



Personality trait differences in boys and girls with clinical or sub-clinical diagnoses of conduct disorder versus antisocial personality disorder

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Abstract

This study tested differences in personality traits measured by the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) in a community sample of adolescents with definite or probable conduct disorder (CD) diagnoses that did not progress to a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) by early adulthood ($n = 43$), those with definite or probable ASPD that persisted into early adulthood ($n = 68$), or controls with neither a CD nor an ASPD diagnosis ($n = 716$) to examine whether antisocial behaviour disorders that differed in course were associated with differences in personality traits. As expected, boys and girls with ASPD were significantly different from controls on constraint, and those with ASPD were significantly lower on constraint than those with only CD. The results suggest that individual differences in certain personality traits may contribute to differences in the type of antisocial behaviour disorder that emerges and thereby to the course of antisocial behaviour.

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Introduction

Personality disorders affect around 11% of the general population (Ekselius, Tillfors, Furmark, & Fredrikson, 2001), making them among the most common mental disorders. Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is marked by antisocial behaviour that begins in childhood and persists into adulthood and affects about 4.5% of the population (Robins, Tipp, & Pryzbeck, 1991). The current conceptualization of personality disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) requires that a maladaptive personality style be persistent with origins in adolescence or early adulthood. This conceptualization recognizes the consistency of personality and its foundations in adolescence. The DSM conceptualization of ASPD also raises the issue of the role of personality in the course of antisocial behaviour. Examination of various psychological dimensions, such as personality, that are associated with antisocial behaviour disorders will increase our understanding of these disorders.

One of the most widely used personality trait models, the big five or five factor model, has been used in research examining personality as it relates to antisocial behaviour in adolescents (e.g. John, Caspi, Robins, Moffitt, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1994). Eysenck's 3-factor model of personality has also been studied in relation to antisocial behaviour in adolescents (Saklofske & Eysenck, 1980) and was among the first of the trait models studied in this regard. More recently, Tellegen's 3-factor model of personality has been used in research on externalizing and antisocial behaviour (e.g. Krueger, McGue, & Iacono, 2001). The commonalities among personality trait models are notable, and preferences for the use of one model over another can surely be debated (Markon, Krueger, & Watson, 2005). The present study utilized a sample on which Tellegen's (2000) Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was administered and, therefore, the focus of the literature review is on that measure.

The literature provides ample evidence of the association of personality traits like constraint (a broad measure of behavioural control, sensation seeking, and attitudes toward authority) and negative emotionality (a broad measure of affective reactivity and proneness to negative emotions) to antisocial behaviour in various forms. For example, Krueger, Schmutte, Caspi, Moffitt, Campbell et al. (1994) examined negative emotionality, constraint and other personality traits associated with delinquency in a sample of 862 18-year-old boys and girls using the MPQ. Various reports of antisocial behaviour (including official records) were correlated with scores from the MPQ. Low constraint and high negative emotionality were strongly associated with delinquency in both genders. This finding is consistent with other studies linking a similar personality profile to antisocial behaviour in boys (Taylor, Iacono, & McGue, 2000; Tremblay, Pihl, Vitaro, & Dobkin, 1994), to ASPD and psychopathy in men (Elkins, Iacono, Doyle, & McGue, 1997; Verona, Patrick, & Joiner, 2001), to general composites of externalizing behaviour in men and women (Krueger et al., 2001), and to conduct disorder (CD) and composites of antisocial behaviour in adolescent boys and girls (Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001). Finally, a recent multivariate investigation of personality and externalizing disorders in children and adolescents showed that the *pattern* of high negative emotionality and low constraint was associated with CD, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and the co-morbid CD-ADHD condition with the co-morbid disorder presentation being associated with a significantly more severe pattern than the single conditions (Cukrowicz, Taylor, Schatschneider, & Iacono,

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