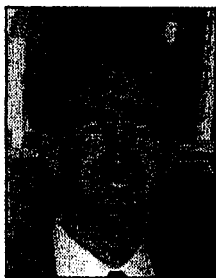


SHARED PERSPECTIVES

Emotional intelligence: popular or scientific psychology?

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Emotional intelligence is a product of two worlds. One is the popular culture world of best-selling books, daily newspapers and magazines. The other is the world of scientific journals, book chapters and peer review.

Most people, I suspect, became familiar with emotional intelligence through the popular 1995 book, "Emotional Intelligence," by Dr. Daniel Goleman or through the many mass-market books, articles and television programs that followed in its wake.

Attendees of last year's APA Annual

Convention heard the popular version of emotional intelligence at the opening session. Others read about it in the *APA Monitor*.

Emotional intelligence, according to *Time* magazine, "may be the best predictor of success in life." According to the book "Emotional Intelligence," evidence suggests that it is "as powerful, and at times more powerful, than IQ," and provides "an advantage in any domain of life." Such enthusiasm may lead APA members to wonder what the scientific literature actually says. In this column, I will describe some of the scientific literature, and compare it to the popular accounts.

A scientific account of emotional intelligence

The popular accounts often refer to the 1990 articles on emotional intelligence that I published with my colleague, Dr. Peter Salovey. Those two articles contain the first formal definition of emotional intelligence, and provide a first demonstration that certain ability tasks may serve to measure the concept.

Increasingly, we have viewed emotional intelligence as a potential standard intelligence (see our 1993 and 1996 articles in the journal *Intelligence*), and we revised our model accordingly in the 1997 book, "Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence" (Basic Books). There, emotional intelligence is defined as the capacity to reason with emotion in four areas: to perceive emotion, to integrate it in thought, to understand it and to manage it.

My colleagues, Dr. Salovey, Dr. David Caruso and I, have developed a new set of 12 ability tasks that assess this four-branch model. Sample tasks include asking people to identify emotions in faces, and asking people to identify a set of simple emotions which, when combined, match a more complex feeling. Research with these new scales suggests that emotional intelligence can be measured reliably, exists as a unitary ability, and is related to, but independent of, standard intelligence (see our forthcoming 1999 article in *Intelligence*).

Is the popular version accurate?

My colleagues and I appreciate the popular discussions of the above work. At the same time, the popular treatments have represented our concept in three ways that are cause for concern.

First, the meaning of emotional intelligence has been stretched. Emotional intelligence is now defined by popular authors in dozens of ways—typically as a list of personality characteristics, such as "empathy, motivation, persistence, warmth and social skills." Dr. Salovey, Dr. Caruso and I refer to these definitions as "mixed models" because they mix together diverse parts of personality.

Second, popular models of emotional intelligence imply that we can predict important life outcomes using such a diverse list of variables—which is, of course, correct. But let's be honest about such lists. They contain variables beyond what is meant by the terms "emotion" or "intelligence," or what reasonable people would infer from the phrase "emotional intelligence." Such popular models are using a catchy new name to sell worthy, old-fashioned personality research and prediction.

Third, the popular and scientific concepts of emotional intelligence are separated by a "claim" gap. Our own and others' ongoing research indicates that emotional intelligence may well predict specific, important life outcomes at about the level of other important personality variables (e.g., 2 percent to 25 percent of variance explained). We believe that such predictions are both useful in practical terms, and impressive theoretically. In contrast, the popular literature's implication—that highly emotionally intelligent people possess an unqualified advantage in life—appears overly enthusiastic at present and unsubstantiated by reasonable scientific standards.

Why it all matters

One point on which both the popular and scientific treatments do agree is that emotional intelligence—if substantiated—broadens our understanding of what it means to be smart. It means that within some of us who are labeled "romantics," "highly sensitive" or "bleeding hearts," serious information processing is taking place.

I believe the identification of such emotional processing is new and powerful enough to advance a psychological agenda, without recourse to stretched definitions or sensational claims. For that reason I invite serious practitioners and researchers to distinguish between popular and scientific approaches, and to take a look at the research in the young field of emotional intelligence.

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