

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND AGGRESSION: THE MODERATOR ROLE OF GENDER

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research has indicated that Emotional Intelligence (EI) is associated with aggression. However, this relationship has been mainly demonstrated among adolescents and by means of self-report questionnaires, which is associated with bias related to shared-reported variance. Based in previous research that found gender differences in the relationship between EI and relevant social and health outcomes, the current study aimed to examine the moderator role of gender in the EI-aggression relationship, using indirect measures (i.e., an ability measure of EI, as well as an aggression inventory that assesses individual's behavior in response to provoking scenarios).

METHOD

Participants

To carry out our study, we used a Spanish community sample. A total of 71 men and 225 women (N = 296) ranging from 19 to 59 years old ($X = 24.46$, $SD = 7.10$) participated in the study.

Measures

- Emotional Intelligence.** The *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT, Version 2.0; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002)* was used. The MSCEIT is a 141-item ability scale designed to measure: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. EI was measured with a Spanish translation of the MSCEIT which showed similar psychometric properties to the original instrument (Extremera, Fernández-Berrocal, & Salovey, 2006).
- Aggression.** The *Aggressive Provocation Questionnaire (APQ; O'Connor, Archer & Wu, 2001)* was used. The APQ consists of 12 hypothetical provoking scenarios in which participants self-report their disposition to respond aggressively. For each situation, participants are asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Extremely) how angry, irritated, and frustrated they would feel. Participants were then asked how they would respond to each situation by choosing one of five action alternatives, categorized as follows: 1) avoid; 2) no response; 3) anger; 4) assertive behavior; or 5) direct aggression.

RESULTS

Table 1. Regression results for the moderating effect of ability EI and gender on assertiveness, anger and irritation.

	R ²	F	β
Assertive behavior			
Step 1	0.00	0.12	
Gender			0.02
Step 2	0.04	5.32**	
Gender			-0.01
MSCEIT			0.19**
Step 3	0.01	4.94**	
Gender			0.98*
MSCEIT			0.59**
MSCEIT x gender			-1.14*
Angry			
Step 1	0.00	0.60	
Gender			0.05
Step 2	0.02	3.08*	
Gender			0.07
MSCEIT			-0.14*
Step 3	0.03	4.79**	
Gender			1.46**
MSCEIT			0.43
MSCEIT x gender			-1.60**
Irritated			
Step 1	0.00	0.32	
Gender			0.03
Step 2	0.01	1.84	
Gender			0.02
MSCEIT			0.11
Step 3	0.13	2.56	
Gender			1.01*
MSCEIT			0.51*
MSCEIT x gender			-1.14*

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2. Gender differences in EI ability and O'Connor dimensions.

	F	p
EI ability	8.96	< 0.01
Feelings (O'Connor)		
Angry	0.60	n.s.
Irritated	0.32	n.s.
Frustrated	1.55	n.s.
Response situation		
Avoid	8.68	< 0.01
No response	0.65	n.s.
Anger	0.07	n.s.
Assertive behavior	0.12	n.s.
Direct aggression	12.69	< 0.001

Figure 1. Effects of ability EI and gender on Assertive behavior

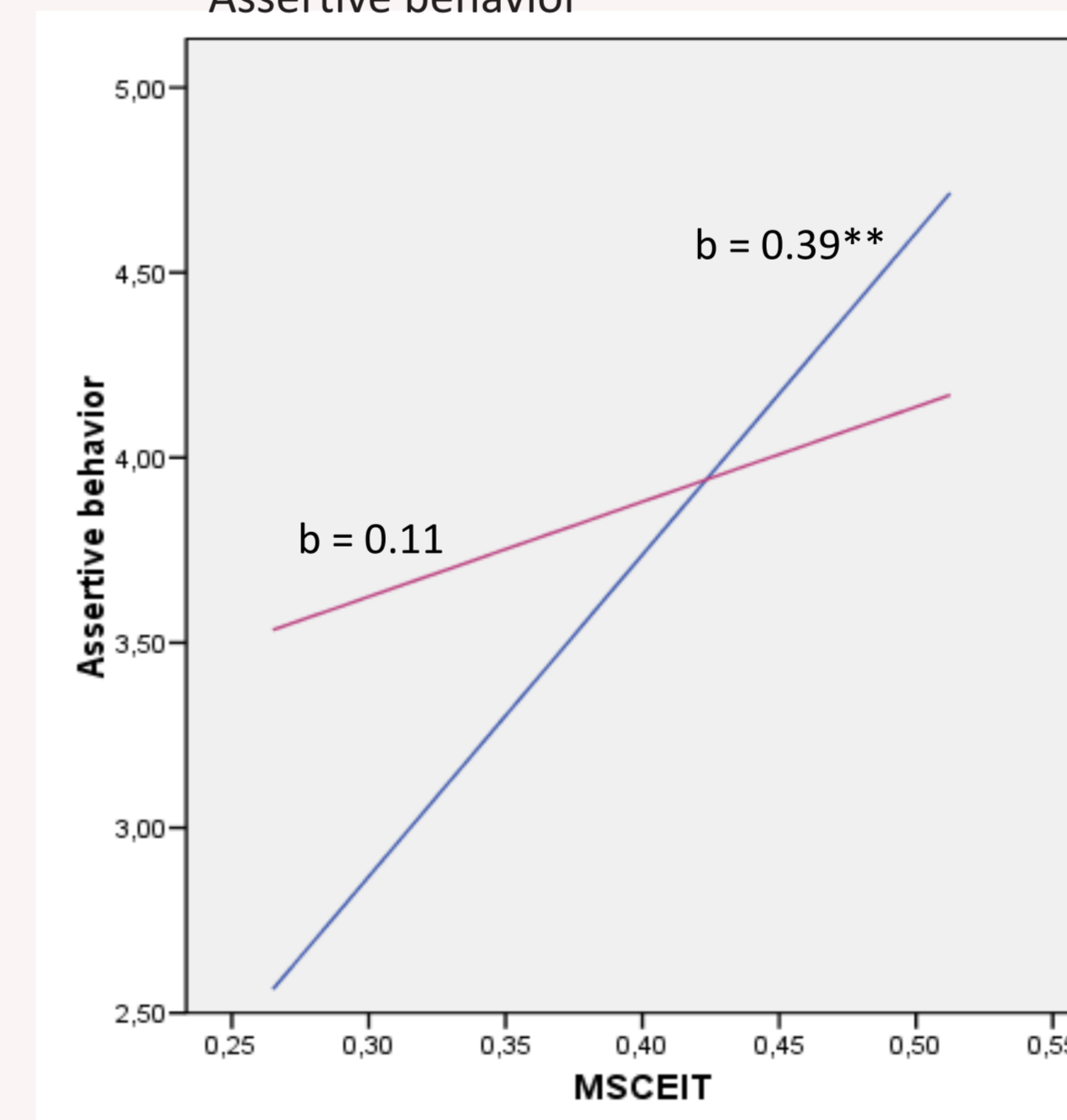


Figure 2. Effects of ability EI and gender on Irritated

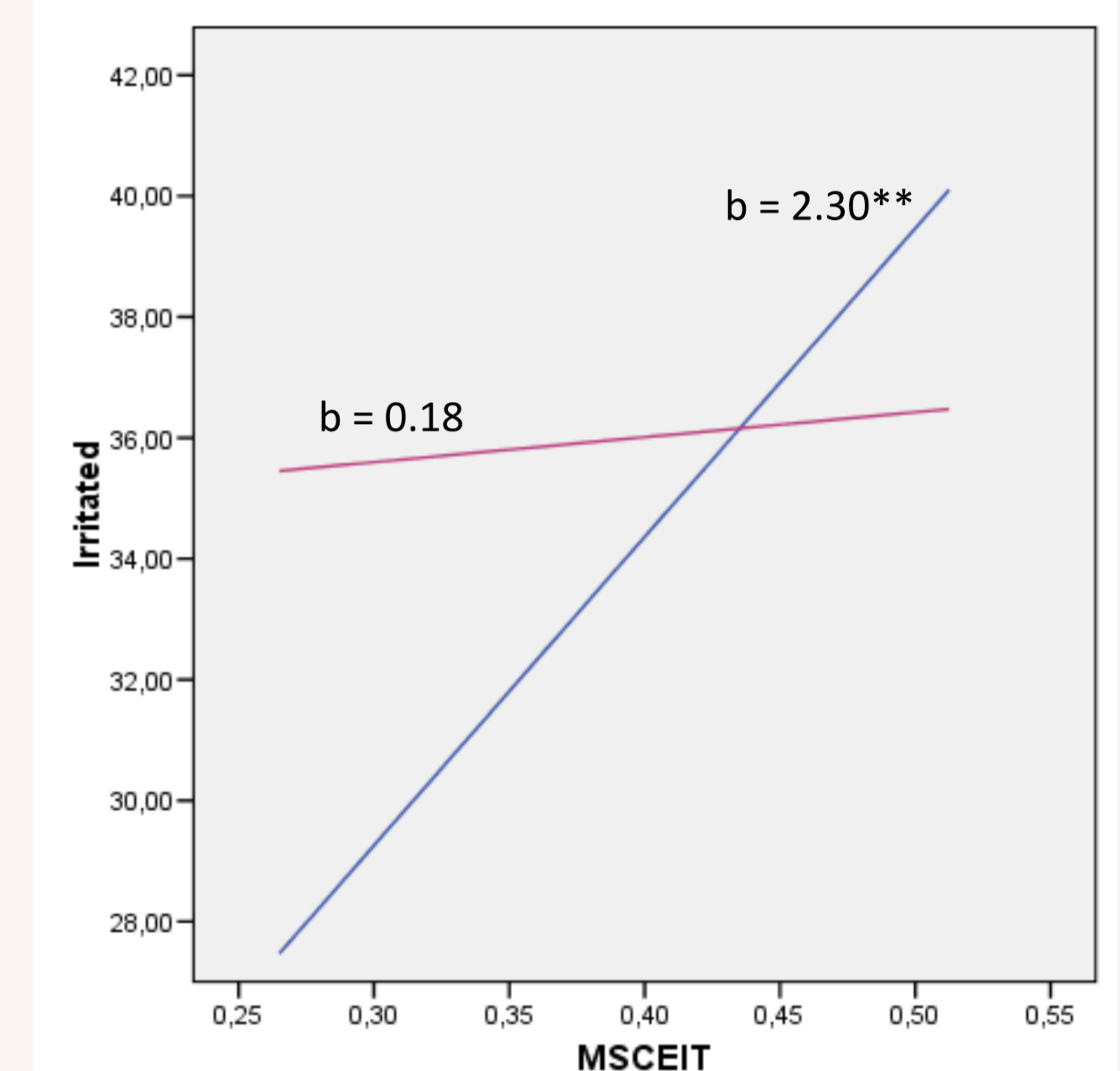
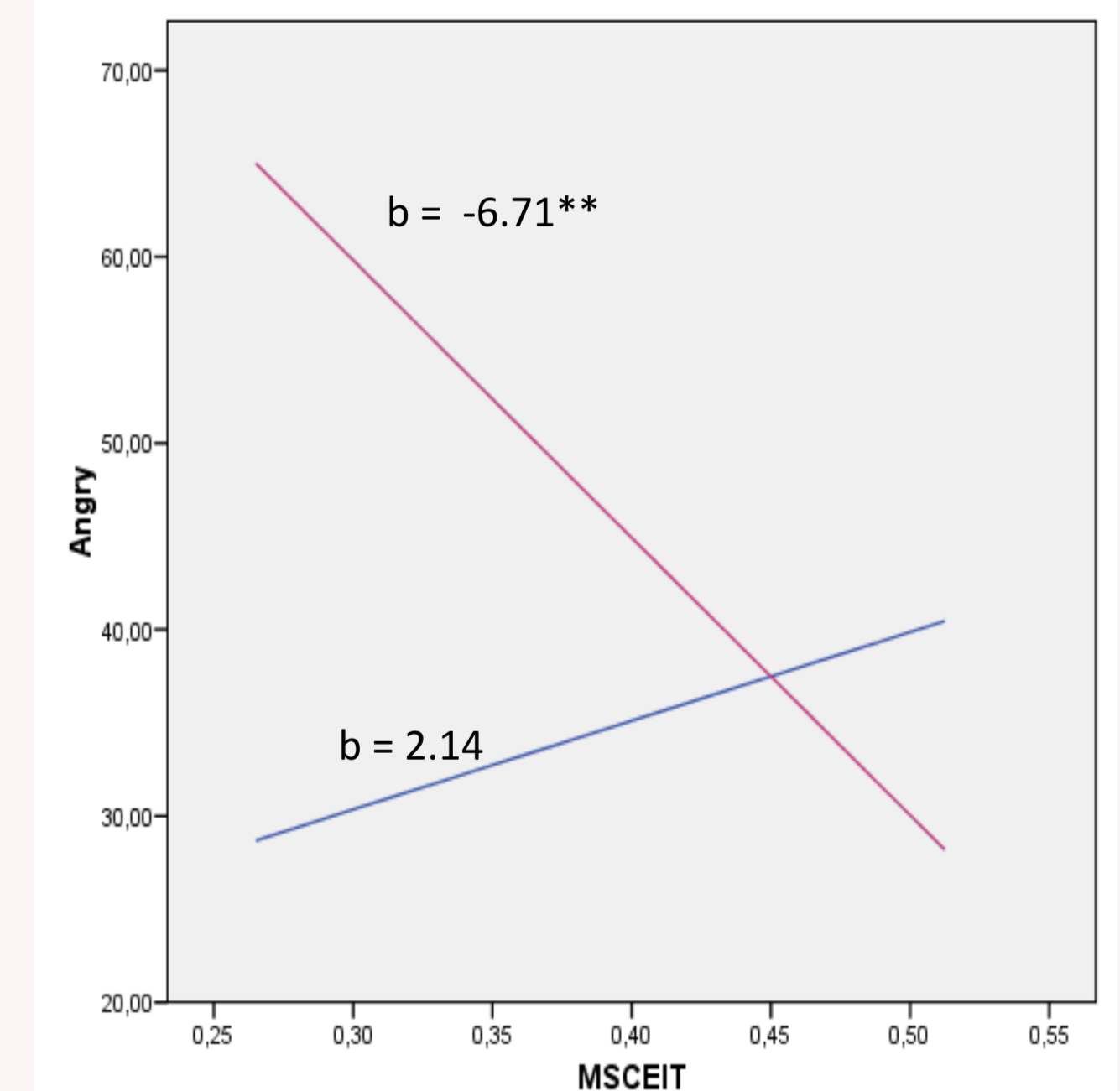


Figure 3. Effects of ability EI and gender on Angry



Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

— Male — Female

CONCLUSIONS

In line with previous studies, results showed gender differences in ability EI, direct aggression and avoidance, with higher levels of EI ability and avoidance in women, and higher levels of direct aggression in men. Interaction analyzes showed that gender moderated the ability EI-aggression relationship. In short, high levels of ability EI were related to higher levels of assertive behavior and feelings of irritation in men, but not in women. High levels of ability EI were related to lower levels of anger in women, but not in men.

These data suggest that EI ability might be a significant resource for men in the prediction of relevant social competencies. It allows them to reach a better understanding and a more efficient management of their feelings through aggressive provoking scenarios. Specifically, EI ability gives rise among men to an increased irritation (possible caused by the awareness that other people are responsible for the conflict) and, at the same time, to assertiveness, a more adaptive response than aggression. In the case of women, higher scores on ability EI were significantly associated with lower anger, while no significant associations were found in men. These results are consistent with previous studies that found higher levels of indirect aggression in women than in men. EI ability seems to help women to better manage their anger. In sum, these preliminary findings suggest the importance of incorporating gender analysis into study designs investigating the relation between EI ability and aggression.