



Relationships between ability and personality: does intelligence contribute positively to personal and social adjustment?

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Abstract

Intelligence/personality associations were studied in four large datasets. Correlations between general ability (g) and major personality traits were generally consistent with previous findings. For other traits, an interpretation of the correlation patterning is that traits classifiable as adaptive in terms of personal and social adjustment have positive correlations with g , whilst maladaptive traits have negative correlations. Regression modelling confirmed these associations and structural equation modelling of selected traits showed that Neuroticism acts as a mediator of g on the outcome. Non-linear relationships between intelligence and personality were not found. In two of the datasets the correlation between Neuroticism and Psychoticism decreased with ability level, and the correlation between fluid and crystallised ability increased with level of Neuroticism. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

In the study of individual differences, intelligence and personality are often implicitly or explicitly assumed to be independent. This assumption is not correct, since it has been established that there are consistent correlations of small effect size between personality and intelligence measures

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(Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997). These findings are summarised in Table 1. Moreover, the weakness of intelligence/personality associations does not in itself provide an argument for their neglect; intelligence and personality are the two construct domains which account for much of the psychological variability between individuals, and therefore replicable associations between them are by definition of theoretical significance. In addition, weak associations have the potential for practical significance under aggregation or when a population-level viewpoint is adopted (Abelson, 1985; Lubinski & Humphreys, 1997; Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1989; Rushton, Brainerd, & Pressley, 1983). The increasing level of interest in intelligence/personality associations is reflected in the recent appearance of two edited texts on this topic (Saklofske & Zeidner, 1995; Sternberg & Ruzgis, 1994). This interest has not however been reflected in the appearance of a large number of new studies. This lack of data is to some extent caused by practical difficulties. The weakness of intelligence/personality associations means that considerations of statistical power impose a requirement of large sample size. In addition, it is important to avoid restriction of the ability range by studying groups which show a reasonable spread of ability scores. Progress has thus been impeded by the practical difficulties associated with recruiting large and reasonably representative samples.

Other, non-correlational, approaches to intelligence/personality associations have been proposed. Again, the weakness of such effects makes their study difficult unless large samples are available. One idea of interest is that some relationships between intelligence and personality might be non-linear (Eysenck & White, 1964); some evidence for non-linear relationships was found by Austin, Deary, and Gibson (1997) and Brand, Egan, and Deary (1994). It has also been proposed that there may be variations in the strength of the associations between personality traits in groups of different ability levels and, conversely, changes in ability intercorrelations for different levels of personality traits, in particular Neuroticism (Brand et al., 1994; Eysenck & White, 1964). A decrease in the correlation between fluid and crystallised ability in low-Neuroticism groups has been found (Austin et al., 1997; Austin, Hofer, Deary, & Eber, 2000). Changes in personality trait intercorrelations with ability level have not however been found.

Another theme in intelligence/personality associations emerges when correlations of intelligence with measures such as coping styles, locus of control, hostility and anger are considered. These constructs are 'downstream' from personality, since they are more directly related to specific behaviours than are broad traits such as Extraversion and Neuroticism. Making the reasonable

Table 1
Summary of the main findings on associations between intelligence and major personality traits^a

	Sign of correlation	Typical correlation magnitude
N	–	0.1
E	+	0.1
O	+	0.3
P	–	0.1

^a N, Neuroticism; E, Extraversion; O, Openness; P, Psychoticism.

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