

BRIEF REPORT

The Relationship Between Emotional Abilities and Right-Wing and Prejudiced Attitudes

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Previous research revealed that cognitive abilities are negatively related to right-wing and prejudiced attitudes. No study has, however, investigated if emotional abilities also show such a relationship, although this can be expected based on both classic and recent literature. The aim of the present study was 2-fold: (a) to investigate the relationship between emotional abilities and right-wing and prejudiced attitudes, and (b) to pit the effects of emotional and cognitive abilities on these attitudes against each other. Results from 2 adult samples ($n = 409$ and 574) in which abilities scores were collected in individual testing sessions, revealed that emotional abilities are significantly and negatively related to social-cultural and economic-hierarchical right-wing attitudes, as well as to blatant ethnic prejudice. These relationships were as strong as those found for cognitive abilities. For economic-hierarchical right-wing attitudes, emotional abilities were even the only significant correlate. It is therefore concluded that the study of emotional abilities has the potential to significantly advance our understanding of right-wing and prejudiced attitudes.

Keywords: blatant prejudice, cognitive abilities, emotional abilities, right-wing attitudes, subtle prejudice

Shortly after World War II, the famous French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1946/1995) struggled with the question of whether anti-Semitic people deviate from ordinary people solely in their level of intolerance. Or, alternatively, are prejudiced people different in other personality aspects as well? Many studies have subsequently studied right-wing ideological attitudes from an individual differences perspective. Authoritarianism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1981) is one of the most studied variables in this respect and much evidence has been obtained for its relationship with various prejudices, such as prejudice against African Americans (e.g., Whitley, 1999) and against people from Turkish and Moroccan descent in Western Europe (e.g., Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005).

Over the years however, it has been acknowledged that right-wing authoritarianism is only one indicator of right-wing attitudes and that such attitudes can be arranged according to two broad dimensions (see, Duckitt & Sibley, 2009; Lipset, 1981). The first dimension—social-cultural attitudes—relates to tradi-

tionalism at one pole, versus openness, autonomy, and personal freedom at the other pole. The second dimension—economic-hierarchical attitudes—relates to belief in hierarchy and inequality at one pole versus egalitarianism, humanitarianism, and concern with social welfare at the other pole. Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO) are the most commonly used concepts that represent the first and second dimension, respectively. Although these two right-wing dimensions are often correlated, they are based on separate motivational schemas and values (Duckitt & Sibley, 2009; Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002).

Many studies have focused on the psychological bases of right-wing attitudes and prejudice. A recent meta-analysis demonstrated that people with fewer cognitive resources are more likely to adhere to social-cultural right-wing attitudes and tend to be more prejudiced toward ethnic minority groups, whereas those higher in cognitive abilities are more likely to endorse left-wing beliefs and to be less prejudiced (Onraet et al., 2015). In one of the included studies in this meta-analysis, intelligence measured at age 10 even predicted prejudice 20 years later (Deary, Batty, & Gale, 2008; see also Hodson & Busseri, 2012). Interestingly, cognitive abilities primarily relate to the social-cultural dimension of right-wing attitudes, whereas its relationship with economic-hierarchical right-wing attitudes is much weaker and even non-significant (Choma, Hodson, Hoffarth, Charlesford, & Hafer, 2014; Onraet et al., 2015).

Another construct that has gained attention in literature pertains to emotional abilities, referring to the ability to (a) identify emotions; (b) understand emotions in terms of the likely appraisals,

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action tendencies, bodily reactions, expressions, and feelings that are elicited by goal-relevant situations; and (c) know how to regulate emotions (Fontaine, 2016; MacCann & Roberts, 2008; Mestre, MacCann, Guil, & Roberts, 2016). According to Mestre et al. (2016), emotional abilities can be measured as a different form of “intelligence” and, importantly, they should be considered in conjunction with cognitive abilities.

However, whereas the link between cognitive abilities and right-wing and prejudiced attitudes has been well-documented, surprisingly, no empirical attention has yet been paid to the relationship between emotional abilities and these attitudes. Such a relationship can nevertheless be reasonably expected on theoretical grounds. Throughout their seminal book, Adorno et al. (1950) repeatedly described right-wing adherents as being ego-alien (i.e., out of touch with their true self) and showing little intraception and self-insight. Also, they tend to be extrapunitive, that is, they blame others for any problem. At the societal level, this leads to the perception of scapegoats, like persons who do not conform to conventional norms and members of ethnic outgroups, who are blamed for threatening society.

Recent quantitative work also suggests that emotional abilities play a role here. A number of studies have revealed that right-wing attitudes and ethnic prejudice are typically accompanied by low levels of empathy (Batson et al., 1997; Nicol & Rounding, 2013; Sidanius et al., 2013; Swart, Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2011). Moreover, Onraet, Van Hiel, De keersmaecker, and Fontaine (2017) showed that self-reported emotional abilities are negatively related to RWA, SDO, and ethnic prejudice, and that this relationship is mediated by perspective-taking. The present study builds further on the findings of Onraet et al. (2017), but instead of using self-report measures for emotional abilities, we assessed participants' actual emotional abilities by use of performance tests. Such a performance approach in the context of abilities is much needed, as people are generally not very proficient in assessing their own abilities. For example, De keersmaecker, Onraet, Lepoutre, and Roets (2017) showed that actual intelligence scores and self-perceived intelligence only show a weak correlation (i.e., $r = .15$) and they may even have opposite effects. Along similar lines, self-report and performance measures of emotional abilities are poorly related (Petrides, 2011).

Taken together, the present study thus tries to answer the question if emotional abilities relate to ideological attitudes and prejudice and is the first study to do this using performance measures of emotional abilities. In a first sample, we investigated this relationship using multiple indicators of emotional abilities to sufficiently cover the different domains. In a second sample, we also assessed cognitive abilities to investigate the relative weight of emotional and cognitive abilities in relationship with right-wing and prejudiced attitudes.

Study 1

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 409 adult participants who were recruited during spring 2015 by third-year psychology students of Ghent University, who were enrolled in the course Psychodiagnostics II, in exchange for course credit.¹ Data were collected individually and to obtain a heterogeneous sample, each

student recruited and tested one participant in a predetermined age-group, with a specified sex and level of education. Before data collection, all students completed a formal training program based on the test guides of the abilities measures, consisting of two 3-hr sessions in small groups. After these courses and study at home, the students took an exam consisting of 25 multiple choice questions on how to administer the test battery.

Although the sample size was determined by the number of students enrolled in the course, the sample provided sufficient statistical power ($>.98$; Champely, Ekstrom, Dalgaard, Gill, & De Rosario, 2015) to detect an effect of $r = -.20$, which mirrors the effect-size obtained in Onraet et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis of the relationship between such attitudes and cognitive abilities.

The mean age of the sample was 35.42 years ($SD = 12.92$), 57.7% was female. With regard to their highest education level, one participant did not finish primary school, 2.2% completed primary school, 7.3% completed lower secondary school (age 15), 37.9% completed secondary school (age 18), 6.6% completed a specialist course after secondary school (1 or 2 years), 27.9% obtained a bachelor degree, and 17.8% had a master degree.

Measures.

Emotional abilities. To operationalize the three major facets of emotional abilities, we administered the Situational Test of Emotional Understanding (STEU; MacCann & Roberts, 2008), the Situational Test of Emotion Management (STEM; MacCann & Roberts, 2008), and the Geneva Emotion Recognition Test (GERT; Schlegel, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2014). We used the rating format of these tests because we wanted to apply the recently proposed method of profile similarities to score emotional intelligence (Legree et al., 2014). Moreover, to avoid fatigue effects, we used abridged versions of 60 items for the STEU ($M = .83$, $SD = .11$), 60 items for the STEM ($M = .72$, $SD = .15$), and 70 items for the GERT ($M = .87$, $SD = .08$).² For each instrument, the profile similarity was computed as the Fisher z -transformed Pearson correlation between the observed score pattern and the average score pattern across all respondents.³ Because the STEU, STEM, and GERT profile similarities were highly correlated (see Table 1), a single abilities profile similarity score was computed as the mean of the three scores.

Right-wing and prejudiced Attitudes. All attitudinal measures were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

RWA. An 11-item RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1981; Dutch translation by Mueloen, 1991) was administered ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 2.87$, $SD = .62$). A sample item is “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn.” This scale measures the social-cultural domain of right-wing attitudes.

¹ Ten participants were not included in the analyses due to missing data. In addition to the measures of the present contribution, participant also completed the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (Petrides & Furnham, 2006), Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS; Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994), and the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983). Relationships between these trait measures and right-wing attitudes are reported in Onraet et al. (2017).

² The three abridged instruments included a balanced representation of correct/effective and incorrect/ineffective emotional reactions to have a balanced reference profile.

³ Fisher z transformation was applied because of a negative skewedness of the correlations.

Table 1
Correlations Between the Emotional Abilities Variables and Right-Wing Attitudes and Prejudice (Studies 1 and 2)

| Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Study 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. STEU | | .42*** | .48*** | .77*** | -.21*** | -.18*** | -.04 | | |
| 2. STEM | .48*** | | .37*** | .86*** | -.28*** | -.21*** | -.10* | | |
| 3. GERT | .52*** | .44*** | | .67*** | -.14** | -.14** | -.01 | | |
| 4. EA profile S | .79*** | .88*** | .70*** | | -.29*** | -.24*** | -.08 | | |
| 5. RWA | -.25*** | -.32*** | -.19*** | -.34*** | | .47*** | .54*** | | |
| 6. SDO | -.20*** | -.22*** | -.15** | -.25*** | .46*** | | .61*** | | |
| 7. Subtle prejudice | -.09 | -.16** | -.06 | -.15** | .55*** | .62*** | | | |
| Study 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| 1. STEU | | .48*** | .39*** | .77*** | -.20*** | -.16* | -.07 | -.31*** | .40*** |
| 2. STEM | .51*** | | .40*** | .86*** | -.25*** | -.20** | -.14** | -.38*** | .29*** |
| 3. GERT | .42*** | .43*** | | .68*** | -.06 | -.03 | -.01 | -.24*** | .25*** |
| 4. EA profile S | .79*** | .87*** | .70*** | | -.22*** | -.20** | -.11* | -.40*** | .40*** |
| 5. RWA | -.24*** | -.30*** | -.12** | -.28*** | | .44*** | .55*** | .60*** | -.21*** |
| 6. SDO | -.19** | -.24*** | -.06 | -.24*** | .45*** | | .53*** | — | -.03 |
| 7. Subtle prejudice | -.11** | -.20*** | -.06 | -.16** | .58*** | .54*** | | .74*** | -.17*** |
| 8. Blatant prejudice | -.37*** | -.43*** | -.30*** | -.46*** | .61*** | — | .73*** | | -.39*** |
| 9. KAIT | .46*** | .36*** | .30*** | .46*** | -.27*** | -.11 | -.23*** | -.47*** | |

Note. STEU = Situational Test of Emotional Understanding; STEM = the Situational Test of Emotion Management; GERT = the Geneva Emotion Recognition Test; EA profile S = Emotional Abilities profile Similarity; RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation; KAIT = Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test. Correlations below the diagonal are bivariate correlations. Correlations above the diagonal are partial correlations controlled for age, sex, and education (0 = did not finish primary school; 1 = primary school; 2 = lower secondary school (till 15 years); 3 = higher secondary school (till 18 years); 4 = Specialist courses after secondary school (1 or 2 years); 5 = Bachelor degree; 6 = Master degree).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

SDO. A 14-item SDO scale (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Dutch translation by Van Hiel & Duriez, 2001) was used ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 2.28$, $SD = .59$). A sample item is “Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others.” This scale measures the economic-hierarchical domain of right-wing attitudes.

Ethnic prejudice. We administered an eight-item Subtle Prejudice Scale (based on Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; see Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2005; $\alpha = .83$, $M = 2.91$, $SD = .64$). A sample item is “I feel sympathy for immigrants living here.”

Results

The aim of this study was to examine the direct relationships of emotional abilities with right-wing attitudes and ethnic prejudice. As can be inferred from Table 1, individuals scoring low on emotional abilities were significantly higher in RWA, SDO, and subtle prejudice. For subtle prejudice, this effect was only significant for the combined profile similarity score and the STEM. Partial correlations, controlling for age, sex, and education level (see Table 1, above the diagonal), revealed a similar pattern of results.

Study 2

In Study 2, we additionally administered a cognitive abilities measure to be able to delineate the specific effects of cognitive and emotional abilities on right-wing and prejudiced attitudes.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 574 adult participants. Part of the sample was collected during spring 2015, and the other

part was collected one year later.⁴ Similar to Study 1, the participants were recruited by psychology bachelor students of Ghent University in exchange for a course credit. The mean age of the sample was 36.20 years ($SD = 12.10$) and consisted of 52.1% females; two participants did not finish primary school, 1.2% completed primary school, 10.1% completed lower secondary school (age 15), 34.5% completed secondary school (age 18), 11.1% completed specialist courses after secondary school (1 or 2 years), 27.7% had a bachelor degree, and 15% obtained a master degree.

Measures.

Emotional abilities. We used the same emotional abilities measures as in Study 1: the STEU ($M = .83$, $SD = .12$), the STEM ($M = .71$, $SD = .17$), and the GERT ($M = .87$, $SD = .07$). Analogous to Study 1, a single, overall emotional abilities score was also computed.

Cognitive abilities. Cognitive abilities were measured with the Dutch version of the Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test (KAIT; Mulder, Dekker, & Dekker, 2004). The KAIT-NL is an individually, face-to-face administered intelligence test battery that takes about 60 min to complete and consists of six subtests: three subtests probe into fluid intelligence (learning symbols, logic reasoning, and secret codes) and three subtests tap into crystallized intelligence (definitions, auditory comprehension, and double

⁴ Data were collected as part of a larger survey. Five hundred and seventy-four participants completed the measures of interest. In the 2015 wave blatant prejudice was not administered, whereas in the 2016 wave SDO was not administered. In the latter wave, participants also completed measures of need for closure (Roets & Van Hiel, 2007) and essentialism (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011), which have been reported in De keersmaecker, Bostyn, Fontaine, Van Hiel, and Roets (in press).

meaning). We used norm scores of intelligence to convert the raw test scores to intelligence quotients ($M = 108.19, SD = 12.40$).

Right-wing and prejudiced attitudes. We administered the same right-wing attitudes scales as in Study 1 (RWA: $\alpha = .75, M = 2.88, SD = .55$, and SDO: $\alpha = .88, M = 2.32, SD = .61$). The former measure was completed by all participants, the latter by 260 participants. All participants were administered the same Subtle Prejudice scale as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .83, M = 2.98, SD = .64$). Finally, 314 participants also completed a 9-item Blatant Prejudice Scale (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; $\alpha = .91; M = 2.26, SD = .77$). A sample item of the Blatant Prejudice Scale is “The White race is superior to all other races.”

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, individuals scoring low on overall emotional abilities were significantly higher in RWA and SDO and in subtle and blatant prejudice. Subtle prejudice and SDO were not significantly related to scores on the GERT. Partial correlations, controlling for age, sex, and education level revealed a similar pattern of results. Next, we investigated the relative effects of emotional and cognitive abilities. For each attitudinal variable we ran a regression analysis including overall emotional abilities (entered in Step 3) together with cognitive abilities (entered in Step 2), controlling for age, sex, and education (entered in the first step). These analyses (see Table 2) revealed that both emotional and cognitive abilities were significant predictors of RWA and blatant prejudice. For SDO, emotional abilities were the only significant, unique predictor, whereas for subtle prejudice only cognitive abilities were a significant, unique predictor.

Discussion

The current study investigated the relationships of cognitive and emotional abilities with right-wing and prejudiced attitudes. To the best of our knowledge, no previous study has yet investigated this relationship using performance tests of emotional abilities. Moreover, given the simultaneous inclusion of emotional and cognitive abilities, we were able to assess their relative impact. Several interesting results emerged from our data. First, most of the relationships between emotional abilities and right-wing and prejudiced attitudes were significant, often in the range of $-.20$ to $-.30$, and thus by no means trivial (Gignac & Szodorai, 2016). The results hence corroborate the hypothesis that people with lower emotional abilities are more likely to be found at the right-wing side of the ideological spectrum, whereas those having higher emotional abilities are more likely to endorse left-wing beliefs. Second, compared to cognitive abilities, emotional abilities are at least equally potent correlate of such attitudes. Specifically, the results generally revealed that emotional abilities show additional variance above and beyond cognitive abilities, except in the case of subtle prejudice. Finally, emotional abilities, but not cognitive abilities, were related to economic-hierarchical right-wing attitudes.

Our results thus testify that the lack of scholarly attention to the empirical relationship between emotional abilities and right-wing and prejudiced attitudes is unwarranted. Meloen (1997) aptly noted that “Adorno et al., . . . were convinced that also more emotional factors were involved, while cognitions often would merely serve as rationalizations” (p. 650). This quote does not only illustrate that emotional factors are important and worthy of investigation as

Table 2
Hierarchical Linear Regression Analyses of Cognitive (Cogn) and Emotional (Emo) Abilities on Right-Wing Attitudes and Prejudice in Study 2

| Predictors | RWA | | SDO | | Subtle prejudice | | Blatant prejudice | |
|---------------------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| | β | 95% CI | β | 95% CI | β | 95% CI | β | 95% CI |
| Step 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Age | .09* | [.01, .17] | -.12* | [-.25, -.00] | .01 | [-.07, .09] | -.06 | [-.16, .05] |
| Sex | -.08 | [-.15, .01] | -.05 | [-.17, .07] | -.12** | [-.20, -.04] | .10 | [-.00, .21] |
| Education | -.26*** | [-.34, -.18] | -.18** | [-.30, -.06] | -.21*** | [-.29, -.13] | -.35*** | [-.45, -.24] |
| Step 2 | | | | | | | | |
| Age | .13** | [.05, .21] | -.12 | [-.24, .01] | .04 | [-.04, .12] | .00 | [-.10, .10] |
| Sex | -.08* | [-.16, -.00] | -.05 | [-.18, .07] | -.12** | [-.20, -.04] | .10* | [.00, .20] |
| Education | -.16*** | [-.25, -.08] | -.17* | [-.30, -.03] | -.13** | [-.22, -.05] | -.18** | [-.29, -.08] |
| Cogn ability | -.23*** | [-.31, -.14] | -.03 | [-.16, .11] | -.18*** | [-.27, -.09] | -.40*** | [-.51, -.29] |
| Step 3 | | | | | | | | |
| Age | .12** | [.04, .20] | -.13* | [-.25, -.00] | .04 | [-.04, .12] | -.01 | [-.11, .08] |
| Sex | -.08* | [-.15, .00] | -.05 | [-.17, .08] | -.12** | [-.20, -.04] | .11* | [.02, .20] |
| Education | -.14** | [-.23, -.06] | -.13 | [-.26, .00] | -.13** | [-.21, -.04] | -.15** | [-.25, -.05] |
| Cogn ability | -.16** | [-.25, -.07] | .06 | [-.08, .21] | -.16** | [-.25, -.06] | -.28*** | [-.39, -.17] |
| Emo ability | -.16*** | [-.25, -.07] | -.22** | [-.36, -.08] | -.05 | [-.14, .04] | -.29*** | [-.39, -.18] |
| Adj R ² Step 1 | .076 | | .037 | | .052 | | .119 | |
| ΔR^2 Step 1 | .081*** | | .048** | | .057*** | | .128*** | |
| Adj R ² Step 2 | .117 | | .034 | | .076 | | .250 | |
| ΔR^2 Step 2 | .042*** | | .001 | | .026*** | | .132*** | |
| Adj R ² Step 3 | .135 | | .067 | | .076 | | .311 | |
| ΔR^2 Step 3 | .020*** | | .036** | | .002 | | .063*** | |

Note. CI = confidence interval; RWA = Right-Wing Authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation Emotional abilities indexed by Emotional Abilities profile. Similarity based on the average correlation of Situational Test of Emotional Understanding, Situational Test of Emotion Management, and Geneva Emotion Recognition Test.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

a topic in itself, but also clarifies that affect and cognition are intertwined (see Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001; Siemer, Mauss, & Gross, 2007). Studies aiming to understand right-wing and prejudiced attitudes should thus not only include purely cognitive abilities, or focus exclusively on emotional abilities, but instead it should be concluded that the field can benefit from research that integrates both emotional and cognitive abilities.

The present study adds to the literature by extending previous studies which showed that right-wing attitudes and prejudice are related to empathy (Batson et al., 1997; Nicol & Rounding, 2013; Sidanius et al., 2013; Swart et al., 2011) and self-reported emotional abilities (Onraet et al., 2017). The unique contribution of the present study, however, is that we were able to demonstrate a similar relationship using objective performance assessments of emotional abilities rather than self-reported subjective impressions about one's own capacity. We do not want to claim that self-reports would always be inferior to performance measures, but it should be acknowledged that self-ratings of abilities can be notoriously misleading (see De keersmaecker et al., 2017; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). It is thus reassuring that the present study shows that performance measures of emotional abilities corroborate the findings obtained with self-report measures, even though the relationship between trait and performance emotional abilities may be rather weak (Petrides, 2011).

Finally, some limitations and suggestions for future studies should be mentioned. First, in the present studies, we relied on cross-sectional correlational data, and hence no inferences of causality can be made. Longitudinal studies may shed a light on this, or experimental studies that include emotional abilities as a moderator variable. Second, our results are somewhat inconsistent with regard to the role of emotion recognition. Whereas the results of both our studies show that deficits in emotion understanding and emotion management are related to right-wing and prejudiced attitudes, emotion recognition yielded a much weaker relationship in Study 2. Future studies should investigate if this result replicates in other samples, and if this would be the case, try to explain why recognition only plays a minor role herein.

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