

Concept Paper Template

Provisional Paper Title: Relationship between schizophrenia polygenic risk (as expressed through placental biology) and general psychopathology

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P.I. Sponsor: Ahmad Hariri and Avshalom Caspi

Today's Date: 2/28/18

Please describe your proposal in 2-3 pages with sufficient detail for helpful review.

Objective of the study:

Increasing research has identified a general liability for psychopathology, often called the 'p factor' (Caspi et al., 2014; Lahey et al., 2017); however, the mechanisms underlying such a general factor are not yet clear. Our prior research sought to examine the neural underpinnings of this p factor in order to begin to identify common mechanisms underlying risk for developing multiple mental disorders (Romer et al., 2017). We identified deficits in cerebellar and occipital gray matter volume and poorer integrity of pontine white matter tracts as uniquely associated with higher p factor scores in a sample of 1236 university students aged 18-22 as part of the Duke Neurogenetics Study (DNS). The results of our analyses provide initial evidence that structural alterations in cortico-cerebellar circuitry supporting core functions related to the basic integration, coordination, and monitoring of information may contribute to a general liability for common mental disorders.

In addition to examining the neural mechanisms underlying the p factor in DNS, we also began investigating genetic contributions to this general liability factor. Similar to findings from Caspi et al. (2014), we found that thought disorders, including mania, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and psychosis, were strongly correlated with the p factor in the DNS. As a result, we examined whether greater polygenic risk for schizophrenia, as one form of thought disorder, was associated with higher general psychopathology (p factor scores) in 524 non-Hispanic Caucasian DNS participants. We found that individuals with higher schizophrenia polygenic risk scores (PRS) had higher p factor scores; however, this positive association was relatively weak ($r=.099$, $p=.024$).

New research has examined the convergence of schizophrenia polygenic risk and placental biology (Ursini et al., in press, Nature Medicine). In particular, Ursini et al. (in press) identified a novel PRS based on genes that are dynamically modulated and highly expressed in placenta and that interact with obstetrical complications to increase risk for schizophrenia. Using this placental PRS (PlacPRS), we examined whether genes implicated in schizophrenia and specifically expressed in placenta might be more strongly related to p factor scores than genes implicated in schizophrenia that are not expressed in placenta in the 524 non-Hispanic Caucasian DNS participants. We found a slightly stronger positive relationship between PlacPRS

($r=.125$, $p=.004$) and p scores as opposed to the association between the full schizophrenia PRS and p ($r=.099$, $p=.024$). This is noteworthy because PlacPRS has much fewer loci underlying the PRS calculation than the full schizophrenia PRS. We also found that the PRS based on genes not expressed in placenta (i.e. non-PlacPRS) was unrelated to p factor scores ($r=.020$, $p=.647$), suggesting that genes specifically expressed in placenta related to schizophrenia risk are predictive of p factor scores in the DNS. Finally, we found a significant moderation of the relationship between placental PRS and p factor scores by pons white matter integrity. This moderation suggests that individuals with greater schizophrenia PlacPRS and who show poorer integrity of pontine white matter tracts have the greatest general liability for psychopathology.

In the current study, we propose to determine whether the associations between placental-based and non-placental-based schizophrenia PRS and p factor scores will replicate in the Dunedin cohort. We also propose to investigate potential moderators of this association including obstetrical complications and differences in brain structure.

Data analysis methods:

Analyses will be conducted in the following four steps:

- 1) Placental and Non-Placental PRS will be generated at $p < 5^{-08}$ and 1^{-06} using summary statistics by the Weinberger group as performed in Ursini et al. (in press). An obstetrical complications index will be created by the Weinberger group using the McNeil-Sjöström scale (McNeil et al., 1994; McNeil, Cantor-Graae, & Sjoström, 1994) as performed in Ursini et al.
- 2) The proposing author, Adrienne Romer, will examine associations between Placental and Non-Placental PRS (at $p < 5^{-08}$ and 1^{-06}) and p factor scores using partial correlations controlling for sex. This analysis answers the question of whether schizophrenia polygenic risk as expressed specifically through placental biology predicts a general liability for psychopathology. We hypothesize that p scores will be positively related to placental and unrelated to non-placental polygenic risk.
- 3) The proposing author will examine whether the association between PRS and p scores is moderated by obstetrical complications. This analysis examines the question of whether individuals with higher schizophrenia genetic risk as expressed through placental biology and greater history of obstetrical complications are at greatest risk for developing common mental disorders. We also will test whether individuals with serious obstetrical complications have higher PRS than individuals without complications, which was observed in the Ursini et al. study.
- 4) Finally, the proposing author will examine if the association between PRS and p scores is moderated by differences in gray matter volume of the cerebellum and occipital lobe and differences in fractional anisotropy (a metric of white matter integrity) of the pons. These analyses test whether individuals with higher schizophrenia genetic risk as expressed through placental biology and deficits in brain structure are at the greatest risk for developing multiple mental disorders.

Variables needed at which ages:

- Placental and Non-Placental PRS at $p < 5^{-08}$ and 1^{-06} thresholds. The Weinberger group will calculate these scores.
- The Weinberger group will calculate an obstetric complications index using scoring from the McNeil-Sjöström scale. To calculate this index, we request obstetric complications data from Shalev et al. (2014) including:
 - maternal diabetes
 - glycosuria
 - epilepsy
 - hypertension
 - eclampsia
 - antepartum hemorrhage
 - accidental hemorrhage
 - placenta previa
 - having had a previous small baby
 - gestational age < 37 weeks or > 41 weeks
 - birth weight < 2.5 kg
 - small size for gestational age
 - major or minor neurologic signs of the neonatal period (eg, jitteriness, tenseness, limpness, hypotonicity)
 - Rh incompatibility
 - ABO incompatibility
 - nonhemolytic hyperbilirubinemia
 - hypoxia at birth (idiopathic respiratory distress syndrome or apnea)
 - low Apgar score at birth
- p factor scores from the bifactor model (from Honalee)
- Extracted gray matter volume values for neocerebellum and occipital lobe region of interest (ROI; already have this from imaging data set per Annchen)
- Extracted fractional anisotropy values for pons ROI (already have this from imaging data set per Annchen)

Significance of the Study (for theory, research methods or clinical practice):

This research may begin to help us better understand the biological mechanisms underlying a general psychopathology factor. In particular, if our hypotheses are supported, this research would suggest that the biological mechanisms underlying schizophrenia may also underlie risk for developing a range of mental disorders including internalizing and externalizing disorders. One such mechanism or pathway underlying general liability for psychopathology may be conferred through placental abnormalities and early life complications in addition to deficits in cortico-cerebellar circuitry responsible for basic processing and monitoring of information. An association of PlacPRS with psychopathology ratings during adult life add strong evidence to the early developmental origins of a bias to the expression of psychopathology.

References cited:

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- McNeil, T.F., et al. (1994). Obstetric complications in histories of monozygotic twins discordant and concordant for schizophrenia. *Acta Psychiatr Scand 89*, 196-204.
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Data Security Agreement

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| Proposing Author | Adrienne Romer |
| Today's Date | 2/19/18 |

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