Neurobiological correlates of antisociality across adolescence and young adulthood: a multi-sample, multi-method study

Neeltje E. Blankenstein1, Mark de Rooij2, Joost van Ginkel2, Tom F. Wilderjans2,3, Esther L. de Ruigh1, Helena C. Oldenhof1, Josjan Zijlmans1, Tijs Jambroes1, Evelien Platje4, Marjan de Vries-Bouw5, Susan Branje6, Wim H. J. Meeus6, Robert R. J. M. Vermeiren7, Arne Popma1 and Lucres M. C. Jansen1

Original Article

Cite this article: Blankenstein NE et al (2023). Neurobiological correlates of antisociality across adolescence and young adulthood: a multi-sample, multi-method study. Psychological Medicine 53, 1834–1849. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721003457

Received: 18 December 2020
Revised: 27 July 2021
Accepted: 2 August 2021
First published online: 27 August 2021

Key words:
Adolescence and young adulthood; antisocial; autonomic nervous system; cortisol; heterogeneity; hypothalamus–pituitary–adrenal axis; testosterone

Author for correspondence:
Neeltje E. Blankenstein,
E-mail: n.blankenstein@amsterdamumc.nl

Abstract

Background. Antisociality across adolescence and young adulthood puts individuals at high risk of developing a variety of problems. Prior research has linked antisociality to autonomic nervous system and endocrinological functioning. However, there is large heterogeneity in antisocial behaviors, and these neurobiological measures are rarely studied conjointly, limited to small specific studies with narrow age ranges, and yield mixed findings due to the type of behavior examined.

Methods. We harmonized data from 1489 participants (9–27 years, 67% male), from six heterogeneous samples. In the resulting dataset, we tested relations between distinct dimensions of antisociality and heart rate, pre-ejection period (PEP), respiratory sinus arrhythmia, respiration rate, skin conductance levels, testosterone, basal cortisol, and the cortisol awakening response (CAR), and test the role of age throughout adolescence and young adulthood.

Results. Three dimensions of antisociality were uncovered: ‘callos-unemotional (CU)/manipulative traits’, ‘intentional aggression/conduct’, and ‘reactivity/impulsivity/irritability’. Shorter PEPs and higher testosterone were related to CU/manipulative traits, and a higher CAR is related to both CU/manipulative traits and intentional aggression/conduct. These effects were stable across age.

Conclusions. Across a heterogeneous sample and consistent across development, the CAR may be a valuable measure to link to CU/manipulative traits and intentional aggression, while sympathetic arousal and testosterone are additionally valuable to understand CU/manipulative traits. Together, these findings deepen our understanding of the fundamental mechanisms underlying different components of antisociality. Finally, we illustrate the potential of using current statistical techniques for combining multiple datasets to draw robust conclusions about biobehavioral associations.

Introduction

Antisociality puts adolescents and young adults at high risk of developing a wide range of problems (Brazil, van Dongen, Maes, Mars, & Baskin-Sommers, 2018). However, there is large heterogeneity in the severity and type of antisociality across adolescence and young adulthood (Moffitt, 2018). To better understand these individual differences, researchers related neurobiological measures such as autonomic nervous system (ANS) and neuroendocrinological functioning to antisociality (e.g. Alink et al., 2008; Dekkers et al., 2019; Portnoy & Farrington, 2015). However, diverse findings and limitations in study designs hinder firm conclusions on these biobehavioral associations across age. Therefore, we examined the continuous relation between multiple neurobiological measures and distinct dimensions of antisociality across the entire adolescent and young adult age range (9–27 years) by harmonizing six heterogeneous study samples (N = 1489).

A heightened tendency for antisociality has been associated with low arousal (sensation seeking hypothesis; Zuckerman, 1990) and a lack of fear (fearlessness hypothesis; Raine & Liu, 1998). Lower resting heart rate (HR), a marker of low ANS activity, is often found to
be associated with higher levels of aggression, delinquency, (violent) offending, and psychopathic traits, irrespective of age or sex (Portnoy & Farrington, 2015). In contrast, a higher respiration rate (RR) – a general measure of ANS functioning – was related to antisociality characterized by heightened emotionality and was more prominent in girls than in boys (and was higher in girls than in boys; Oldenhof et al., 2019). This fits well with models stating that callous-unemotional (CU) aggressive behavior is related to low arousal, while anxiety- or frustration-based aggression is related to high arousal (Blair, 2013; Fanti, 2018).

In addition, studies on the parasympathetic branch of the ANS (promoting resting conditions) show that respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA) an index of PNS activity and a marker of self-regulation is lowered in antisocial youths (Beauchaine & Thayer, 2015). This seems related to dysfunctions in emotion-regulation abilities. However, findings diverge between sexes, or studies included only boys, and non-significant findings have also been reported (Beauchaine, Hong, & Marsh, 2008; Bimmel, Van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Juffer, & De Geus, 2008; De Vries-Bouw et al., 2011; De Wied, Boxtel, Posthumus, Goudena, & Matthys, 2009; de Wied, van Boxtel, Matthys, & Meeus, 2012; Marsh, Beauchaine, & Williams, 2008; Oldenhof et al., 2019).

Findings on the sympathetic branch of the ANS (promoting fight or flight reactions) are also mixed depending on the type of antisociality studied. Lowered SNS (longer pre-ejection period, PEP) has been associated with conduct disorder, while heightened SNS (higher skin conductance levels, SCLs) with more grandiose-manipulative traits, with effects primarily found in adolescence, and less in childhood (Beauchaine, Gatzke-Kopp, & Mead, 2007; Beauchaine, Katkin, Strassberg, & Snarr, 2001; MacDougall, Salekin, & Gillen, 2019; Marsh et al., 2008). However, non-significant findings have also been reported (van Zonneveld, Platje, de Sonneville, van Goozén, & Swaab, 2017). Thus, findings on ANS functioning suggest specific associations with different aspects of antisociality, yet importantly, findings are inconclusive, mostly limited to males, and the role of age remains unclear.

Findings on neuroendocrinological measures and antisociality in youth also depend on the specific behavior examined. First, testosterone has been associated with aggression (although modestly), social dominance, impulsivity, and approach-related behaviors (Archer, 2006; Carré & Archer, 2018; Geniole et al., 2020; Peper, Braams, Blankenstein, Bos, & Crone, 2018; Rowe, Maughan, Worthman, Costello, & Angold, 2004), but there is limited evidence for associations with conduct disorder- or CU-like traits (e.g. Loney, Butler, Lima, Counts, & Eckel, 2006; but see Pajer et al., 2006). Second, lower levels of basal cortisol or a lower cortisol awakening response (CAR) have been related to heightened cortisol levels relate to status-seeking behaviors such as dominance (Mehta & Josephs, 2010). A recent meta-analysis that focused on these behaviors, and in addition on risk taking, aggression, and psychopathy, only moderately supports this ‘dual-hormone hypothesis’ (Dekkers et al., 2019). It is currently unclear if this dual-hormone hypothesis applies to specific dimensions of antisociality across adolescence and young adulthood. This warrants a robust study on neuroendocrinological factors and antisociality across the entire adolescent age range in the context of multiple neurobiological measures.

In sum, although prior studies have laid the groundwork for biological underpinnings of antisociality in youth, many used case-control designs, narrow age ranges, and modest sample sizes. As a result, little is known about the relation between the severity of distinct dimensions of antisociality and neurobiological functioning throughout adolescence and young adulthood, ranging from typically developing individuals to individuals with severe antisociality. Indeed, recent frameworks call for a more dimensional approach to understand mental dysfunctions (Insel et al., 2010), which may eventually aid in the assessment of specific forms of antisocial behavior in practice (Glenn, 2019). Studying a large heterogeneous sample may therefore provide a deeper, fundamental insight into these dynamics.

The current study

We studied (1) effects of multiple neurobiological measures in unison (i.e. conjointly), (2) in a large heterogeneous sample, (3) across a broad age range, and (4) on multiple dimensions of antisociality. We combined six heterogeneous samples (1489 participants, combined age range = 9–27 years, 67% male) to examine associations between ANS and neuroendocrinological measures and antisociality across the entire adolescent and young adult age range. Because we set out to examine heterogeneity in antisociality throughout adolescence and young adulthood, we included individuals from populations with varying backgrounds in antisocial severity: adolescents from the general population, adolescents referred to a diversion program (i.e. due to minor delinquent acts), adolescents with a conduct disorder diagnosis, adolescents and young adults currently in closed youth care or detained in juvenile detention center due to severe antisocial behavior, and young adults characterized by a multitude of problems. The inclusion of these varied samples thus enables to study this heterogeneity. In this study, a prominent focus was thus to harmonize and find the optimal statistical approach for analyzing multiple datasets in order to robustly answer our research questions.

Our main goal was to uncover specific dimensions of antisociality and subsequently aimed to relate these to ANS measures [HR, RR, PEP (SNS), RSA (PNS), SCL (SNS)], testosterone, cortisol, and the CAR. We focused on resting measures, which give an index of the body’s neurophysiological and neuroendocrinological attunement of the stress system. We included testosterone for its role in aggression and social-dominance-related behaviors. We expected that ANS measures would differentially relate to specific dimensions of antisociality (Portnoy & Farrington, 2015), whereas testosterone would relate to dimensions such as aggression and social dominance (Archer, 2006; Dekkers et al., 2019). Finally, we expected that heightened cortisol functioning related to reduced psychopathic/CU-like traits (Loney et al., 2006) and heightened aggression (McBurnett et al., 2000; Yi-Zhen & Jun-Xia, 2009). For each dimension of antisociality we tested associations with all neurobiological measures in unison, and tested the role of age and sex.
Methods and materials

Participants

Participants came from six samples of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, collected in the Netherlands between 2002 and 2016. All studies were approved by their respective ethical committees and all participants and caregivers gave written informed consent. The complete sample included 1489 participants with a total of 2443 observations, due to the longitudinal nature of two of the samples (see below). Participants were between 9.00 and 27.18 years old (M_age = 16.54, S.D._age = 2.39), and 67% were male (note that the age range of girls was limited to 18 years, warranting a cautious interpretation of related effects). Table 1 provides an overview of each sample’s characteristics and descriptive statistics of the behavioral outcome variables and the neurobiological independent variables. Below we give a brief description of each sample (see also online Supplementary Appendix A and Table S1). Papers that include data that were used in the current study are indicated with an asterisk in the reference list. All samples included at least five neurobiological measures, and at least one self-report measure on antisociality.

Sample descriptions

Sample 1 included three annual waves of data of the longitudinal population sample RADAR-Y (Branje & Meeus, 2018). Sample 2 included two waves of data of male adolescents who were referred to a delinquency diversion program after having committed a minor offense, and non-delinquent controls (Popma et al., 2006, 2007). Sample 3 consisted of adolescent girls and boys with conduct disorder and controls from the Dutch portion of a European multi-center study (Freitag, 2014; Oldenhof et al., 2019). Sample 4 consisted of adolescents (girls and boys) in a closed treatment facility for compulsory treatment due to severe antisocial behavior (Jambroes et al., 2019). Sample 5 included adolescent boys in juvenile justice institutions, referred because of severe behavioral problems or criminal offenses (de Ruigh, Jansen, Vermeiren, & Popma, 2019). Finally, sample 6 included multi-problem adolescent and young adult males who struggle with a variety of psychosocial problems and have a history of juvenile justice problems (Zijlmans et al., 2018, 2019).

Self-report measures

To derive dimensions of antisociality we used the following self-report measures: the Reactive and Proactive Aggression questionnaire (RPQ; Raine et al., 2006), the Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), the Adult Self-Report (ASR; Rescorla & Achenbach, 2004), and the Youth Psychopathic Index-short version (YPI-sv; van Baardewijk et al., 2010). The RPQ assesses 23 proactive and reactive aggressive actions on a three-point Likert scale (0: never, 1: sometimes, 2: often; for example: ‘Got angry when I did not get my way’). For the YSR and ASR we included 31 and 29 items of aggressive and rule-breaking behaviors, respectively, which are scored on a three-point Likert scale (0: never, 1: sometimes, 2: often; for example: ‘I don’t keep by the rules at school/work or somewhere else’). Finally, the YPI-sv assessed 18 psychopathic traits, on a four-point Likert scale (ranging from 0: Does not apply at all, to 3: Applies very well; for example: ‘It’s easy for me to manipulate people’).

Importantly, these questionnaires were not administered in each sample, but there was overlap in used items from the questionnaires across samples (see online Supplementary Table S1), and our goal was to study associations between broad dimensions of antisociality and neurobiology. Therefore, we entered all raw item scores – of all samples together – in a principal component analyses (PCA)-like method [coupled matrix factorization (CMF)] that took the overlap in questionnaires (items) between samples into account. As such, broad dimensions of antisociality were derived in a data-driven way rather than including pre-defined subscales of these questionnaires in only a portion of the samples. Importantly, this technique derived antisociality measures representing the same broad dimensions across the different samples (see section ‘Data analyses’).

Neurobiological measures

Neurobiological measures included resting HR, PEP, RSA, RR, SCLs, testosterone levels, cortisol, and the CAR. Specific data collection procedures and analysis methods for each sample can be found in the original respective papers (indicated with an asterisk in the reference list). In the online Supplementary materials (Appendix B), we briefly describe assessment protocols across samples. Online Supplementary Table S1 depicts data availability of the samples, and Fig. 1(d–l) depicts raw observed data of the neurobiological measures across age, showing considerable between-subject heterogeneity.

Data analyses

We used three sets of analyses, which we briefly summarize here and are further described in Appendix C of the online Supplementary materials. Code is available via https://osf.io/qn95r/. It is important to note that in these analyses – in which we combined and analyzed the datasets – we did not control for sample. This was done to not remove any interesting variance between the samples, i.e. by controlling for sample, one removes heterogeneity. First, to derive broad general dimensions of antisociality from the – partially overlapping – questionnaires assessed across the samples, we used coupled matrix factorization (CMF) (Sorber, Van Barel, & De Lathauwer, 2015; Van Deun, Smilde, Van Der Werf, Kiers, & Van Mechelen, 2009). CMF reduces the items across all questionnaires from all samples – even when not all questionnaires (items) are administered in each sample – to their underlying dimensions. We tested for a one-, two-, three-, and four-component solution and retained the solution that optimally balances model fit (i.e. sum of squared residuals) and model complexity (i.e. the number of components). The items’ content and the component loadings of the chosen solution were used to label each component and to link each component to an underlying dimension of antisociality. We used a varimax rotation to ensure a clear structure of the loadings of each item per component (i.e. simple structure), thus facilitating interpretation of the components. Components were allowed to correlate, as they all reflect dimensions of antisociality.

Next, we applied multiple imputations to deal with missing neurobiological data (Rubin, 2004; Van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2010). The data structure and availability of the variables across the samples are depicted in online Supplementary Table S1, and details of the multiple imputation procedure are outlined in online Supplementary Appendix C. The data were imputed 100 times. Each of the 100 imputed datasets has a rather
Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the total sample and of each subsample

| Sample characteristics | 1: Population samplea | 2: Diversion program samplea | 3: Dutch FemNAT-CD sample | 4: Closed youth care sample | 5: Juvenile justice institution sample | 6: Multi-problem young adult sample |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Sample size N          | 1489                 | 450                         | 185                       | 195                        | 119                                  | 413                           |
| % boys                 | 67                   | 57                          | 100                       | 16.0                       | 39                                   | 100                           |
| % typically-developing | 61                   | 100                         | 33                        | 46                         | 0                                    | 0                             |
| Age M (s.d.)           | 16.54 (2.39)         | 15.99 (0.92)                | 15.23 (2.50)              | 14.39 (2.26)               | 15.79 (1.34)                         | 18.58 (1.71)                  |
| Age range              | 9.00–27.18           | 13.67–19.56                 | 11.26–20.66               | 9.00–21.95                 | 13.17–20.28                          | 13.92–24.45                  |
| Behavioral outcomes M (s.d.) |             |                              |                           |                            |                                      |                               |
| CU/manipulative traits | 0.02 (0.05)          | 0.01 (0.03)                 | 0.03 (0.05)               | 0.03 (0.07)                | 0.03 (0.09)                          | 0.02 (0.04)                  |
| Intentional aggression/conduct | 0.02 (0.05) | 0.01 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.05) | 0.02 (0.07) | 0.06 (0.07) | 0.02 (0.05) |
| Reactivity/irritability/impulsivity | 0.03 (0.04) | 0.02 (0.02) | 0.03 (0.05) | 0.05 (0.05) | 0.05 (0.07) | 0.03 (0.04) |
| Neurobiological independent variables M (s.d.) | | | | | | |
| HR (beats/min)         | 71.77 (10.63)        | 70.36 (10.15)               | 76.35 (10.91)             | 75.50 (10.13)              | 77.25 (10.52)                        | 71.66 (10.27)                |
| PEP (ms)              | 107.98 (20.44)       | 113.88 (18.84)              | 99.05 (21.60)             | 100.90 (19.19)             | 100.19 (18.45)                       | 99.84 (19.73)                |
| RSA (ms)              | 84.31 (46.76)        | 85.71 (48.18)               | 76.05 (42.95)             | 90.98 (46.59)              | 91.04 (49.44)                        | 79.91 (43.64)                |
| RR (breaths/min)       | 17.51 (2.57)         | 17.31 (2.52)                | 17.83 (2.61)              | 17.76 (2.59)               | 18.01 (2.61)                         | 17.89 (2.65)                 |
| SCL (μS)              | 5.11 (3.17)          | 5.48 (3.33)                 | 3.71 (2.22)               | 5.30 (3.19)                | 4.81 (2.72)                         | 4.89 (2.92)                  |
| Testos (pmol/l)        | 182.17 (120.14)      | 156.46 (105.03)             | 167.77 (112.54)           | 77.47 (78.17)              | 125.00 (99.87)                       | 289.71 (78.32)               |
| Cortisol (nmol/l)      | 6.13 (5.38)          | 4.77 (3.21)                 | 4.98 (6.74)               | 4.36 (3.44)                | 6.53 (3.78)                         | 9.59 (3.37)                  |
| CAR AUCg (nmol/l)      | 1044.06 (463.28)     | 1086.03 (438.14)            | 700.95 (447.41)           | 1005.30 (426.83)           | 1071.59 (323.33)                      | 1054.30 (427.41)             |
| CAR AUCi (nmol/l)      | 47.87 (401.73)       | —42.74 (405.20)             | 111.73 (297.70)           | 96.12 (406.44)             | 288.22 (297.13)                      | 126.30 (382.21)              |

CU, callous-unemotional; HR, heart rate; PEP, pre-ejection period; RSA, respiratory sinus arrhythmia; RR, respiration rate; SCL, skin conductance level; Testos, testosterone; CAR AUCg, cortisol awakening response: area under the curve with respect to the ground; CAR AUCi, cortisol awakening response: area under the curve with respect to the increase.

*Sample includes two or more measurement waves. Descriptive statistics depicted here are collapsed across all measurement waves for parsimony.
complicated structure where some parts have a nested structure (i.e. multiple waves within persons; samples 1 and 2) and other parts do not have such a nested structure (samples 3–6). To deal with this complexity, we applied a general linear model with clustered bootstrap that takes into account dependency in parts of the data (GLMCB; Deen & de Rooij, 2019). This technique is better able to deal with this partial dependency than multilevel/linear mixed effects models, a common technique applied to nested data. An additional advantage of the clustered bootstrap approach is that almost no distributional assumptions need to be satisfied for the data (and the model residuals).

**Model specification**

We calculated quasi-likelihood information criteria (QIC) values (Pan, 2001) for different models for each of the 100 imputed datasets. QIC values indicate model fit and lower values indicate a better fitting model. We compared the resulting 100 QIC values between the models via box plots. The model with the lowest QIC values across the 100 imputed datasets was retained as the best-fitting model. In the case of equal model fits, the simplest model was chosen. The best-fitting model was subsequently entered in a GLMCB, using 100 bootstrap samples for each imputed dataset. To obtain the estimated parameter value, we took the average of the 100 estimates from the 100 imputed datasets (Rubin, 2004). To obtain a confidence interval we used the percentile approach on the 100 × 100 estimated values so that both the variance within the imputed datasets as well as the variance between the imputed datasets was taken into account (van Ginkel & Kiers, 2011). If zero was not included in the confidence interval, the effect was considered significant (at α = 0.05).

The models that were compared to describe age and sex patterns of all measures are specified in online Supplementary Table S2 (upper half). Using QIC values we compared models with age as a linear effect, age as a quadratic polynomial, and models including an interaction between sex and these age effects. Our main hypotheses concerned the associations of the neurobiological measures with the dimensions of antisociality, and the role
of age and sex. Using QIC values, for each dimension we compared a model with the main effects of neurobiological measures only, with models additionally including age as a linear effect, age as a quadratic polynomial, and models including an interaction between sex and these age effects. These model specifications are depicted in online Supplementary Table S2 (lower half). When there was an age effect, we additionally compared different models in which age interacted with the neurobiological measures.

Results

Disclosing dimensions of antisociality through CMF

The CMF analysis showed that the three-component solution was most appropriate as it optimally balanced model fit and model complexity. In particular, although being more complex, the three-component solution (loss = 31,920, explained variance of 56.9%) fitted the data clearly better than the one- (loss = 36,459, 50.8%) and two-component (loss = 33,965, 54.2%) solutions. The four-component solution fitted the data better (loss = 30,394, 58.9%) but not so much better to warrant the added complexity. Moreover, the three-component solution was preferred over the four-component solution as the items loaded relatively unambiguously on the three components, whereas none of the items had a highest loading on the fourth component, which explained only 5.74% of the variance. Online Supplementary Fig. S1A shows, for each pair of the three components, the loadings (after varimax rotation) of each item on their respective components and illustrates the separation of the items based on the component loadings. The three-component solution explained 56.9% of the variance in the data, with all three components being more or less of equal importance (i.e. each component explains more or less the same amount of variance in the data). Online Supplementary Table S2 gives an overview of explained variances per solution, Table 2 provides a complete list of the items loading substantially on each component for the chosen three-component solution, and depicts the items’ original subscales, and online Supplementary Table S4 additionally shows the item loadings for each pair of the three components, and correlations are limited to participants who completed these questionnaires in the original studies. Finally, Fig. 1(a–c) shows the raw data of the component scores across age and samples, showing considerable heterogeneity in these behavioral measures. This set the stage for our main analyses.

Development of behavioral outcome measures

Here, we describe the developmental patterns of our behavioral outcome measures, i.e. the components derived from the CMF. Test statistics are summarized in Table 3 and effects are visualized in Fig. 1 (m–o). Recall that we evaluated model fits by comparing the QIC values per multiply imputed dataset via box plots (online Supplementary Fig. S2). The model with the lowest QIC values across the 100 imputed datasets was retained as the best-fitting model. It should be noted that the age overlap for girls and boys is limited, therefore these developmental patterns should be compared with caution.

First, CU/manipulative traits was best described by a model including the interaction between (linear) age and sex (i.e. CU/manipulative = Age × Sex). For girls, this dimension appeared stable (but note the limited age range until 18 years), while for boys an increase from until 27 years was observed. Intentional aggression/conduct was best described by a quadratic age by sex interaction effect (i.e. intentional aggression/conduct = Age² × Sex). Here, reactive aggression peaked around 14 years for girls, while for boys, a quadratic dip was observed around 18–19 years. Finally, reactivity/irritability/impulsivity showed a linear age by sex interaction effect (i.e. reactivity/irritability/impulsivity = Age × Sex). Across age this measure decreased for girls while it increased for boys.

Development of neurobiological measures

Observed data of neurobiological measures across age, before multiple imputations, are shown in Fig. 1(d–l). Results of the GLMCBs on the imputed datasets are visualized in Fig. 1p–x and summarized in Table 3. ANS measures were best described by models including age linear only (see online Supplementary Fig. S2 for QIC values across multiply imputed datasets, lower values indicate a better fit). While HR and RR decreased linearly with age, PEP increased with age, and RSA and SCL remained stable across age. Testosterone was best described as a model including a quadratic age by sex interaction effect, but note the limited age range in girls. Testosterone levels increased steeply for boys and leveled off into young adulthood. For girls, testosterone levels increased moderately during puberty. Basal cortisol and cortisol awakening response, area under the curve with respect to the increase (CAR AUCg) showed an additional main effect of sex (girls > boys). These analyses across the imputed dataset show that the development of these neurobiological measures were in the expected direction and support the use of these imputed measures for our main analyses.

Relation between neurobiological measures and dimensions of antisociality

Next, we tested associations between neurobiological measures and the antisociality dimensions. Online Supplementary Fig. S3 shows a correlation plot of all measures across imputed datasets. These include zero-order correlations and partial correlations controlling
### Table 2. Raw items per component and original subscales

| Original subscale | Item content |
|------------------|--------------|
| **Component 1: Callous-unemotional/manipulative traits** |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 20. Gotten others to gang up on someone else |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 105. I use drugs |
| YPI Affective | 3. I think that crying is a sign of weakness even if no one sees you |
| YPI Interpersonal | 4. I have the ability to con people by using my charm and smile |
| YPI Interpersonal | 5. I am good at getting people to believe me when I make something up |
| YPI Affective | 6. When other people have problems it is often their own fault. Therefore one should not help them |
| YPI Interpersonal | 8. I have talents that go far beyond other people’s |
| YPI Interpersonal | 9. It’s easy for me to manipulate people |
| YPI Affective | 10. To be nervous and worried is a sign of weakness |
| YPI Interpersonal | 14. When I need to, I use my smile and my charm to use others |
| YPI Affective | 15. I don’t understand how people can be touched enough to cry by watching things on TV or movie |
| YPI Interpersonal | 16. I am destined to become a well-known, important and influential person |
| YPI Affective | 17. To feel guilty and remorseful about things you have done that have hurt other people is a sign of weakness |
| YPI Affective | 18. I don’t let my feelings affect me as much as other people’s feelings seem to affect them |
| **Component 2: Intentional Aggression/Conduct** |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 2. Had fights with others to show who was on top |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 4. Taken things from other students |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 6. Vandalized something for fun |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 7. Had temper tantrums |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 8. Damaged things because you felt mad |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 9. Had a gang fight to be cool |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 10. Hurt others to win a game |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 12. Used physical force to get others to do what you want |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 13. Gotten angry or mad when you lost a game |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 15. Used force to obtain money or things from others |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 16. Felt better after hitting or yelling at someone |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 17. Threatened or bullied someone |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 18. Made obscene phone calls for fun |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 21. Carried a weapon to use in a fight |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 22. Gotten angry or mad or hit others when teased |
| RPQ Proactive aggression | 23. Yelled at others so they would do things for you |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 2. I drink alcohol without my parents’ permission. |
| YSR Aggression | 3. I argue a lot |
| YSR Aggression | 16. I am mean to others |
| YSR Aggression | 20. I damage my own things |
| YSR Aggression | 21. I damage other people’s things |
| YSR Aggression | 22. I don’t obey my parents |
| YSR Aggression | 23. I am disobedient at school |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 26. I don’t feel guilty after have done something I shouldn’t have |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 28. I don’t keep by the rules at home, at school, or somewhere else |
| YSR Aggression | 28. I fight a lot |

(Continued)
| Original subscale | Item content |
|------------------|--------------|
| YSR Rule-breaking | 39. I deal with boys and girls who get into trouble |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 42. I lie and cheat |
| YSR Aggression   | 57. I physically attack people |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 67. I run away from home |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 72. I set fires |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 81. I steal from home |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 82. I steal outdoors |
| YSR Aggression   | 94. I bully others a lot |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 96. I thing about sex too much |
| YSR Aggression   | 97. I threaten people to hurt them |
| ASR Aggression   | 3. I argue a lot |
| ASR Aggression   | 37. I get in fights a lot |
| ASR Aggression   | 57. I physically attack people |
| ASR Aggression   | 68. I scream or yell a lot |
| Component 3: Reactivity/Irritability/Impulsivity |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 1. Yelled at others when they have annoyed you |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 3. Reacted angrily when provoked by others |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 5. Gotten angry when frustrated |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 11. Become angry or mad when you do not get your way |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 14. Gotten angry when others threatened you |
| RPQ Reactive aggression | 19. Hit others to defend yourself |
| YSR Aggression   | 19. I try to get a lot of attention |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 63. I rather hang out with older boys and girls than same-aged peers |
| YSR Aggression   | 68. I yell a lot |
| YSR Aggression   | 86. I am stubborn |
| YSR Aggression   | 87. My mood or feelings change suddenly |
| YSR Aggression   | 89. I am suspicious |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 80. I curse or use dirty words |
| YSR Aggression   | 95. I am hot tempered |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 99. I smoke tobacco |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 101. I skip classes or skip school |
| YSR Rule-breaking | 104. I am louder than other boys or girls |
| YPI Behavioral   | 1. I have probably skipped school or work more than most other people |
| YPI Behavioral   | 2. I consider myself as a pretty impulsive person |
| YPI Behavioral   | 18. It often happens that I talk first and think later |
| YPI Behavioral   | 11. I get bored quickly by doing the same thing over and over |
| YPI Behavioral   | 12. It often happens that I do things without thinking ahead |
| YPI Behavioral   | 13. It has happened several times that I’ve borrowed something and then lost it |
| ASR Aggression   | 5. I blame others for my problems |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 6. I use drugs |
| ASR Aggression   | 16. I am mean to others |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 20. I damage my own things |

(Continued)
for age and sex. These exploratory correlations indeed suggest meaningful associations between neurobiological measures and our dimensions of antisociality, which we formally tested using GLMCB. Results of the GLMCB models are summarized in Table 4 and significant effects are visualized in Fig. 2. Recall that we inspect QIC values across multiple imputed datasets to assess which model best fitted the data. QIC values are visualized in online Supplementary Fig. S4, and lower values indicate a better fit.

First, QIC values showed that CU/manipulative traits were best described by a model with neurobiological main effects only (i.e. the model: CU/manipulative = HR + PEP + log_RSA0 + RR + SCL + Testosterone + Cortisol + AUCg + AUCi; see online Supplementary Fig. S4A, left panel). After bootstrapping this model, we observed significant effects of PEP, testosterone, and CAR AUCi. Here, shorter PEP, more testosterone, and greater cortisol awakening reactivity response were related to higher levels of CU/manipulative traits (see Fig. 2a–c).

Second, intentional aggression/conduct was also best described by a model with neurobiological main effects only (i.e. the model: intentional aggression/conduct = HR + PEP + log_RSA0 + RR + SCL + Testosterone + Cortisol + AUCg + AUCi; see online Supplementary Fig. S4A, left panel). After bootstrapping this model, we observed significant effects of PEP, testosterone, and CAR AUCi. Here, shorter PEP, more testosterone, and greater cortisol awakening reactivity response were related to higher levels of CU/manipulative traits (see Fig. 2a–c).

Third, reactivity/irritability/impulsivity was best described by a model including the main effects of the neurobiological measures, as well as a (linear) age by sex interaction effect (i.e. reactivity/irritability/impulsivity = HR + PEP + log_RSA0 + RR + SCL + Testosterone + Cortisol + AUCg + AUCi + Age² × Sex). Models including interactions between neurobiological measures and age and sex did not indicate a better fit. After bootstrapping the best model, we observed that only effects of sex, age, and their interaction were significant. Here, reactivity/irritability/impulsivity values increased for boys and decreased for girls.

Finally, to add to existing literature on the dual-hormone hypothesis, we also explicitly examined whether models including testosterone-by-cortisol interactions improved model fits. This was not the case: for none of the antisociality components did QIC values indicate a better fit when including any of the possible testosterone-by-cortisol interactions (i.e. testosterone × cortisol, testosterone × CAR AUCg, testosterone × CAR AUCi; see online Supplementary Fig. S4, right panels for QIC box plots).

Discussion

This multi-sample study is unique in that we were able to examine associations between multiple neurobiological measures conjointly

Table 2. (Continued.)

| Original subscale | Item content |
|------------------|--------------|
| ASR Rule-breaking | 23. I don’t keep by the rules at work or somewhere else |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 26. I don’t feel guilty when I’ve done something I shouldn’t have |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 28. I get along badly with my family |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 39. I deal with people who get into trouble |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 41. I am impulsive or do things without thinking |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 43. I lie or cheat |
| ASR Aggression | 55. My moods change between elation and depression |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 76. My behavior is irresponsible |
| ASR Aggression | 81. My behavior is very changeable |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 82. I steal |
| ASR Aggression | 85. I am stubborn, sullen, or irritable |
| ASR Aggression | 87. My mood or feelings change suddenly |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 90. I drink too much alcohol or get drunk |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 92. I do things that can get me in trouble with the law |
| ASR Aggression | 95. I am hot tempered |
| ASR Aggression | 97. I threaten people to hurt them |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 114. I fail to pay debts or fulfill other financial obligations |
| ASR Aggression | 116. I am easily upset |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 117. I have trouble managing money or payment cards |
| ASR Aggression | 118. I am too impatient |
| ASR Rule-breaking | 122. I have trouble keeping jobs |

RPQ, Reactive Proactive Aggression Questionnaire; YPI, Youth Psychopathic Trait Index (short version); YSR, Youth Self Report; ASR, Adult Self Report.

1842 Neeltje E. Blankenstein et al.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721003457 Published online by Cambridge University Press
Table 3. Results of the best age models of each variable

| Variable                        | b     | CI lower | CI upper | β      |
|---------------------------------|-------|----------|----------|--------|
| **CU/manipulative traits**      |       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 0.0112| −0.0208  | 0.0453   | −      |
| Sex                             | −0.0388| −0.0786  | −0.0017  | −0.008 |
| Age linear                      | −0.0003| −0.0024  | 0.0018   | −0.013 |
| Sex × Age linear                | 0.0033| 0.0010   | 0.0058   | 0.002  |
| **Intentional Aggression/Conduct** |      |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | −0.1700| −0.3480  | 0.0322   | −      |
| Sex                             | 0.4047| 0.1793   | 0.6145   | 0.084  |
| Age linear                      | 0.0261| −0.0017  | 0.0508   | 1.366  |
| Age quadratic                   | −0.0009| −0.0018  | 0.0000   | −0.114 |
| Age linear × Sex                | −0.0492| −0.0769  | −0.0192  | −0.024 |
| Age quadratic × Sex             | 0.0015| 0.0005   | 0.0025   | 0.002  |
| **Reactivity/Irritability/Impulsivity** |  |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 0.1172| 0.0856   | 0.1486   | −      |
| Sex                             | −0.1693| −0.2054  | −0.1339  | −0.039 |
| Age linear                      | −0.0053| −0.0073  | −0.0033  | −0.310 |
| Age linear × Sex                | 0.0098| 0.0076   | 0.0121   | 0.005  |
| **Heart rate**                  |       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 87.7960| 84.0890  | 91.4401  | −      |
| Age linear                      | −0.9691| −1.1767  | −0.7594  | −0.218 |
| **Pre-ejection period**         |       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 98.0285| 88.8593  | 106.2537 | −      |
| Age linear                      | 0.6013| 0.1454   | 1.0978   | 0.070  |
| **Respiratory sinus arrhythmia**|       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 94.8839| 76.4982  | 114.2942 | −      |
| Age linear                      | −0.6395| −1.6954  | 0.3845   | −0.033 |
| **Respiration rate**            |       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 18.5822| 17.4705  | 19.7596  | −      |
| Age linear                      | −0.0646| −0.1291  | −0.0036  | −0.060 |
| **Skin conductance level**      |       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 4.7035| 3.1665   | 6.1534   | −      |
| Age linear                      | 0.0246| −0.0444  | 0.0951   | 0.018  |
| **Testosterone**                |       |          |          |        |
| Intercept                       | 77.1134| −61.6840 | 245.3216 | −      |
| Age linear                      | −10.7027| −35.0738| 9.6246   | −0.213 |

(Continued)
in 1489 participants ranging from none to severe antisocial behavior problems across the entire adolescent age range (9–27 years, 67% male). Three dimensions of antisociality emerged: CU/manipulative traits, intentional aggression/conduct, and reactivity/irritability/impulsivity, which showed considerable heterogeneity. Our main analyses revealed that (1) more CU/manipulative traits related to shorter PEPs, higher levels of testosterone, and higher cortisol awakening reactivity, independent of age and sex; (2) higher intentional aggression/conduct related to higher cortisol awakening reactivity, independent of age and sex; and (3) reactivity/irritability/impulsivity was explained by age and sex only, in which a decrease across age was found for girls and an increase across age for boys.

To derive broad general dimensions of antisociality that are consistent across the different samples, we used CMF. This is a PCA-like method that can deal with multiple samples by assuming overlap in items between samples. A solution with three dimensions was retained which reflected CU and manipulative, intentional aggression, and reactive and irritable behaviors. These dimensions resonate with existing models on (adolescent) antisocial behavior, which also consider similarly differentiated aspects of antisociality (e.g. Blair, 2013) and prior factor analyses (although on aggression specifically) in adolescents (Smeets et al., 2011), and adults (Van Donkelaar et al., 2020). This indicates that CMF results in meaningful components which could be used in subsequent analyses.

Our developmental analyses showed that CU/manipulative traits increased moderately with age for boys, and was stable for girls. An important caveat is the limited overlap in age ranges between boys (10–27) and girls (9–18 years), therefore these comparisons have to be interpreted with caution. Prior research indicates that CU-traits are relatively stable from early childhood on, but primarily for those individuals with elevated CU-traits (Frick, Ray, Thornton, & Kahn, 2014). Our sample was more heterogeneous as it included a wider range of individuals, ranging from typically-developing participants to participants with moderate to severe problem behavior. The developmental pattern for intentional aggression/conduct fits well with prior study on the development of physical aggression and violence (Tremblay, 2010), although overrepresentation of youths with problem behavior in late adolescence/young adulthood may in part explain the increase for males in late adolescence. Finally, reactivity/irritability/impulsivity decreased for girls and increased for boys. Prior research in typical development (including both sexes) have shown both decreases (Harden & Tucker-Drob, 2011), increases, and adolescent peaks (Peper et al., 2018) in impulsivity measures, while irritability remains stable across adolescence (Brotman, Kircanski, & Leibenluft, 2017; Caprara, Paciello, Gerbino, & Cugini, 2007). Our dimension covers both impulsivity as well as irritability. Therefore, future research should confirm the developmental pattern of this construct.

Most neurobiological measures showed expected developmental patterns. HR, PEP, and RR all decreased with age, confirming prior research. Although HR also decreased linearly with age, in line with prior research, this effect did not attain significance. SCL was stable throughout adolescence and young adulthood, which extends prior research in childhood and early-middle adolescence (El-Sheikh, 2007). Furthermore, basal cortisol levels and the CAR also increased with age (Gunnar, DePasquale, Reid, & Donzella, 2019; Kiess et al., 1995; Oskis, Lovday, Hucklebridge, Thorn, & Clow, 2009; Platje et al., 2013b). Finally, testosterone showed the expected increase for boys, and to a lesser extent for girls (Hiort, 2002; Peper et al., 2018). In sum, these findings confirm existing knowledge on neurobiological development, and extend these findings by robustly documenting the developmental

### Table 3. (Continued.)

| Variable | $b$ | CI lower | CI upper | $\beta$ |
|----------|-----|----------|----------|---------|
| Age quadratic | 0.6223 | −0.1109 | 1.4964 | −0.431 |
| Sex | −953.2643 | −1210.6165 | −716.8602 | −0.075 |
| Age linear × Sex | 114.6445 | 83.9609 | 149.3242 | 0.022 |
| Age quadratic × Sex | −2.8224 | −3.9678 | −1.8233 | −0.001 |

| Cortisol | Intercept | −12.5764 | −18.3970 | −8.4867 | − |
|----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------|--------|
| Age linear | 1.1316 | 0.8811 | 1.4968 | 0.500 |

| CAR AUCg | Intercept | 136.1294 | −264.4061 | 484.2551 | − |
|----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------|--------|
| Sex | −230.2575 | −285.2945 | −171.5003 | −0.005 |
| Age | 64.2381 | 42.0723 | 89.1338 | 0.331 |

| CAR AUCi | Intercept | −388.1281 | −653.7942 | −114.1861 | − |
|----------|-----------|----------|----------|---------|--------|
| Age linear | 26.3613 | 9.3043 | 42.7556 | 0.157 |

CI, confidence interval; CAR AUCg, cortisol awakening response, area under the curve with respect to the ground; CAR AUCi, cortisol awakening response, area under the curve with respect to the increase. Variables in the first column indicate the included independent variables based on the model selection via QICs. Significant effects ($\alpha = 0.05$) are in bold.
pathways across the entire adolescent and young adult age range in a heterogeneous sample.

Our main focus was on associations between neurobiological measures and dimensions of antisociality. First, we found increased SNS activity (specifically, shorter PEP) and hypothalamus–pituitary–adrenal (HPA)-axis functioning (specifically, a higher CAR) to be related to increased CU/manipulative traits. Other research reported blunted rather than heightened SNS activity with

| Variable                  | b       | CI lower   | CI upper   | β       |
|---------------------------|---------|------------|------------|---------|
| **CU/manipulative traits**|         |            |            |         |
| Intercept                 | 0.04680 | −0.01271   | 0.12175    | −0.043  |
| HR                        | −0.00019| −0.00051   | 0.00010    | −0.069  |
| PEP                       | −0.00016| −0.00030   | −0.00002   | −0.033  |
| log_RSA0                  | −0.00279| −0.01177   | 0.00347    | −0.010  |
| RR                        | 0.00025 | −0.00096   | 0.00136    | 0.014   |
| SCL                       | −0.00015| −0.00216   | 0.00252    | −0.010  |
| Testos                    | 0.00005 | 0.00003    | 0.00008    | 0.137   |
| Cortisol                  | 0.00081 | −0.00009   | 0.00181    | 0.095   |
| CAR AUCg                  | 0.00000 | −0.00002   | 0.00001    | −0.049  |
| CAR AUCi                  | 0.00001 | 0.00000    | 0.00003    | 0.109   |
| **Intentional Aggression/Conduct** |         |            |            |         |
| Intercept                 | 0.01394 | −0.04174   | 0.07063    | −         |
| HR                        | 0.00011 | −0.00017   | 0.00038    | 0.025   |
| PEP                       | −0.00011| −0.00026   | 0.00003    | −0.051  |
| log_RSA0                  | 0.00161 | −0.00501   | 0.00781    | 0.019   |
| RR                        | 0.00056 | −0.00058   | 0.00180    | 0.032   |
| SCL                       | −0.00120| −0.00331   | 0.00099    | −0.083  |
| Testos                    | 0.00002 | −0.000002  | 0.00005    | 0.062   |
| Cortisol                  | −0.00057| −0.00167   | 0.00038    | −0.068  |
| CAR AUCg                  | 0.00000 | −0.00002   | 0.00001    | −0.024  |
| CAR AUCi                  | 0.00002 | 0.00000    | 0.00003    | 0.150   |
| **Reactivity/Irritability/Impulsivity** |         |            |            |         |
| Intercept                 | 0.28219 | 0.19062    | 0.37471    | −         |
| Sex                       | −0.15680| −0.19379   | −0.11859   | −0.037   |
| Age linear                | −0.01408| −0.01830   | −0.00968   | −0.825   |
| Sex × Age linear          | 0.00879 | 0.00062    | 0.01122    | 0.005   |
| HR                        | 0.00017 | −0.00012   | 0.00045    | 0.044   |
| PEP                       | −0.00002| −0.00016   | 0.00010    | −0.012   |
| log_RSA0                  | −0.00195| −0.00947   | 0.00479    | −0.026   |
| RR                        | −0.00063| −0.00164   | 0.00043    | −0.040   |
| SCL                       | 0.00111 | −0.00047   | 0.00286    | 0.086   |
| Testos                    | 0.00001 | −0.00002   | 0.00005    | 0.040   |
| Cortisol                  | 0.00084 | −0.00004   | 0.00185    | 0.112   |
| CAR AUCg                  | −0.00001| −0.00002   | 0.00000    | −0.095   |
| CAR AUCi                  | 0.00001 | −0.000001  | 0.00002    | 0.092   |

CI, confidence interval; HR, heart rate; PEP, pre-ejection period; log_RSA0, log-transformed respiratory sinus arrhythmia; RR, respiration rate; SCL, skin conductance level; CAR AUCg, cortisol awakening response, area under the curve with respect to the ground; CAR AUCi, cortisol awakening response, area under the curve with respect to the increase. Variables in the first column indicate the included independent variables based on the model selection via QICs. Significant effects (α = 0.05) are in bold.
psychopathic traits, although these studies focused on youths with problem behaviors (Fanti, 2018; Fanti et al., 2019). Yet, other research does report heightened SNS functioning (although reflected in higher SCL) in adolescent males with – specifically – more grandiose-manipulative traits (MacDougall et al., 2019). Our dimension reflected both CU as well as (grandiose-)manipulative aspects. Moreover, our study included a wide range of individuals, ranging from typically developing adolescents to adolescents with more severe antisocial problems. Findings may differ when examining a wide range of individuals rather than focus on specific subgroups. Alternatively, the low arousal theory (e.g. Raine & Liu, 1998; Zuckerman, 1990), suggesting blunted SNS and HPA-axis activation, may only be pronounced in subgroups of individuals characterized by severe antisociality. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity and between RR and reactivity/irritability we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity. In our exploratory analyses limited to the samples that could be characterized by more severe antisociality we did find negative associations between cortisol and HPA-axis reactivity.

Furthermore, a higher CAR was also related to more intentional aggression/conduct, and this effect was slightly stronger than for CU/manipulative traits. This fits well with models suggesting that increased threat sensitivity gives rise to this dimension of antisociality (Blair, 2013) through hyperactivity of the ANS and HPA-axis (Fanti, 2018; Oldenhof et al., 2019). Finally, reactivity/irritability/impulsivity was not related to any of the neurobiological measures, although prior research did find associations between impulsivity and testosterone in typically developing adolescents (Peper et al., 2018) and with cortisol in detained adolescents (Feilhauer et al., 2013). The current study adds to this literature by showing absent associations across a heterogeneous sample, and extends prior research by covering aspects of both irritability and impulsivity.

One of our key aims was to test these associations across the entire adolescent age range. We found that these neurobiological associations were stable throughout adolescence and young adulthood and across both sexes. Indeed, prior research shows developmentally stable and sex-independent associations (Portnoy & Farrington, 2015). We show that this holds for multiple SNS and PNS measures. Regarding the CAR, our findings confirm a meta-analysis showing sex-independent associations, but diverge from this meta-analysis showing an absent association in adolescence (Alink et al., 2008). However, other, longitudinal, research did find associations between the CAR and CU-traits in adolescents (Jambroes et al., 2019; Loney et al., 2006). Future research should confirm these findings, preferably within a longitudinal study from childhood to early adulthood, which allows us to capture within-person developmental changes.

In contrast to prior research, we found no associations with HR, RSA, SCL, basal cortisol, and CAR AUCg (i.e. total cortisol during wakening). Possibly, the inclusion of multiple other ANS and hormonal measures resulted in these particular measures accounting for little additional variance. Importantly, our findings underscore that multiple neurobiological measures should be included, which yields more specific information about the contribution of indices of ANS and HPA-axis functioning (Alink et al., 2008; Oldenhof et al., 2019), and that specifically PEP, testosterone, and cortisol awakening reactivity play a pivotal role in explaining distinct dimensions of antisociality.

Fig. 2. Results of the general linear models with clustered bootstraps for the biobehavioral models. Displayed are significant associations between dimensions of antisociality and neurobiological measures. PEP, pre-ejection period; RR, respiration rate; CAR AUCi, cortisol awakening response, area under the curve with respect to the increase (i.e. cortisol awakening reactivity).
**Strengths, limitations, and future directions**

This study has a number of strengths, such as a robust, heterogeneous, and large combined sample size spanning a broad age range, and multiple neurobiological measures. Despite sample differences in the items used and data availability, we could combine and analyze these samples using a sophisticated set of analyses: CMF, multiple imputations, and GLMCB. This combination may be promising for future studies wishing to combine different datasets to increase sample size and robust findings. With the transition toward open science, data-harmonization techniques become increasingly important. Moreover, the current data-driven approach yields more insights into underlying components and mechanisms of antisociality. Insight into fundamental concepts and mechanisms underlying antisociality may subsequently inform clinicians in understanding the origins of antisocial behavior. Future studies may focus on relating these mechanisms to (preventive) interventions (e.g. see de Ruigh et al., 2021).

Despite these strengths, this study also had some limitations. First, sex was not equally distributed across age because of the sampling of the original studies. Conclusions about developmental trajectories for girls are thus limited to a less broad age range. Relatedly, in late adolescence/young adulthood, typically developing controls were underrepresented. Future research should strive for an equal distribution of males and females, and participants from various backgrounds, across all developmental phases. Furthermore, although factor loadings differentiated the three dimensions of antisociality, it should be noted that the dimensions were small-to-moderately negatively correlated. This may have had consequences for the interpretation of the three separate regression models (one for each dimension), which we interpreted independently. A solution would be to run a multivariate model, but this may lead to a less conservative analysis and a more complex – and thus less interpretable – model. Finally, for our behavioral measures we included self-report measures only. An opportunity for future research is to include multiple informants (e.g. self-, teacher-, and parent reports), as well as juvenile-justice registrations, psychosocial stress and emotion regulation tasks, and psychosocial factors such as socio-economic status, substance use, the influence of (delinquent) peers, and trauma (Moffitt, 2018). Such a comprehensive biopsychosocial perspective of multifaceted antisociality may give rise to person-based predictions of an individual’s sensitivity to intervention.

**Conclusions**

This study is the first to examine associations between multiple dimensions of antisociality and multiple neurobiological measures conjointly in such a large, heterogeneous sample across the full adolescent and young adult age range. We found that CU/manipulative traits were related to higher arousal (reflected in higher SNS), and higher levels of testosterone, whereas cortisol awakening reactivity was consistently related to both CU/manipulative traits and intentional aggression/conduct. These findings deepen our understanding of – developmentally stable – neurobiological correlates of antisociality components. Finally, this study also highlights the potential of using the current techniques to harmonize existing datasets, to optimize data use of unique populations, and for robust analyses. Together, this study yields fundamental insights into underlying components and mechanisms of antisociality across adolescence and young adulthood.

**Supplementary material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721003457.

**Acknowledgements.** We thank all participants for taking part in the individual studies, and all those who assisted in data collection.

**Author contributions.** We thank all participants for taking part in the individual studies, and all those who assisted in data collection.

**References**

Note. References marked with an asterisk (*) are studies of which data are included in the current study.

Achenbach, T. M., & Rescorla, L. (2001). Manual for the ASEBA school-age forms & profiles: An integrated system of multi-informant assessment. New York, NY: Springer.

Alink, L. R., van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Mesman, J., Juffer, F., & Koot, H. M. (2008). Cortisol and externalizing behavior in children and adolescents: Mixed meta-analytic evidence for the inverse relation of basal cortisol and cortisol reactivity with externalizing behavior. Developmental Psychobiology: The Journal of the International Society for Developmental Psychobiology, 50(5), 427–450.

Archner, J. (2006). Testosterone and human aggression: An evaluation of the challenge hypothesis. Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 30(3), 319–345.

Beauchaine, T. P., Gatze-Kopp, L., & Mead, H. K. (2007). Polyvagal theory and developmental psychopathology: Emotion dysregulation and conduct problems from preschool to adolescence. Biological Psychology, 74, 174–184.

Beauchaine, T. P., Hong, J., & Marsh, P. (2008). Sex differences in autonomic correlates of conduct problems and aggression. Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 47(7), 788–796.

Beauchaine, T. P., Katkin, E. S., Strassberg, Z., & Snarr, J. (2001). Disinhibitory psychopathology in male adolescents: Discriminating conduct disorder from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder through concurrent assessment of multiple autonomic states. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 110(4), 610.

Beauchaine, T. P., & Thayer, J. F. (2015). Heart rate variability as a transdiagnostic biomarker of psychopathology. International Journal of Psychophysiology, 98(2), 338–350.

Bien, N., Van IJzendoorn, M. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., Juffer, F., & De Geus, E. J. (2008). Problem behavior and heart rate reactivity in adopted adolescents: Longitudinal and concurrent relations. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 18(2), 201–214.

Blair, R. J. R. (2013). The neurobiology of psychopathic traits in youth. Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 14(11), 786–799.

*Branie, S., & Meeus, W. H. J. (2018). Research on adolescent development and relationships (young cohort). DANS. doi: 10.17026/dans-zrb-v5wp

Brazil, I. A., van Dongen, J. D., Maes, J. H., Mars, R., & Baskin-Sommers, A. R. (2018). Classification and treatment of antisocial individuals: From behavior to biocognition. Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 91, 259–277.

Brotman, M. A., Kirkanski, K., & Leibenluft, E. (2017). Irritability in children and adolescents. Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 13, 317–341.
Raine, A., Dodge, K., Loeber, R., Gatzke-Kopp, L., Lynam, D., Reynolds, C., ... Liu, J. (2006). The reactive–proactive aggression questionnaire: Differential correlates of reactive and proactive aggression in adolescent boys. Aggressive Behavior, 32(2), 159–171.

Raine, A., & Liu, J. H. (1998). Biological predispositions to violence and their implications for biosocial treatment and prevention. Psychology, Crime and Law, 4(2), 107–125.

Rescorla, L. A., & Achenbach, T. M. (2004). The Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA) for Ages 18 to 90 Years.

Rowe, R., Maughan, B., Worthman, C. M., Costello, E. J., & Angold, A. (2004). Testosterone, antisocial behavior, and social dominance in boys: Pubertal development and biosocial interaction. Biological Psychiatry, 55(5), 546–552.

Rubin, D. B. (2004). Multiple imputation for nonresponse in surveys (Vol. 81). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Smeets, K. C., Oostermeijer, S., Lappenschaar, M., Cohn, M., Van der Meer, J., Popma, A., ... Buitelaar, J. K. (2017). Are proactive and reactive aggression meaningful distinctions in adolescents? A variable-and person-based approach. Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 45(1), 1–14.

Sorber, L., Van Barel, M., & De Lathauwer, L. (2015). Structured data fusion. IEEE Journal of Selected Topics in Signal Processing, 9(4), 586–600.

Tremblay, R. E. (2010). Developmental origins of disruptive behaviour problems: The ‘original sin’ hypothesis, epigenetics and their consequences for prevention. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 51(4), 341–367.

van Baardewijk, Y., Andershed, H., Stegge, H., Nilsson, K. W., Scholte, E., & Vermeiren, R. (2010). Development and tests of short versions of the youth psychopathic traits inventory and the youth psychopathic traits inventory-child version. European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 26(2), 122–128.

Van Buuren, S. V., & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, K. (2010). mice: Multivariate imputation by chained equations in R. Journal of statistical software, 45(1), 1–68.

Van Deun, K., Smilde, A. K., Van Der Werf, M. J., Kiers, H. A., & Van Mechelen, I. (2009). A structured overview of simultaneous component based data integration. BMC Bioinformatics, 10(1), 246.

van Donkelaar, M. M., Hoogman, M., Shumskaya, E., Buitelaar, J. K., Bralten, J., & Franke, B. (2020). Monoamine and neuroendocrine gene-sets associate with frustration-based aggression in a gender-specific manner. European Neuropsychopharmacology, 30, 75–86.

van Ginkel, J. R., & Kiers, H. A. (2011). Constructing bootstrap confidence intervals for principal component loadings in the presence of missing data: A multiple-imputation approach. British Journal of Mathematical and Statistical Psychology, 64(3), 498–515.

van Zonneveld, L., Platje, E., de Sonneville, L., van Goozen, S., & Swaab, H. (2017). Affective empathy, cognitive empathy and social attention in children at high risk of criminal behaviour. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 58(8), 913–921.

Yi-Zhen, Y., & Jun-Xia, S. (2009). Relationship between levels of testosterone and cortisol in saliva and aggressive behaviors of adolescents. Biomedical and Environmental Sciences, 22(1), 44–49.

Zijlmans, J., Bevaart, F., van Duin, L., Luijks, M., Popma, A., & Marhe, R. (2019). Error-related brain activity in relation to psychopathic traits in multi-problem young adults: An ERP study. Biological Psychology, 144, 46–53.

Zijlmans, J., Marhe, R., Bevaart, F., Luijks, M. J. A., van Duin, L., Tiemeier, H., & Popma, A. (2018). Neural correlates of moral evaluation and psychopathic traits in male multi-problem young adults. Frontiers in Psychiatry, 9, 248.

Zuckerman, M. (1990). The psychophysiology of sensation seeking. Journal of Personality, 58(1), 313–345.