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Borderline personality disorder and multiple aspects of emotional intelligence

Terri L. Leible¹, William E. Snell Jr.*

*Department of Psychology, Southeast Missouri State University, MS # 5700, One University Plaza,
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701, USA*

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Abstract

Although considerable attention has begun to be focused on personality disorders in recent years, relatively little is known about the relationship between personality disorders and emotional intelligence. In response to the need to better understand this relationship, the present research was designed to determine whether personality disorder symptomatology would be associated with six aspects of emotional intelligence: emotional clarity, emotional attention, emotional regulation, private emotional awareness, private emotional preoccupation, and public emotional monitoring. The results indicated that several personality disorders were systematically associated with these aspects of emotional intelligence.

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1. Introduction

The topic of emotional intelligence has begun to attract the attention of researchers and professionals alike (Ciarrochi, Forgas, & Mayer, 2001). Early psychologists believed that rational thought was different from, even antithetical to, human emotions (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995). Emotional processes were viewed as interruptions to rational mental

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1-573-651-2447; fax: +1-573-651-2176.

E-mail address: wesnell@semo.edu (W.E. Snell Jr.).

¹ Now a graduate student at the Department of Educational Administration and Counseling, SE Missouri State University.

activities. Contemporary psychologists now realize that emotions can aid in understanding adaptive social behavior (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 1998). Emotional intelligence can be defined as the appraisal and expression of emotion for one's self and others, the regulation of emotion in one's self and others, and the utilization of emotion for motivational purposes (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Generally speaking, these features of emotional intelligence combine to aid in people's ability to adapt to life's changes through the use of both rational and emotional coping skills.

Emotional intelligence involves emotional problem solving as well (Mayer & Geher, 1996). In order to solve emotional problems, individuals must first become aware of their own emotions and then use that information to recognize emotions in others. This ability to recognize emotions is vital to people's emotional well being, because the ability to recognize emotions in others is related to additional aspects of emotional intelligence, including empathy and openness (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, 1997). Without the emotional mental ability to detect what other people feel, individuals would probably be less able to experience empathy and understanding toward others. Thus, emotional intelligence not only involves personal components (e.g., emotional insight and emotional self-management), but also encompasses interpersonal components (e.g., empathy and handling relationships).

Recent researchers have begun to examine the impact of emotional intelligence tendencies on people's mental health. As people develop and mature, emotional reactions may combine with complex thoughts to help develop highly sophisticated methods for human functioning (Mayer & Salovey, 1995). For those unable to properly function emotionally, long term therapy that specifically focuses on affect consciousness has been found to facilitate the self-regulation of emotions (Monsen, Odland, Faugli, Daae, & Eilertsen, 1995). More specifically, this 5-year follow-up of patients who received long term therapy for more than a year found that treatment was systematically related to changes in how well people's emotions were regulated (affect consciousness was assessed via a semistructured instrument in this investigation).

Additional research by Mayer, DiPaolo, and Salovey (1990) has examined people's abilities to recognize emotional content and to use this ability as a basis for empathizing with others. Their findings revealed that those individuals characterized by limited emotional awareness were less likely to empathize with others. Both the recognition of emotions and the potential importance of this ability to daily functioning are basic to emotional well being (Mayer & Geher, 1996). According to Lane and Schwartz (1987), emotional abilities are very important to mental health. Lane and Schwartz (1987) found that emotional disturbance was a fundamental aspect of schizophrenia, organic mental disorders, psychosomatic disorders, and personality disorders. Moreover, the practice of psychological therapy relies upon emotions in the diagnosis and subsequent treatment of mental disorders. For example, every personality disorder described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition (DSM-IV; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994) involves disturbances in affect or its regulation (Westen, Muderrisoglu, Fowler, Shedler, & Koren, 1997).

Two self-report instruments have been devised by Salovey, Mayer, and their colleagues to assess multiple aspects of emotional intelligence: The State Meta-Mood Scale (SMMS; Mayer & Stevens, 1994) and the Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey et al., 1995). Meta-mood is defined as a reflected experience of mood (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988); as such, state meta-mood refers to people's immediate awareness of and thoughts about their ongoing moods

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