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Perceiving Others' Feelings: The Importance of Personality and Social Structure

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Perceiving Others' Feelings: The Importance of Personality and Social Structure

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Abstract

Recent research has explored the relationship between social hierarchy and empathic accuracy—the ability to accurately infer others' mental states. In the current research, we tested the hypothesis that, regardless of one's personal level of status and power, simply *believing* that social inequality is natural and morally acceptable (e.g., endorsement of social dominance orientation, or SDO), would be negatively associated with empathic accuracy. In a sample of managers, a group for whom empathic accuracy is a valuable skill, empathic accuracy was lower for those who possessed structural power and also for those who endorsed social dominance, regardless of their structural power. Moreover, men were less empathically accurate than women, a relationship statistically mediated by men's higher SDO and greater structural power. These findings suggest that for empathic abilities, it matters just as much what you think about social hierarchies as it does where you stand within them.

Perceiving Others' Feelings: The Importance of Personality and Social Structure

Jay Gatsby, Ebenezer Scrooge, and Don Quixote, three of literature's most famous protagonists, come from vastly different eras and places. Yet they share one notable feature in common. All three come from positions of extraordinary power and privilege—Gatsby, a member of New York City's wealthy elite; Scrooge, a money lender; Quixote, a member of the Spanish nobility—and all three struggle with accurately perceiving and understanding the social world around them. Gatsby emerges as an aloof host with an unrealistic vision of the woman he pursues, Scrooge fails to sympathize with the needs of others until a supernatural experience forcibly changes his perspective, and Quixote exhibits an inability to see the world that borders on insanity. This tendency for privilege and status to come with an impaired understanding of the realities of others' experiences is not simply a literary trope. According to recent research, powerful or high-status individuals are—at least under some conditions—empathically challenged; they are ignorant of, and sometimes indifferent to, the feelings and thoughts of those around them (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Hogeveen, Inzlicht, & Obhi, 2014; Kraus et al., 2010; Van Kleef, Oveis, Van der Löwe, LuoKogan, Goetz, & Keltner, 2008). Indeed, a number of recent studies have elucidated the conditions under which power shapes empathy (Cote et al., 2011; Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009). However, despite this rich literature on how status and power impact empathic processes, little attention has been paid to whether one's dispositional *preferences* regarding power, status and social inequality bear on such processes. Regardless of their personal level of power and status, individuals vary in the extent to which they are comfortable with inequalities in the distribution of status and power. This individual difference, a stable characteristic of personality, has been fruitfully explored by researchers studying social dominance orientation (SDO). SDO is defined as an ideological

orientation grounded in the belief that it is appropriate, and even preferable, for social groups to differ in status (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994).

Because of SDO's focus on group-based social hierarchies, its proponents tend to perceive others not as individuals with idiosyncratic thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but as representatives of social groups (Carter, Hall, Carney, & Rosip, 2006; Tausch, & Hewstone, 2010). This focus on decoding group-membership cues may hamper empathic abilities, which depend on being highly attuned to the exact information—others' individuating mental states—that SDO deemphasizes. Based on this rationale, which we articulate more fully in the literature review below, we tested the hypothesis that individuals high in SDO, regardless of their own personal level of power or status, would display poorer empathic accuracy than their low-SDO counterparts.

Empathy

Colloquially, the term empathy encompasses a number of distinct, but related, processes. It includes the tendency to feel a sense of concern or sympathy for another person (i.e., empathic concern; Davis, 1983) and the ability to make accurate inferences about the nature of someone else's internal experiences (i.e., empathic accuracy, Ickes et al., 1990; Levensen & Reuf, 1992). The present work focuses on this latter construct. Empathic accuracy is a complex process that requires actively attending to the thoughts, feelings, and needs of others, as well as the context in which others are embedded (Kraus, Cote, & Keltner, 2010). Empathic accuracy facilitates many aspects of social life: the fulfillment of individual goals (e.g., Gleason et al., 2009; Lorimer & Jowett, 2009; Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2010; Simpson et al., 2011; Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis & Devoldre, 2008), affect regulation (e.g., Simpson et al., 2011), therapeutic success (e.g., Rogers, 1957), effective social support (Verhofstadt et al., 2008), and positive

relationship outcomes (e.g., Gleason, Jensen-Campbell & Ickes, 2009; Haugen, Welsh & McNutty, 2008; Kilpatrick, Bissonette, & Rusbult, 2002; Lorimer & Jowitt, 2009; Verhofstadt et al., 2008).

Several theoretical frameworks have been offered to aid understanding of the neural and biological basis of empathic processes (e.g., Bartz et al., 2010; Decety & Chaminade, 2003; Keysers & Gazzola, 2007; Levenson & Reuf, 1992; Preston & DeWaal, 2002; Zaki, Weber, Bolger & Ochsner, 2009), and research suggests that many factors contribute to variation in empathic accuracy. Predictors of empathic accuracy include (1) motivational forces (e.g., the need to belong, Picket, Gardner & Knowles, 2004), (2) situational cues (e.g., attraction, Ickes, Stinson, Bisonnette & Stella, 1990), (3) individual or group differences (e.g., gender, Klein & Hodges, 2001; Stinson & Ickes, 1992; education level, Thomas, Fletcher & Lange, 1997; self-monitoring and grade point average, Ickes et al., 1990; culture, Ma-Kellams & Blascovich, 2012), and (4) relationship-specific factors (e.g., relationship length and exposure to target others, Maragoni, Garcia, Ickes & Teng, 1995; Thomas et al., 1997).

Power, Status, and Empathic Accuracy

Of the factors known to impact empathy, one that has garnered increasing attention is social power and status. A growing body of research has compellingly demonstrated that power and status can affect various empathy-related outcomes. People who are made to feel powerful relative to others exhibit less perspective taking and worse empathic accuracy (Galinsky et al., 2006). They also display reduced motor resonance, a neural response to observing others engaging in action (Hogeveen et al., in press). Motor resonance is thought to support effective motor simulation (Hogeveen et al., in press) and empathy (Preston & de Waal, 2002). Consistent with these findings, additional research has shown that individuals who are higher in

socioeconomic status (SES) also display poorer empathic accuracy as compared to lower-SES individuals (Kraus et al., 2010). There is some evidence, however, that power can have the opposite effect, at least under certain conditions (Schmid Mast et al., 2009). For example, because power can encourage action and goal pursuit (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), for individuals who strive to be empathic, power *increases* empathic accuracy (Cote et al., 2011).

Ideology, SDO, and Social Cognition

Beyond the effect of *having* power, there is reason to suspect that one's ideological *beliefs about* power, particularly about social inequality, may be important for empathic accuracy. The *ideology as motivated social cognition* framework (Jost & Amodio, 2012) has theorized, and shown empirically, that ideologies are shaped by basic motivational drives (e.g., uncertainty reduction, threat management) and also predict a host of motivated thoughts and behaviors. As a consequence, people who differ in their abstract ideological beliefs will also tend to differ in their lower-level social-cognitive processes, such as sensitivity to basic emotions (Helzer and Pizarro 2011; Hodson and Costello 2007; Inbar et al. 2009a, b; Terrizzi et al. 2010; Tybur et al. 2010) and accuracy in dealing with novel and unexpected information (Amodio et al., 2007). Additional studies have shown that ideologies can also have personal consequences, affecting relational outcomes and social functioning (for review, see Schlenker, Chambers, & Le, 2012).

If ideology shapes social cognition and perception in ways that impact social functioning, then SDO is a prime candidate to potentially shape empathic accuracy. Individuals who endorse SDO beliefs regard some groups as naturally superior to others, view group-level inequality as inevitable and morally acceptable, and tend to pursue occupations that enhance or affirm existing social inequalities (Pratto et al, 1994). Individual differences in SDO can explain many

intergroup behaviors (Levin, Federico, Sidanius, & Rabinowitz, 2002; Sidanius, Pratto, &

Mitchell, 1994) and perpetuate oppression, inequality, and group-based conflict (Guimond,

Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003; Pratto et al., 2000). Critically, SDO beliefs shape how one

perceives and processes the social world. High-SDO individuals tend to see the social world in

terms of groups, seeing people not as individuals but as representatives of the social categories to

which they belong. High-SDO individuals tend to believe that boundaries between social groups

are clear (Haslam & Levy, 2006) and that race is a fundamental and biologically determined—

rather than socially constructed—category (Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). Accordingly, they tend

to perceive people according to their group memberships rather than their individual

characteristics. Indeed, high-SDO individuals are especially prone to making group-based

stereotypes (Carter, Hall, Carney, & Rosip, 2006; Tausch, & Hewstone, 2010) and resist

changing their stereotype-based judgments when presented with disconfirming information

(Tausch, & Hewstone, 2010). High-SDO individuals use these stereotypes to legitimize group-

based status differences (Pratto et al., 1994) and to support prejudiced attitudes toward lower-

status groups (Guimond et al., 2003; Whitley, 1999). To make stereotype-based inferences, one

must attend to group-membership cues—such as age, gender, or race—to correctly classify

individuals according to their social group or groups. Attending to the thoughts, feelings, and

experiences of others is not required and may even interfere with group-level generalizations.

Not surprisingly then, high-SDO individuals report making relatively few attempts to understand

the world from another person's point of view (Nicol & Rounding, 2013). They also experience

feelings of empathic concern infrequently and to a diminished degree (Chiao, Mathur, Harada, &

Lipke, 2009; Heaven & Bucci, 2001; McFarland, 2010; Nicol & Rounding, 2013; Pratto et al.,

1994). In short, the existing research suggests that high-SDO individuals do not routinely attend

to individuating information about other people, and care less about others' experiences. To what extent do these tendencies translate to an impaired ability to read other's mental states?

Given the focus of high-SDO individuals on group-diagnostic cues, they may be particularly poor at attending to idiosyncratic cues relating to another person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Empathic accuracy typically entails decoding nonverbal cues (e.g., eye gaze, facial muscle movements) that signal subtle, transient, shifts in thoughts and feelings. A high-SDO individual may, for example, quickly decode from static physical cues that a person is middle-aged, Caucasian, and female, but be relatively oblivious to her changes in eye gaze or her fleeting expression of surprise. In this way, by engendering a chronic fixation on group-membership cues, SDO may interfere with empathic accuracy.

The Present Study: SDO and Empathic Accuracy among Managers

In the present study, we explored whether SDO relates to empathic accuracy, over and above any potential effect of having power. We tested our hypothesis using a particularly relevant sample: real managers. This sample has a number of advantages over typical student samples.

First, this is a sample for which SDO, power, and empathy are all highly relevant and important. There is reason to believe that SDO may be well-represented in management positions, as high-SDO individuals tend to value power and status (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Duriez, Van Hiel, & Kossowska, 2005) and tend to attain high-status roles. One study, for example, found that high-SDO individuals were especially likely to emerge as leaders in a dyadic laboratory task (Son Hing, Bobocel, Zanna, & McBride 2007). Moreover, empathic accuracy is central to many of the challenges of management. Managers benefit greatly from knowing what other people are thinking and feeling. A manager who lacks empathic accuracy

may struggle in numerous ways, from failing to detect dissatisfaction among subordinates to missing opportunities to create and claim value in negotiations (Elfenbein, Foo, White, Tan, & Aik, 2007; Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008; Neale & Bazerman 1983). Deficits in empathic accuracy among managers could have concrete organizational consequences, including inefficient coordination among team members, less satisfied subordinates (at least for female managers; Byron, 2007), stalled or suboptimal negotiations (Elfenbein et al., 2007; Galinsky et al., 2008; Neale & Bazerman 1983), and general deficits in workplace performance or effectiveness (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979). It is clear from these findings that are many incentives for managers to be good at reading others' mental states. If high-SDO managers nevertheless struggle with empathic accuracy despite these powerful incentives this would provide a compelling demonstration of the importance of accounting for dispositional preferences for social hierarchy when trying to predict differences in empathic abilities.

Second, by studying managers, we are able to assess natural variation in the actual power and authority that individuals possess within their organizations. By doing so, we are able to study the relationships of interest in an ecologically valid way. This feature is particularly important because it allowed us to test the replicability of previous work on power and empathic accuracy, which have typically relied on manipulating power and testing its impact on empathic processes in the lab among student samples (Galinsky et al., 2006; Hogeveen et al., 2014; cf. Cote et al., 2011; Schmid Mast et al, 2009).

We made two primary predictions about the link between SDO and empathic accuracy among managers. First, following past research, we predicted that having power in one's organizational role, which we assessed in terms of the *number of subordinates* a manager has and

the *authority* the manager has over those subordinates, would be associated with poorer empathic accuracy. Second, we predicted that managers who routinely view others solely in terms of their location in the larger dominance hierarchy (i.e., those high on SDO) would also show poorer empathic accuracy. Critically, we predicted that this effect would occur over and above the effect of power. That is, we expected that high-SDO managers would show lower empathic accuracy, regardless of whether they experienced high or low power in their jobs. We also measured several control variables. First, because SES has been linked to empathic accuracy (Kraus et al., 2010), we measured SES (education and family income) so that we could test whether the predicted relationships between empathic accuracy and both SDO and power were independent of any potential relationship to SES. Second, because the empathic accuracy task used in the current study features some fairly uncommon words (e.g., aghast), we measured participants' verbal knowledge so that we could rule it out as a potential confound.

Method

Participants

In targeting a manager sample, we used the same methodology used by Sherman et al., (2012, Study 2). Specifically, we recruited from several executive education programs at Harvard (designed for public-sector professionals) and also from the greater Boston area. Managers were identified as those who answered yes to the question "Are you responsible for managing others?" ($n = 84$). Individuals who were not fluent in English ($n = 2$) were excluded, leaving a final sample of 82 managers (63 male; $M_{age} = 44.68$, $SD_{age} = 6.72$; range = 30 - 59).

Primary Measures

Empathic accuracy. The "Reading the Mind in the Eyes" test (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001) assesses the ability to recognize complex mental states from limited facial cues. In each of 36

trials, participants were shown a photograph of the eye region of an individual's face and were

asked which of four words (e.g., *terrified*, *upset*, *arrogant*, or *annoyed*) best described the

target's current mental state.

SDO. Participants completed the 14-item Social Dominance Orientation scale (Pratto et

al., 1994) using a seven-point scale (1 = *very negative,* 4 = *neither positive nor negative,* 7 = *very*

positive). Items were averaged into a single composite measure (α = .87).

Number of subordinates. Participants answered the following two questions: "How

many people do you, yourself, manage?" and "How many people are subordinate to you within

your line of management (i.e., direct and indirect reports)?" Responses were log-transformed to

reduce skew.

Authority over subordinates. Participants responded to the following four statements:

"I can punish or reward subordinates," "I can promote or demote subordinates," "I am expected

to motivate my subordinates," and "I supervise subordinates and evaluate or correct their work as

necessary" (seven-point scales: 1 = *much less than others in my organization*, 7 = *much more*

than others in my organization). Items were averaged into a single authority composite measure

(α = .88).

Control Measures

Verbal knowledge. We administered to a large subset of participants (*n* = 63) 29 items

from the vocabulary subtest of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Third Edition (WAIS-III;

Wechsler, 1997). Participants were shown a word and asked to define it. Performance was

untimed, and participants completed the task at their own pace. Performance was scored,

following the scoring manual, by two coders (intercoder reliability was .70).

Socioeconomic status. Participants indicated their level of education (1 = *high school*, 2 = *some college*, 3 = *2-year degree*, 4 = *4-year degree*, 5 = *post-graduate/professional degree*, or *other*), and family income (1 = *$0-$24,999*, 2 = *$25,000-$49,999*, 3 = *$50,000-$74,999*, 4 = *$75,000-$99,999*, 5 = *$100,000-$149,000*, 6 = *$150,000-$249,999*, 7 = *$250,000-$499,999*, 8 = *$500,000+*). Outliers (values exceeding three SDs above or below the mean) were excluded from analysis.

Results

Power, SDO, and Empathic Accuracy

Of the 36 trials in the empathic accuracy task, participants, on average, provided a correct response on approximately 26 trials (M = 26.10, SD = 3.73). Bivariate correlations among the primary variables (see Table 1) revealed that empathic accuracy was negatively associated with SDO (r = -.28, p = .01) and with authority (r = -.24, p = .03) but was unrelated to the two quantitative leadership measures (number of total subordinates and number of direct reports; p's > .86). SDO and authority were unrelated (r = -.05, p = .64), suggesting that each was independently related to empathic accuracy. This was confirmed in regression analyses. To account for the potential influence of demographic variables, we tested a three-step regression model, entering age, educational level, and family income in Step 1, adding authority in Step 2, and then adding SDO in Step 3. The Step 1 model was non-significant, F(3, 76) = .76, p = .50, R^2 = .03. In Step 2, however, the addition of authority significantly increased the variance explained (R^2 change = .05, F(1,75) = 4.20, p = .04), indicating that it was a significant negative predictor of empathic accuracy (β = -.26, p = .04). Finally, our primary hypothesis was supported in Step 3: the addition of SDO significantly increased the amount of variance explained (R^2 change = .08, F(1,74) = 6.60, p = 01). In this final model, both authority and SDO were significant

negative predictors of empathic accuracy ($\beta = -.28$, $p = .01$, for SDO; $\beta = -.28$, $p = .03$, for Authority). Thus, SDO predicted poorer empathic accuracy over and above the effect of having authority in one's position. Neither relationship varied significantly as a function of the gender of the target in the empathic accuracy task. Moreover, the results remained statistically significant if verbal knowledge was added as a predictor.

Gender Differences in Empathic Accuracy

Analysis of gender revealed that women performed better on the empathic accuracy task than men ($M = 27.63$, $SD = 3.81$ vs. $M = 25.64$, $SD = 3.60$), $t(80) = 2.09$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.54$). To test whether either of the two significant predictors of empathic accuracy—SDO and authority—contributed to the gender difference, we tested a multiple mediator model using bootstrapping methods (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Men scored higher on SDO (B = .53, $p = .04$) and had greater authority (B = .50, $p = .056$). Each factor was, in turn, associated with poorer empathic accuracy (for SDO: B = -.26, $p = .02$; for authority: B = -.23, $p = .04$). The overall mediation was significant, as indicated by a significant total indirect effect (B = .25, 95% Confidence Interval (CI) = .06 to .60). Once SDO and authority were taken into account, the direct effect of gender on empathic accuracy was no longer significant (B = .28, $p = .28$). Regarding the individual mediators, SDO was a significant mediator (indirect effect = .14; 95% CI = .01 to .39). Authority (indirect effect = .11) was a marginally significant mediator; it was not significant at the 95% level (95% CI = -.003 to .35) but was significant at the 90% level (90% CI = .01 to .31).[1]

Discussion

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[1] We conducted additional mediation analyses to check the robustness of the observed relationships. The mediation results remain unchanged if the demographic variables (age, education level, and family income) and verbal knowledge were added as covariates.

In the current research, we tested whether the empathic accuracy of mangers was related to their ideological beliefs about the acceptability of social inequality, regardless of the amount of power they themselves possessed. We found that the more managers endorsed social inequality, and the more they held authority over subordinates, the more they failed to accurately infer the mental states of target individuals. The negative relationships between these hierarchy-relevant factors and empathic accuracy could not be explained by age, socioeconomic status, or verbal knowledge. Thus, the study identifies a stable personality characteristic on which managers vary that can predict empathic accuracy.

The finding that managers with substantial authority over their subordinates were less empathically accurate than others is consistent with several studies showing that temporarily boosting one's sense of power via short-lived laboratory manipulations can decrease perspective taking and empathic accuracy (Galinsky et al., 2006; Hogeveen et al., 2014; cf. Cote et al., 2011; Schmid Mast et al, 2009). The present findings extend this work by showing this pattern applies to power that arises from occupying a management position within an organization. The current research also confirms laboratory studies that have suggested that organizational leaders may suffer from relatively poor empathic accuracy because of the elevated power their roles afford. Managers who had the most authority over their subordinates performed the worst on the empathic accuracy task.

Managers need not have great power to display poor empathic accuracy, as confirmed by the independent negative relationship between SDO and empathic accuracy. High-SDO managers, regardless of their level of authority, displayed relatively poor empathic accuracy. This finding highlights the role of ideology in shaping social perceptions. Ideology serves as a lens through which one experiences the social world. The lens of SDO focuses on group-based

status asymmetries. The lower empathic ability of high-SDO individuals highlights the substantial interpersonal consequences of viewing people as representatives of groups rather than as individuals with unique thoughts, intentions, and feelings. Critically, we were able to isolate the independent contributions of structural power (authority over subordinates) and SDO to empathic abilities. In doing so, we illustrate that, as far as empathic accuracy is concerned, it matters just as much what you think about the existence of social hierarchies as it does where you stand within those hierarchies.

The present study also contributes our understanding of the link between gender and SDO, We found high-SDO managers struggled to decode the mental states of both men and women, suggesting that the empathy deficit of high-SDO individuals does not depend on the target's membership in a low-status group. Yet the gender of the perceiver did matter: men performed significantly worse on the empathic accuracy task than women. Although this finding is consistent with some past research that has found gender differences in empathic accuracy (Galinsky et al., 2006, Study 3; Hall, 1978), evidence suggests that such differences may not necessarily be hard-wired, but rather can be attributed to more fluid contextual and individual difference variables, such as the motivation to be empathic (Hall & Mast, 2008; Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000; Klein & Hodges, 2001). Consistent with this view, we found that the gender difference was statistically mediated by the two individual difference predictors of empathy: SDO and authority. Men performed relatively poorly on the empathic accuracy task because they were more likely than women to endorse social dominance and to have greater authority over their subordinates.

The current findings align with recent work highlighting the interpersonal consequences of SDO. Most studies on SDO have focused on intergroup dynamics—how individuals high on

this dimension tend to exhibit thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that promote and sustain inequality between groups (for a review, see Ho et al., 2012). The exception to this pattern was a recent study by Sidanius, Kteily, Skeffington, Ho, Duriez and Sibley (2013) on the role of SDO and empathy in testing Duckitt's dual process model of prejudice. In the study, they tested a related but distinct component of empathy, empathic concern. The authors found that individuals who are low in compassion and empathic concern tend to exhibit higher levels of SDO; in addition, SDO further reduces compassion and empathic concern. The current findings and those of Sidanius et al. (2013) suggest that an exclusive focus on intergroup phenomena may provide an incomplete picture of the various ways in which SDO shapes social life. SDO is an ideology with both intergroup and interpersonal ramifications.

One limitation of the present work is our reliance on observational measures of power and social dominance beliefs, which we have used to argue that SDO may shape empathic abilities. Given that we did not manipulate SDO directly, we cannot rule out the reverse causal direction. That is, impairments in empathic abilities may predispose one to SDO. Indeed, it may be easier to accept social inequalities if one is largely blind to other's mental states. Conversely, those who are highly attuned to what others are thinking and feeling may readily perceive the impact of such inequalities on lower status individuals and groups. As a result, they may find inequalities harder to justify. Future research will be essential for testing this possibility.

This limitation notwithstanding, our finding that these relationships emerged among real managers highlights the potential impact on organizations. SDO and authority are highly relevant factors within organizational hierarchies. High-SDO individuals value power and status (Duriez & Van Hiel, 2002; Duriez et al., 2005) and may pursue management roles frequently and successfully (Son Hing et al., 2007). Whether they rise to the top or remain in low-level

managerial roles, their belief system may cause them to struggle with tasks that depend on being able to accurately infer what other people are thinking and feeling.

More broadly, these findings contribute to a growing body of work on social intelligence (Goleman, 2006) and its predecessor, emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1989; Ickes, 1997, 2003). Although emotional and social intelligence differ in their level of analyses (emotional intelligence focuses on intra-individual forces whereas social intelligence focuses on inter-individual connections), the ability to accurately understand others' experiences plays a crucial role in both, as it critically impacts individuals' social adjustment across numerous life domains (Goleman, 1995). Importantly, empathic accuracy is a particularly powerful predictor of leadership outcomes (see Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008, for review). This relationship, considered alongside our findings, suggests that one's dispositional preferences regarding hierarchy and level of structural power may have implications for one's success in leadership roles.

In sum, our findings reveal that one's abstract belief system—whether one believes that social dominance is morally acceptable or not—can impact one's capacity to empathize. This knowledge advances both theory and practice, illuminating a novel factor that shapes empathy and providing concrete guidance to those striving to build successful organizations.

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Table 1. Intercorrelations among primary variables.

	Empathic Accuracy	SDO	Authority	Number of total subordinates	Number of direct reports	Verbal knowledge
Empathic Accuracy	--					
SDO	-.28*	--				
Authority	-.24*	-.05	--			
Number of total subordinates	-.003	-.11	.36**	--		
Number of direct reports	-.02	.02	.31**	.33**	--	
Verbal knowledge	-.02	-.24	-.003	-.06	.24	--

Note. *< .05, ** < .01

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