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Examining the factor structure of the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory with an Australian general population sample

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Abstract

It has been claimed that the dimensional structure of the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) (Bar-On, 1997a) represents a hierarchical model of emotional and social intelligence describing a general factor, five-second order factors and 15 primary factors. However, there are several anomalies in the factor analytic methodology employed by Bar-On (1997a), and his interpretation of the results that render the dimensional structure of the EQ-i unclear. In contrast to claims by Bar-On, in the present study a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses found evidence for a general factor of emotional intelligence and six primary factors. Differences between the results reported by Bar-On (1997a) and those of the current study are attributed largely to the more appropriate factor analytic methodology employed. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Models and measures of emotional intelligence

Since Salovey and Mayer's conceptualisation of emotional intelligence (EI; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), a number of different models and measures have been developed (e.g. Bar-On, 1997a;

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Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). These alternative models and measures have been compared according to their theoretical structure (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000; McCrae, 2000), and according to the way they measure EI (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Models of EI have been placed into two general categories, ‘ability’ and ‘mixed’ (or personality) models of EI. Ability models have been identified as those that define EI as ‘intelligence’ in the traditional sense (e.g. Mayer & Salovey, 1997). That is, as a conceptually related set of mental abilities to do with emotions and the processing of emotional information, that are apart of, and contribute to, logical thought and intelligence in general. In comparison, mixed models of EI (e.g. Bar-On, 1997a) have been identified as those that define EI as a mixture of emotion-related competencies, personality traits and dispositions. Measures of EI similarly fall into two categories, self-report measures of EI, and performance-based (objective) measures. Self-report measures pertaining to ability models of EI (e.g. Trait-Meta Mood Scale, TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) are purported to assess individuals’ beliefs about emotional abilities rather than their actual capacity (Mayer, Caruso et al., 2000). Self-report measures pertaining to mixed models (e.g. the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory, Bar-On EQ-i; Bar-On, 1997a) have been described as embedded within the personality framework, and to assess cross-situational consistencies in behaviour (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Performance-based measures of EI pertain to ability models (e.g. Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test, MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 1999), and involve a series of emotion-related questions for which there are more and less correct answers according to consensual responses. The present paper examines the dimensional structure of one of the predominant mixed model self-report measures of EI, the Bar-On EQ-i, (Bar-On, 1997a), in an Australian general population sample.

1.2. Bar-On’s (1997a) model of emotional intelligence

Bar-On’s model of EI (1997a) involves an array of personal, emotional, and social abilities and skills thus constituting a mixed model. While Bar-On places this model under the banner of EI, it is a somewhat broader construct that he more generically refers to as “...emotional and social intelligence” (Bar-On 2000, p. 363). Bar-On purports to have identified 15 determinants of successful emotional functioning and positive psychological well-being from a review of the mental health literature, which have been operationally defined and conceptualised as the 15 components of his model. These components include: Emotional Self-Awareness (ES), the ability to recognise and to understand one’s feelings; Assertiveness (AS), the ability to express feelings, beliefs and thoughts, and to defend one’s rights in a non-destructive manner; Self-Regard (SR), the ability to respect and accept oneself; Self-Actualisation (SA), the ability to realise one’s potential capacities; Independence (IN), the ability to be self-directed and self-controlled in one’s thinking and actions and to be free of emotional dependency; Empathy (EM), the ability to be aware of, to understand, and to appreciate the feelings of others; Interpersonal Relationship (IR), the ability to establish and maintain mutually satisfying relationships; Social Responsibility (RE), the ability to demonstrate oneself as a cooperative contributing, and constructive member of one’s social group; Problem Solving (PS), the ability to identify and define problems as well as to generate and implement potentially effective solutions; Reality Testing (RT), the ability to assess the correspondence between what is experienced and what objectively exists; Flexibility (FL), the ability

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