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**Manipulative relational behaviour and delinquency: sex differences and links with emotional intelligence**

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## **Abstract**

Trait emotional intelligence (EI) encompasses high levels of emotional understanding and is generally associated with positive outcomes. However research has suggested that high EI might predispose some young females to delinquency. The present study investigated whether this relationship can be accounted for by a tendency towards emotionally manipulative behaviours, facilitated by high EI. Two hundred and fifty two young adults (125 female) completed measures of EI, Machiavellianism, managing the emotions of others (MEOS) and self-reported delinquent behaviour. High EI females presented higher levels of delinquency, Machiavellian Tactics and morality, the supposedly prosocial MEOS behaviours enhancing and diverting and the non-prosocial behaviours worsening, inauthenticity and concealing. High EI males reported fewer delinquent offences, high levels of MEOS prosocial enhancing behaviour and low levels of non-prosocial behaviours. We suggest that high EI may enable manipulative relational behaviours in some females which in turn support delinquency aimed at fulfilment of social or material goals.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; delinquency; relational aggression; sex differences

## **Introduction**

Although it is well established that males engage in more delinquent and criminal acts than females, the gender gap in offending has shrunk considerably, with females becoming more frequent and possibly more aggressive in their offenses than previously (Cauffman, 2008; Dodge, Coie, & Lynam 2006). However, the determinants of delinquency for females is still uncertain, with generic explanations developed from studies with male offenders often applied universally (Björkqvist, 1994; Card, Stucky, Sawalani & Little, 2008; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014) and few studies have considered gender differences in terms of individual determinants (Kennedy, et al, 2015). The present research compares male and female participants in examining the association between delinquent behaviour and the tendency to emotionally manipulate other people.

Successful interpersonal manipulation requires social skills, an ability to understand other people's emotions and feelings and predict how they will respond to emotionally salient stimuli (Björkqvist, 1994; Jones and Paulhus, 2011). This perceptiveness may help an individual to fulfil unmet emotional needs by socially dubious means, for instance making others feel bad through derision, bullying and indirect aggression, or the judicious choice of vindictive action to elicit the greatest emotional harm. Emotional manipulation may equally incite others to commit offences or collaborate in bullying, or allow the perpetrator to sustain a relationship with a desired social group who may be involved in delinquency. As such, manipulators are often attempting to gain control over their social status and relationships with others (Archer & Coyne, 2005). This and associated delinquency can form a type of adaptive behaviour for some adolescents living in challenging social circumstances (Agnew et al, 2002). An important issue is that successful emotional manipulation is covert – indeed if the

psychological damage is exacted in a socially skilled way, the aggressor can make it appear as if there was no malicious intention at all (Björkqvist, 1994).

Given that manipulation requires emotional understanding, it is plausible that successful manipulators may possess high levels of emotional intelligence (EI). Trait EI comprises a set of dispositions which reflect the ability to experience, identify, understand and utilise personal emotions and those of others (Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). High EI comprises abilities such as behavioural and emotional self-regulation, empathy, self-esteem and assertiveness, and has been associated with an array of advantageous life outcomes such as positive psychological and physical well-being and social relationships (Austin, Saklofske & Egan, 2005; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013; Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010; Mavroveli, Petrides, Rieffe & Bakker, 2007; Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007). However, there is also speculation about whether there may be a darker side to EI, whereby individuals use their abilities to serve their own ends at the expense of others. The present research draws on this idea. Recently, Bacon, Burak and Rann (2014) reported sex differences in the relationship between trait EI and delinquent behaviour, such that high trait EI was associated with lower levels of delinquency for males, but higher levels of delinquency for females. Bacon et al suggested that high EI might facilitate what is often termed indirect or relational aggression such as psychological bullying, deliberate social exclusion or malicious gossip (Archer & Coyne, 2005). This type of behaviour is more prevalent amongst young females than males where physically aggressive bullying is more common (Archer, 2004; Österman et al., 1998; Viding, Simmonds, Petrides, & Frederickson, 2009) and Björkqvist (1994) has suggested that females prefer relational aggression because it inflicts harm while minimizing personal danger. Bacon et al did not measure relational aggression specifically, inferring their interpretations from results based on self-reports of general delinquency such as

theft, arson, vandalism, etc. They suggested that the high EI females who engage in these acts are also those more likely to participate in more indirect forms of relational aggression. The present research investigates whether a positive association between trait EI and both relational and general delinquency in females can be explained by higher levels of the interpersonally manipulative behaviours implicit in relational aggression.

In addition, the idea of a dark side to EI has raised the possibility of an association with Machiavellianism, a personality trait typified by a dispositional tendency to manipulate and exploit others (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellians harbour a cynical worldview whereby people are generally seen as untrustworthy. They show disregard for conventional morality and ethics, often achieving their goals by duplicitous means (Christie & Geis, 1970; Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992; Jones & Paulus, 2009; Rauthmann, 2012). Machiavellians tend to have good impulse control and self-regulation (traits they share with high EI individuals) which lead them into forms of antisocial behaviour which are strategic (rather than overt and opportunistic) such as lying in tax returns, cheating in exams and bullying (see Jones & Paulhus, 2009, for review). Given that successful social manipulation requires a good working understanding of emotions, it is feasible that the more successful Machiavellians (in terms of meeting their own needs) might possess high EI. However, Austin, Farrelly, Black and Moore (2007) reported a negative relationship between the two traits. They suggested that although individuals scoring highly on Machiavellianism are undoubtedly manipulative, they may not always be successful in achieving their aims by such means due to unsatisfactory interpersonal skills. Alternatively however, Ain et al (2013) proposed that Machiavellians who also have higher levels of EI (and hence an ability to recognise and understand social norms) are simply more likely to inhibit Machiavellian tendencies, or not to report them.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that Machiavellian-style interpersonal manipulation may occur within the emotional intelligence domain. Kilduff, Chiaburu and Menges (2010) examined the role of EI in the workplace where individuals may be striving for promotion, recognition or higher remuneration. Kilduff et al argue that while many high EI individuals use positive altruistic behaviours, some achieve their goals through more manipulative strategic behaviours such as disguising or expressing emotions for personal gain, using misattribution to stir and shape emotions in others, and regulating emotion-laden communication. This type of behaviour has been largely neglected in the EI context where research has tended to focus on prosocial emotion management intended to benefit the target of the behaviour. Similarly, the limited research on delinquency in this context has tended to focus on demonstrating that offenders have low levels of interpersonal skills. For instance, poor self-rated social competence is associated with delinquency among convicted juvenile offenders (Palmer & Hollin, 1999) and a lack of empathy has been linked to offending in both incarcerated and community samples (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). High trait EI is also typified by emotional and behavioural self-regulation, and it is lower levels of these abilities which tend to be associated with crime and delinquency (Eisenberg et al. 1996; Moffitt et al., 2011).

Overall, if trait EI can facilitate interpersonal manipulation (as Kilduff, et al, 2010, suggest) this might explain an association between high EI and higher levels of delinquency in females. The present study investigates this possibility. We modified the self-report measure of general delinquent behaviour (e.g. theft, arson, vandalism) used by Bacon et al (2014) to include items reflecting indirect aggression, bullying and deliberate emotional manipulation, which we have collectively termed interpersonal delinquency. We measured manipulateness in two ways; Firstly, with the widely used *Mach IV* Machiavellianism scale (Christie & Geis, 1970) where we predicted that female participants would show a significant positive association between

trait EI, scores on the Mach IV and levels of both interpersonal delinquency and general delinquency. Our second measure of interpersonal manipulation was the newly developed Manipulating the Emotions of Others Scale (MEOS; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013). The ability to manage others' emotions as well as our own is a key component of EI and the MEOS was developed as a measure of this specific facet. Particularly relevant to the present context, it takes into account potentially negative uses of EI. Austin et al. (2007) showed that emotional manipulation was positively correlated with Machiavellianism and further work has suggested similar relationships with psychopathy, self-monitoring and an insincere approach to relationships with others (Grieve, 2011; Grieve & Mahar, 2010). Furthermore, managing the emotions of others is a form of emotion regulation, broadly defined as the ability to inhibit and moderate feelings and behaviours in order to conform to the demands of a given context (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Such regulation can apply to both the self and others' emotions (Niven, Totterdell & Holman, 2009) and Austin and O'Donnell (2013) have further discussed how it can potentially support both prosocial and non-prosocial motives in this respect. Bacon et al (2014) suggested that one reason that high EI might be buffer against delinquency for males was that it facilitates positive emotion regulation. The MEOS allows for the measurement of the tendency towards both mood-improving and mood-worsening behaviours together with the prosocial and non-prosocial aspects of managing others' emotions.

The MEOS assesses the tendency towards interpersonal manipulation across six subscales and includes both prosocial and non-prosocial behaviours. The prosocial scales *Enhance* (e.g. offering help or reassurance) and *Divert* (e.g. using humour or enjoyable activities to improve others' mood) correlate positively with EI (Austin, Saklofske, Smith & Tohver, 2014) so we predicted that these Tactics may help to explain delinquent behaviour in females when used as tools to manipulate, rather than support, others. We expected this to be evidenced by a positive

relationship between levels of enhancing and diverting behaviours, trait EI and delinquency. The two non-prosocial MEOS factors *Worsen* (e.g. critical and undermining behaviours) and *Inauthentic* (e.g. flattery, sulking or inducing guilt) are also of interest as they encompass aspects of self-serving manipulation. While we might expect these to be associated with delinquency, they have been negatively associated with trait EI (Austin, et al, 2014), so we predicted that these would be associated with higher levels of delinquency in males (given Bacon et al's, 2014, finding that low EI males commit more offences). However, as this is the first study to examine a relationship between the MEOS and offending of any sort, we were interested to observe any relationships that emerged and whether MEOS data could explain further variance in delinquency beyond that attributable to EI, sex and/or machiavellianism.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants***

Two hundred and fifty two student participants took part in return for course credit (males  $N = 127$ ,  $M_{age} = 20.53$ ,  $SD = 2.66$ ; females  $N = 125$ ,  $M_{age} = 20.33$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ;  $p = .62$ ).

### ***Materials and Procedures***

All participants completed the following measures in a single sitting.

*Delinquent Behaviour Scale - II*: This was a modified version of the original scale used by Bacon et al (2014) consisting of 50 behaviours and activities and participants were asked to indicate whether or not they had engaged in each activity since age 12. Of these activities, 20 related to General Delinquency (GD) ranging from relatively minor offences such as truancy from school or cheating in exams to more serious offences such as assault. A further 15 items concerned Interpersonal Delinquency (ID), such as spreading untrue rumours and various bullying behaviours. A further 15 neutral behaviour items comprised notable but non-

delinquent experiences, such as appearing on TV or playing in an orchestra. Scores were obtained by summing the yes responses in each subscale. Each showed adequate reliability (GD  $\alpha = .86$ ; ID  $\alpha = .69$ ; neutral  $\alpha = .78$ ). We did not analyse the neutral item data beyond confirming that males and females did not differ ( $p = .26$ ).

*Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, short-form* (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). This 30-item questionnaire is designed to measure global trait EI and is considered a robust measure with student samples (Sanchez-Ruiz, Perez-Gonzalez, & Petrides, 2010). Items such as “Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me” and “I usually find it difficult to regulate my emotions” are responded to on a seven-point scale, whereby a score of 1 = completely disagree and 7 = completely agree, giving a maximum possible score of 210. The present data showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Mach IV* (Christie & Geis, 1970) measure of Machiavellianism. The questionnaire is made up of 20 items, each measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. The Mach IV yields scores on three subscales, obtained by averaging responses on relevant items: Machiavellian Tactics (e.g. manipulating others,  $\alpha = .89$ ), pragmatic morality (e.g. detachment from emotion laden behaviours,  $\alpha = .78$ ) and cynical world view (e.g. that people are generally untrustworthy.  $\alpha = .71$ ).

*Managing Emotions of Others Scale* (MEOS; Austin & O’Donnell, 2013). The MEOS presents 58 items and participants indicate the extent to which each item reflects their behaviour on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale yields scores on six subscales. Two of these reflect prosocial behaviours as described previously: *Enhance* comprises 15 items, max possible score = 75; e.g. When someone is unhappy, I reassure them

that things will get better, and *Divert* comprises 7 items, max possible score = 35; e.g. When someone is unhappy I try to cheer them by talking about something positive. Two subscales reflect non-prosocial behaviours, also described previously: *Worsen* comprises 13 items, max possible score = 65; e.g. I know how to embarrass someone to stop them from behaving in a particular way, and *Inauthenticity* comprises 11 items, max possible score = 55; e.g. If someone's behaviour has caused me distress, I try to make them feel guilty about it. Finally, two further subscales reflect more neutral aspects: *Concealment* (the tendency not to let emotions show) 7 items, max score = 35; e.g. When someone has made me upset or angry, I tend to downplay my feelings, and *Poor skills* (self-assessed lack of ability to influence another's mood; e.g. I am not very good at motivating people) 5 items, max score = 25. All subscales showed good reliability with the present sample: Enhance  $\alpha = .79$ , Divert  $\alpha = .84$ , Worsen  $\alpha = .86$ , Inauthentic  $\alpha = .69$ , Conceal  $\alpha = .75$  and Poor skills  $\alpha = .71$ .

## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and compares male and female scores on all measures.

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics for males and females on all measures**

	Female		Male		Male and female compared
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
ID	11.41	7.64	9.07	7.64	t (250) = 3.43, p = .001
GD	12.66	7.53	16.05	8.30	t (250) = 3.39, p = .001
TEI	144.80	21.99	138.01	2.85	t (250) = 2.52, p = .01
MACH Tactics	2.91	0.54	2.61	0.44	t (250) = 4.93, p < .001
MACH moral	4.12	0.71	3.86	0.94	t (250) = 2.49, p = .01
MACH views	2.75	0.40	2.72	0.36	ns
MEOS Enhance	62.26	6.90	62.69	8.07	ns
MEOS Worsen	22.86	7.47	26.04	7.32	t (250) = 3.37, p = .001
MEOS Conceal	22.77	5.26	23.87	5.46	ns
MEOS Inauthentic	3.21	8.18	28.66	5.98	ns
MEOS Divert	28.12	3.47	27.17	4.93	ns
MEOS Poor Skills	12.02	2.60	11.13	2.78	t (250) = 2.64, p = .01

GD – general delinquent behaviour; ID – interpersonal delinquent behaviour; TEI – trait emotional intelligence

Males reported significantly higher engagement with GD than females, while females reported higher ID than males. As might be expected with a non-offender student sample, the delinquent behaviours most often reported tended to be relatively low-level and the most prevalent for both males and females reflected having been drunk before age 18, followed by truancy from school. For more serious offences, perhaps surprisingly, the most endorsed activity for both sexes was arson. In terms of interpersonal delinquency, for both males and females the most prevalent activity reported was spreading rumours, followed by posting material online with the express purpose of upsetting someone. Females scored more highly than males on trait EI and also on the Mach IV subscales Tactics (reflecting a use of manipulative social strategies) and Morals (having low regard for ethics and conventional morality in dealing with others). Males on the other hand scored highest on the MEOS Worsen scale reflecting a greater tendency to be openly critical and use Tactics such as embarrassment or verbal put downs in dealing with others. Overall, this might suggest that males prefer more overt ways of managing other people, while females prefer more underhand manipulative methods – though they still rated their ability to influence others poorly compared to males (as reflected in the higher MEOS poor skills scale scores).

Table 2 shows Pearson correlations between reported levels of delinquent behaviour, Trait EI and each of the interpersonal manipulation measures. For both sexes, reports of engagement in interpersonal delinquent behaviour (ID) and general delinquent behaviour (GD) were highly correlated. Females showed a significant positive association between TEI and both forms of delinquency whilst for males both associations were significant but negative. In terms of Mach IV scales, both groups showed a positive association between delinquency and the use of Machiavellian Tactics. In females, Tactics was also associated with EI, as predicted. Machiavellian morals, the disregard for conventional interpersonal ethics, only linked to

delinquency in females. It also presents a positive correlation with EI, though this did not reach significance.

**Table 2. Bivariate correlations for males (N = 127) and females (N = 125)**

	Male			Female		
	ID	GD	TEI	ID	GD	TEI
GD	.83**			.68**		
TEI	-.40**	-.48**		.40**	.30**	
Mach Tactics	.28**	.39**	-.08	.46**	.29**	.40**
Mach morals	.03	.05	.06	.38**	.32**	.14
Mach views	.29**	.16	.07	.21*	.13	-.17
MEOS enhance	-.26*	-.42**	.38**	.18*	.03	.25**
MEOS worsen	-.04	-.09	.04	.07	.29**	.11
MEOS conceal	.01	.01	-.23*	-.27**	-.11	-.47**
MEOS inauthentic	-.16	-.09	.20*	.27**	.20*	.02
MEOS divert	.01	-.16	.37**	.29**	.22*	.24**
MEOS poor skills	.33**	.41**	-.46**	-.36**	-.20*	-.59**

\* sig. at .05; \*\* sig. at .01

As expected, the prosocial MEOS scales (enhance and divert) were both significantly and positively correlated with EI for both groups. Enhance was negatively associated with delinquency in males, suggesting that those who attempt to enhance others moods commit fewer offences. Females however showed no relationship between this prosocial trait and general delinquency, while a small but significant correlation was observed between enhancing behaviours and ID. The prosocial divert factor (using diversionary Tactics to lift others' low mood) was positively correlated with both forms of delinquency for females only.

On the non-prosocial scale Inauthentic, females show a positive association with both types of delinquency, suggesting that females who tend to be inauthentic in their dealing with others also commit more offences. However, they present no relationship between this behaviour and EI. Conversely, in males inauthenticity shows no relationship with delinquency, but a significant positive association with EI. Finally self-rating of ability to influence others'

emotions was negatively associated with EI for both groups as we might expect. However, while this rating correlated positively with delinquency for males, the relationship is negative for females. Overall, in terms of our *á priori* aims, three factors in particular present significant positive relationships with both delinquency and trait EI for females only: Machiavellian Tactics and the supposedly prosocial MEOS factors enhance and divert. These factors may help to explain the EI-delinquency link for females in terms of interpersonal behaviours. However, other variables, most notably Machiavellian morality, and MEOS factors worsen and inauthentic also suggest possible sex differences in their relationships with delinquency, if not as a function of EI.

To test this, linear regression analyses were conducted on the two types of delinquency. In each analysis, we first entered sex, TEI and the three Machiavellian factors into the model, together with potential interactions between these. Our best predicting models based on these factors are shown in Table 3, Model 1. For GD, 24% of the variance is accounted for by a model which suggests sex differences in EI, Machiavellian Morals and, in line with our expectation, a three-way interaction between sex, Machiavellian Tactics and EI. This suggests that the relationship between Machiavellian Tactics and GD differs between groups in terms of the positive association with EI in females. In ID, 28% of variance is accounted for by model 1. The contributory predictors are the same as for GD, with one exception. Here the significant three-way predictor suggests that it is the relationship between ID and Machiavellian *morality* which differs between sexes as function of the positive association with EI in females. We found no significant effects in relation to Machiavellian views.

**Table 3. Regression models.**

General delinquent behaviour (GD)					Interpersonal delinquent behaviour (ID)				
Predictors	St. $\beta$	t	p	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	Predictors	St. $\beta$	t	p	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
<i>Model 1</i>					<i>Model 1</i>				
Sex	2.22	4.83	< .001	.24	Sex	5.56	4.01	< .001	.28
TEI	.21	2.06	.04		TEI	.22	2.40	.01	
Mach Tactics	.14	1.53	.13		Mach Tactics	.30	4.43	< .001	
Mach morals	.15	2.33	.02		Mach morals	.39	3.96	< .001	
Sex*TEI	-3.18	4.82	< .001		Sex*TEI	-4.97	-3.53	.001	
Sex*Mach morals	-.89	-2.20	.01		Sex*Mach morals	-3.77	-2.77	.01	
Sex*Mach Tactics*TEI	.82	2.14	.03		Sex*Mach morals*TEI	3.09	2.26	.02	
<i>Model 2</i>					<i>Model 2</i>				
Sex	4.58	5.06	< .001	.34	Sex	10.68	6.62	< .001	.47
TEI	.22	2.48	.01		TEI	.16	1.97	.05	
Mach Tactics	.18	2.25	.03		Mach Tactics	.24	3.76	< .001	
MEOS enhance	-.41	-4.05	< .001		Mach morals	.43	5.06	< .001	
MEOS divert	.47	4.77	< .001		Sex*TEI	-10.20	-6.10	< .001	
Sex*TEI	-5.28	-5.14	< .001		Sex*Mach morals	-3.88	-3.13	.002	
Sex*MEOS worsen	-2.79	-2.77	.01		Sex*Mach morals*TEI	2.66	2.13	.04	
Sex*Mach Tactics*TEI	.68	1.78	.06		MEOS conceal	-.14	-2.15	.03	
Sex*MEOS worsen*TEI	2.71	2.67	.01		MEOS inauthentic	.20	3.01	.003	
					Sex*MEOS enhance	-2.26	-3.26	.001	
					Sex*MEOS worsen	-3.65	-3.49	.001	
					Sex*MEOS worsen*TEI	4.17	3.87	< .001	
					Sex*MEOS inauthentic*TEI	-1.33	-5.02	< .001	
					Sex*MEOS divert*TEI	3.12	6.72	< .001	
					Sex*MEOS poor skills*TEI	.68	2.52	.01	

At stage 2 of our analyses we added the MEOS subscales as additional predictors and tested possible interactions of these with sex and with EI. Model 2 in Table 3 presents our final, best fitting and most parsimonious models. Adding the MEOS variables accounted for significantly more variance over and above that explained by sex, TEI and machiavellianism, with Model 2 accounting for 34% of variance in GD,  $F \text{ change } (4, 180) = 7.61, p < .001$ ; and 47% in ID,  $F \text{ change } (9, 174) = 8.06, p < .001$ .

In addition to the significant predictors indicated in model 1, for GD we observe main effects of MEOS prosocial traits enhance and divert, though no indication of sex differences in their power to predict GD. There was however an indication of sex differences in the effects of non-prosocial factor Worsen. A significant three-way interaction suggests that the relationship between worsening behaviours and GD differs between sexes as a function of EI. Re-examining the correlations in Table 2, females present a positive association between GD and worsening behaviour and also a positive correlation between worsening and EI. At correlational level this latter association did not reach significance, however the relationship is noticeably stronger than that for male participants.

In terms of ID, model 2 shows a more complex picture in how the MEOS variables interact with sex and EI to predict delinquency. Both enhance and worsen show significant interactions with sex, reflecting the inverse relationships between these and ID across groups (cf. Table 2). The three-way interaction between sex, worsen and EI seen to predict GD was also present here, along with other significant three-way effects involving inauthenticity, diverting behaviours, and poor skills. For males, Inauthenticity is positively associated with EI, though not related to delinquency. The inverse is the case for females. Divert is positively linked to EI for both sexes, but only with delinquency for females, with high diverting

behaviour associated with high delinquency. Finally poor skills are negatively associated with EI for both groups, though positively with delinquency for males, and negatively for females. It is notable that these latter three effects also occur in relation to GD (as Table 2 suggests) however in regression they only become significant predictors of delinquency in terms of ID behaviours.

## **Discussion**

The aim of the present study was to examine whether sex differences in the relationship between trait EI and delinquency reported previously could be explained by a greater tendency among female delinquents to employ interpersonal manipulation. We extended the enquiry to examine both general delinquency (vandalism, theft, skipping school etc.) and specifically interpersonal forms of delinquency (such as bullying, rumour spreading and social exclusion). In line with our predictions, high EI females reported higher levels of both forms of delinquency, compared to low EI females. Their overall manipulative personality profile comprised high levels of Machiavellian Tactics and morality, and high levels of the supposedly prosocial enhancing and diverting behaviours, as well as the less prosocial worsening, inauthentic and concealing. Conversely, high EI males reported generally low levels of both forms of delinquency. They present high levels of prosocial enhancing behaviour and low levels of concealing and inauthenticity. However, negative manipulative behaviour does not appear to be the sole preserve of females. Males also showed relationships between Machiavellian Tactics and delinquency; however they presented no associated link with emotional intelligence. This explains why an effect for males was not captured in previous work (Bacon et al, 2014) where only EI and not manipulation specifically was measured. The sexes both showed a negative association between self-reported levels of poor

social influencing skills and EI. Poor skills predicted delinquency in males, in line with the known links between poorer social skills and offending (e.g. Palmer & Hollin, 1999).

However, it was associated with lower levels of delinquency in females. It seems that females who perceive they have little social influence offend least, possibly through limited contact with delinquent peers.

The Tactics most often employed by individuals scoring high in Machiavellianism tend to be guilt induction, deceit and ingratiation. They are also likely to exploit friendship and are able to do so because of their ability to stay emotionally detached. Alongside this, Machiavellian morality is reflected in a tendency to disregard conventional ethics and social norms and a belief that unethical or duplicitous behaviour is justified in achieving social and life goals (Jones and Paulus, 2009). Our results suggest that both of these Machiavellian traits are linked to higher levels of both GD and ID in females. However, only Tactics shows a relationship with EI in GD, and only morality in ID. This may be because a detached morality is more of a necessity in relational offending. It is worth noting that Austin, et al (2007) have previously reported a significant negative association between EI and Machiavellianism, and suggested that low EI Machiavellians may be less successful manipulators. However, they analysed a global Machiavellianism score, rather than its subfactors, and this may have blurred the distinction between the three traits and/or masked sex differences.

We predicted that the MEOS non-prosocial behaviours (conceal and worsen) would be related to delinquency for males though would show a negative, or negligible, relationship with EI. In fact, both sexes showed a negative association between conceal and EI, though only in females was it related to delinquency, and negatively at that. Worsening behaviour on the other hand, (for instance overt criticism, undermining and other Tactics designed to hurt and

intimidate) showed no relationship to either delinquency or EI for males, though our regression suggests it was significant predictor of delinquency for females, in interaction with higher levels of EI. The two prosocial MEOS factors enhance and divert, reflect behaviours such as being positive, using humour or arranging an enjoyable activity in order to lift the mood of others. Austin et al (2014) demonstrated a positive association between enhancing-diverting behaviours and EI for both males and females and we observed similar effects in our correlational analyses. As predicted, for females, our regressions highlighted an association between both behaviours and higher levels of ID (though not GD) and diverting was also predictive of ID in interaction with high EI. Overall, we suggest that some females at least who are high in EI use this ability to develop and employ manipulative interpersonal strategies and this in turn is related to delinquency.

So why might manipulation (particularly the supposedly prosocial forms) be associated with delinquency for high EI females? We suggest that the explanation may lie in the nature of their social relationships. There is evidence that the causes of delinquency may be more relationship-oriented for females than for males (Odgers & Moretti, 2002), and that female delinquency is often associated with adversarial relationships with parents and romantic partners. Cauffman, Farruggia and Goldweber (2008) suggest that young women who engage in self-reported delinquent behaviour are more likely to experience a high degree of antisocial encouragement exerted on them by their current romantic partner. Furthermore, Kennedy et al (2015) report that young female offenders present with higher incidences of childhood abuse and family conflict than non-offenders. An antagonistic home situation may mean that maintaining other social relationships becomes of prime importance. A wish to keep friends happy and entertained or a fear of rejection and a desire to keep well-in with a group perceived to be socially powerful, may be the goals of using the prosocial strategies for these young

women. Possessing higher levels of EI might facilitate greater sensitivity to where one fits into group dynamics and the best way to retain or improve social standing. For males, it may be that they use Machiavellian Tactics but in a more direct way without focus on the emotions evoked. Their goals may be pragmatic rather than relational, hence EI is not an important facilitator.

Furthermore, Van der Schoot and Wong (2012) report a relationship between delinquency in females and what they term Nurturance, a trait closely linked to empathy (Batson, Lishner, Cook, & Sawyer, 2005). People who have high levels of empathy are usually less likely to offend (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004), possibly because they understand the emotional consequences of their behaviours. Van der Schoot and Wong (2012), however, suggest that female delinquents with high levels of nurturance do commit offences, but only those they perceive to be victimless. Our present results suggest an alternative explanation. Our data show that that some females with high EI (and hence presumably higher levels of empathy/nurturance) do indeed commit interpersonally aggressive offences which have very clear victims. An alternative explanation for the empathy/nurturance link therefore is that empathy facilitates successful interpersonal manipulation which leads to the achievement of pragmatic goals, which may be practical (e.g. acquisition of goods) or social, e.g. maintaining relationships with friends or partners.

As such, although interpersonal manipulation may appear antisocial, for young females growing up in an environment where survival is perceived more important than social niceties, it may in fact be a very adaptive behaviour. While males and females both exhibit the same physiological stress responses, males are most likely to engage in fight or flight behaviours, often involving aggression and other forms of overt delinquency. Females in the other hand

often turn to what is sometimes described as “tend and befriend” behaviour - using social interactions to protect against threats (Klein & Corwin, 2002). For females more than for males, adversarial interpersonal relationships are a notable social risk factor (Odgers & Moretti, 2002) and girls tend to be more sensitive to perceived threats to their social relationships. Their perceptions of others’ expectations may have a profound impact on emotional well-being and delinquency in that female offenders use aggression as a way to sustain relationships through coercion (Moretti, DaSilva & Holland, 2004). It is understandable that those with high EI are best able to detect perceived threats to their social world and implement strategies to ameliorate that threat. It may be that it is these circumstances are one factor which differentiates between whether high EI is a facilitative or protective factor against offending behaviour. It is also noteworthy that in stressful circumstances females predominate in internalised disorders such as depression and anxiety (e.g. Leadbeater, Blatt, & Quinlan, 1995) and individuals with a tendency to internalise problems tend to engage in indirect, covert means of aggression rather than direct, confrontational forms. Conversely, direct aggression (most prevalent in males) is associated with emotional dysregulation, low peer acceptance, and peer rejection (Card et al, 2008). These factors are also characteristic of low trait EI

Our results extend to both interpersonal and generalised forms of delinquency and both forms of female offending present opportunities for future research in terms of the role that EI plays in female offending and forensic outcomes. Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2014) have suggested that one reason female offending has received less research attention is because overt and aggressive antisocial behaviour is less common, less serious and less persistent in females, and therefore less costly to society (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014; Fontaine, Carbonneau, Vitaro, Barker, & Tremblay, 2009). Moreover, females often desist from offending as they mature

and practical considerations such as caring for children come to the fore. However, adolescents with a history of antisocial behaviour are likely to marry people who exert an antisocial influence. Evidence suggests that, for males, marriage is often a steadying influence while for female offenders marriage to an antisocial mate reinforces antisocial behaviours throughout adulthood (Sampson, Laub & Wimer, 2006). Furthermore, as Cauffman (2008) has discussed, the longer term consequences of offending for females, in terms of their own health and wellbeing and that of the next generation cannot be underestimated. Most research into indirect aggression has focussed on children and adolescents (Card et al, 2008), however the wealth of research on behaviours such as workplace bullying, for instance, suggest that relational aggression continues into adulthood (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2010) as do its negative consequences. However, it is also important to note that many of the potential social and inter-relational determinants discussed may also be salient for some men and can therefore not provide any conclusive explanations for sex-differences. Further work might usefully explore further the nature, determinants and effectiveness of interpersonal manipulations used by both male and females. The prevalence, longevity and consequences of adult female indirect aggression is particularly worthy of attention.

This work is not without limitations. Firstly, although our measures have all been used previously in research they may suffer from well-documented limitations associated with psychometrics and self-report. Secondly, an undergraduate sample may limit generalisability to an offender population. Although it is notable that UK undergraduates are increasingly heterogeneous and a fairly high level of delinquency was reported, we didn't ask about conviction rates, incarceration or whether participants had offended recently. As such, few if any of our participants may have been actually convicted of an offence and most are likely to

be adolescent limited delinquents, rather than presenting an ongoing adult offending profile. Further research is therefore required with offender samples.

Overall, we propose that for some young women at least, strong EI abilities confer an understanding of the effects and consequences of manipulative actions and hence allow them to select and target those actions to bring about the effects they desire. Indeed, in what we have termed interpersonal delinquency, such emotional harm is likely to be a key goal in itself. These results have some important forensic implications. Firstly, high EI females may have an advantage in their interaction with the legal system. Female offenders, including those charged with interpersonal violence offences, often receive more lenient sentences compared to men and one explanation for this is suggested to be a general paternalisation of the criminal justice system (e.g. Curry, Lee, & Rodriguez, 2004; Franklin & Fearn, 2008; Sandler & Freeman, 2011). Under such a system women are viewed as less culpable, violent, blameworthy and dangerous and hence they receive concessions during sentencing (Spohn and Beichner, (2000). In the courtroom, or in her dealings with police or legal professionals, a skilled interpersonal manipulator might make it appear as though they had no intention to harm at all. There are also implications for intervention. Cauffman (2008) has highlighted emerging evidence that gender-specific offender treatment methods can be effective when they target multiple aspects of offenders' lives, including family and peer relationships. Furthermore, a recent review commissioned by the National Offender Management Service in the UK (Stewart, 2015) has discussed how rehabilitation programmes for female offenders have often focussed on instrumental factors such as substance abuse, whereas relatively little is known about the psychological criminogenic needs of women and hence many treatment programmes do not consider these. The present research contributes to this knowledge and suggests that, given that much female offending appears to be founded in social relationships, interventions might

usefully focus on tackling psychological factors which give rise to relational aggression and manipulative behaviours. Our results suggest that supporting young females in using their EI in prosocial and enabling ways may help to prevent interpersonally aggressive offending and support convicted offenders in avoiding recidivism on their re-entry to the community.

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