations. They also describe how the other person would feel. Responses are scored based on the complexity and number of emotion words used.
Chapin Social Insight Test (CSIT)	Social Insight	A multiple-choice test assesses the perceptiveness and accuracy with which an individual can appraise others and forecast what they might say or do. We used an 11-item short form with unit-weighted scoring.

^aO'Sullivan and Guilford (1976).

^bLane et al. (1990).

Note. Table adapted from Barchard and Hakstian (2001).

Table 3
Self-Report Measures of Ability EI

Test	Subscale	Descriptions
Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) ^a	Difficulty Describing Feelings	Difficulty in verbally describing one's own emotional experiences.
TAS-20	Difficulty Identifying Feelings	Difficulty in identifying what emotions one is feeling.
Tett Emotional Intelligence Scale (TEIS) ^b	Emotional Appropriateness	The ability to differentiate between similarly experienced emotions in light of the given situation.
TEIS	Recognition of Emotion in Others	The degree to which one recognizes others' emotions based on their non-verbal cues.
TEIS	Regulation of Emotion in the Self	The degree to which one controls strong emotions in the self.
TEIS	Regulation of Emotion in Others	The degree to which one manages how others feel.
Trait Meta-Mood Scale ^c	Repair	The ability to manage negative moods and remain optimistic.
TEIS	Emotion in the Self: Verbal	The degree to which one is in touch with one's feelings and can describe those feelings in words.

^aBagby, Taylor, and Parker (1994).

^bTett, Wang, Gribler, and Martinez (1997).

^cSalovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey and Palfai (1995)

Note. Table adapted from Barchard and Hakstian (2001).

Table 4
Internal Consistency (Alpha) Reliability Estimates for the 24 Ability EI Measures

Measure	Study 1 Coefficient Alpha	Study 2 Coefficient Alpha
Emotional Understanding and Perception of Emotion in the Self		
MSCEIT C Blends ^a	.52	
MSCEIT D Progressions	.54	
MSCEIT H Transitions	.50	
MSCEIT L Analogies	.38	
LEAS 5-Item Version	.58	
TAS-20 Difficulty Describing Feelings	.81	
TAS-20 Difficulty Identifying Feelings	.80	
TEIS Emotional Appropriateness	.40	
TEIS Emotion in the Self: Verbal		.81
Perception of Emotions in Others		
MSCEIT A Faces	.80	
Expression Grouping Part I	.25	.48
TEIS Recognition of Emotion in Others	.83	.81
Perception of Emotions in Objects		
MSCEIT F Landscapes	.86	
MSCEIT J Designs	.84	
Managing Emotions in the Self		
TMMS Repair	.85	
TEIS Regulation of Emotion in the Self	.85	.81
MSCEIT I Emotion Management	.70	
Managing Emotions in Others		
TEIS Regulation of Emotion in Others	.81	.77
MSCEIT E Emotions in Relationships	.79	
Emotional Integration		
MSCEIT B Synesthesia	.75	
MSCEIT G Facilitation	.77	
MSCEIT K Sensation Translation	.66	
Social Insight		
Cartoon Predictions Part I	.44	.70
Missing Cartoons Part I	.55	.69
Social Translations Part I	.65	.92
Chapin Social Insight Test		.18

Note. Reliability estimates for all measures except the MSCEIT scales are weighted averages (across gender) of alpha coefficients obtained in the present studies.

^aItem-level scores are not available to users of the MSCEIT. The internal-consistency estimates reported for the MSCEIT scales were obtained from Mayer, Salovey, Caruso & Sitarenios (2002) and are based on between 1,339 and 1,680 mixed-gender subjects.

Table 5
Effect Sizes for 24 Measures of Ability Emotional Intelligence, Study 1

Measure	Hedge's G
Maximum-Performance	
Expression Grouping	.14
Cartoon Predictions	-.04
Missing Cartoons	.14
Social Translations	-.05
LEAS	-.34
MSCEIT A Faces	-.25
MSCEIT B Synesthesia	-.16
MSCEIT C Blends	-.16
MSCEIT D Progressions	-.13
MSCEIT E Emotions in Relationships	-.27
MSCEIT F Landscapes	-.15
MSCEIT G Facilitation	-.19
MSCEIT H Transitions	-.22
MSCEIT I Emotion Management	-.32
MSCEIT J Designs	-.20
MSCEIT K Sensation Translation	-.48
MSCEIT L Analogies	-.08
Self-Report	
TEIS Recognition of Emotion in Others	-.10
TMMS Repair	.09
TEIS Regulation of Emotion in Others	.07
TEIS Regulation of Emotion in the Self	.60
TAS-20 Difficulty Describing Feelings	.10
TAS-20 Difficulty Identifying Feelings	-.23

Note. A positive effect size indicates that men obtained higher scores, while a negative effect size indicates that women obtained higher scores.

Table 6
Effect Sizes for 9 Measures of Ability Emotional Intelligence, Study 2

Measure	Hedge's G
Maximum-Performance	
Chapin Social Insight Test	-.20
Expression Grouping	-.10
Cartoon Predictions	-.43
Missing Cartoons	-.22
Social Translations	-.26
Self-Report	
TEIS Emotions in Self: Nonverbal	-.36
TEIS Recognition of Emotions in Others	-.65
TEIS Regulation of Emotions in the Self	.15
TEIS Regulation of Emotions in Others	.13

Note. A positive effect size indicates that men obtained higher scores, while a negative effect size indicates that women obtained higher scores.