



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE — EMPATHY = AGGRESSION?

Kaj Björkqvist and Karin Österman

Åbo Akademi University

Ari Kaukiainen

University of Turku

ABSTRACT. *Empathy reduces aggressive behavior. While empathy and social intelligence are strongly correlated, it is, for both logical and consequential reasons, important to regard them as different concepts. Social intelligence is required for all types of conflict behavior, prosocial as well as antisocial, but the presence of empathy acts as a mitigator of aggression. When empathy is partialled out, correlations between social intelligence and all types of aggression increase, while correlations between social intelligence and peaceful conflict resolution decrease. Social intelligence is related differently to various forms of aggressive behavior: more strongly to indirect than to verbal aggression, and weakest to physical aggression, which is in accordance with the developmental theory of aggressive style. More sophisticated forms of aggression require more social intelligence. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.*

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IN THE PRESENT ARTICLE, studies on the relationships between social intelligence, empathy, and behavior in conflict situations are reviewed, with a special focus on recent research conducted with the application of peer-estimated measures of major variables involved.

PHYSICAL, VERBAL, AND INDIRECT AGGRESSION

During the last decade, the study of adolescent aggressive behavior has increasingly focused upon the fact that aggression is not only physical by its nature, but it may take

Correspondence should be addressed to Kaj Björkqvist, Åbo Akademi University, Department of Developmental Psychology, P.B. 311, FIN-65101, Vasa, Finland.

a wide variety of forms. One important step that made this new focus possible was the rapid development of the peer-estimation paradigm; many forms of interpersonal aggression will simply go unnoticed if only self-reports or behavioral observations are used (for a review of the development of peer estimations in aggression research, see Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1992).

Björkqvist and colleagues (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1992) suggested a developmental theory with regard to styles of aggressive behavior: physical, direct verbal, and indirect aggression are not only three different strategies, but they also constitute three developmental phases, partly following, partly overlapping, each other during childhood and adolescence. Small children, who have not yet developed verbal and social skills to any considerable degree, will have to resort to physical aggression. In this respect, they are like members of subhuman species, who do not possess a language. When verbal and social skills develop, these facilitate expression of aggression without having to resort to physical force. When social intelligence develops sufficiently, the individual is fully capable of indirect aggressive behavior: (s)he is able to induce psychological, sometimes even physical, harm to a target person by mere social manipulation, without putting him/herself at direct risk of retaliation. A consequence of the theory is that social intelligence should be expected to correlate more with indirect than with direct forms of aggression, since indirect aggression by definition requires skills at social manipulation.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The concept of social intelligence was introduced by Thorndike (1920). However, Thorndike and his colleague were not able to verify existence of such a domain of intelligence through psychometric studies (Thorndike, 1936; Thorndike & Stein, 1937), and the concept fell into oblivion. Recently, a renewed interest in social intelligence has emerged, with most authors claiming that there is, indeed, evidence for the existence of this domain (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1989; Erwin, 1993; Ford & Tisak, 1983), while others are critical (Keating, 1978). Social intelligence has a connotation closely related to notions such as social skills and competence. Emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1990) clearly is a partly overlapping concept, and interpersonal intelligence (Hatch & Gardner, 1993) another. We believe social intelligence has a perceptual, a cognitive-analytical, and a behavioral (skills) component. Cleverness in analyzing the social behavior of others is central and, reciprocally, so is the ability to recognize motives and cognitive traps of one's own. Furthermore, the socially intelligent individual is capable of producing adequate behavior for the purpose of achieving desired social goals. As far as goals with respect to conflicts are concerned, these may be hostile, but also aiming at a peaceful resolution of conflicts. Social intelligence should be an asset in conflict situations, whether the individual chooses to be aggressive or peaceful. The choice between these two types of conflict behavior is, for the socially intelligent individual, optional.

Social intelligence has mostly been measured by self-reports, such as the Six Factors Test of Social Intelligence (O'Sullivan & Guilford, 1966). The validity of self-reports is always somewhat questionable if the measured ability or trait is socially (un)desirable, and, accordingly, peer-estimated measures are recommendable in such cases. There has been a scarcity of peer-estimated measures of social intelligence so far; Ford and Tisak (1983) included a peer-*nomination* measure (which is not the same as peer estimations, in a strict sense) in their test battery. In order to cover this lack, Kaukiainen, Björkqvist,

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