



CIO inventory: A new tool for measuring personality traits common to psychopathy and narcissism and their interaction with gender



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ABSTRACT

A lack of empathy, interpersonal dominance, aggression and the exploitation of others are the key features of both narcissism and psychopathic disorders. With the aim to better capture the shared facets of these traits, this study developed a new tool named the Capability to Influence Others (CIO) Inventory, which is based on the pleasantness evaluation of ten items–verbs presented in the infinitive form. The inventory, characterized by very quick submission, was administered to 67 males and 100 females and was correlated with the concurrent Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) and Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP). An exploratory factor analysis supported the presence of only one factor in both the male and female groups. Internal consistency of the CIO was very good for both men (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85; 95% CIs: 0.80–0.90) and women (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83; 95% CIs: 0.77–0.87). Further statistics showed a high correlation between the CIO and the LSRP-F1 (primary psychopathy) in both genders ($r > 0.47$). Clear gender differences were found in the correlation between the CIO and the NPI: the correlation was high ($r = 0.58$) in males and absent in females. The CIO may represent a quick and low demanding tool for a preliminary screening of individuals with high psychopathic/narcissistic traits from community samples, forensic institutions, high schools and company personnel.

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1. Introduction

Psychopathy is traditionally defined as a personality disorder characterized by two main components: emotional detachment and antisocial behavior. With respect to the first component, diagnostic criteria include lacking empathy, lacking guilt or remorse, showing egocentricity, lying and being manipulative. With respect to the second component, psychopaths show impulsivity, irresponsibility, absence of long-term goals and criminal behavior (Hare, 1993). Based on this definition, several diagnostic tools have been developed to assess predispositions toward these two separate facets, among which are the Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 2003), the Psychopathic Personality Inventory – Revised (PPI-R; Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005) and the Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP; Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995). In recent years, Patrick, Fowles, and Krueger (2009) proposed a triarchic model of psychopathy, describing the disorder in terms of three phenotypic constructs: disinhibition, meanness and boldness. The first construct entails personality traits such as aggression,

impulsivity, rule-breaking and impatience (Hall et al., 2014; Venables & Patrick, 2012). Meanness is related to impaired empathy, cruelty, disregard for and exploitation of others and cold-heartedness (Patrick, Drislane, & Strickland, 2012). Boldness is the “adaptive” component of psychopathy, comprising traits such as interpersonal dominance, absence of fear and anxiety, high self-confidence, assertiveness and persuasiveness (Hall et al., 2014). A self-report questionnaire of psychopathy, reflecting this new conceptualization of the disorder, was developed by Patrick (2010).

A personality disorder which is often associated with psychopathy is narcissism, and many authors have commented on the overlap between psychopathy and narcissism at a phenotypical level (Bursten, 1989; Gustafson & Ritzer, 1995; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Individuals diagnosed with a narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) are characterized by a sense of high self-esteem, an abnormal sense of superiority, a sense of dominance, a sense of grandiosity and a sense of entitlement. They are highly competitive, achievement-oriented and tend to be manipulative. Other symptoms, as defined by the DSM-5 (APA, 2013), include the inability to understand feelings of others, callous affectivity, self-centeredness and a firm belief of being better than others, as well as continuously seeking attention and

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admiration. To date, the narcissistic construct is not operationally well defined, and neither are its relations with other psychological traits. Also, the boundary between the clinical trait and normality is quite veiled. Some authors support the existence of two different facets of narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable (Miller & Campbell, 2008; Pincus et al., 2009; Wink, 1991). Grandiose narcissism describes a relatively more adaptive subgroup than vulnerable narcissism, especially in the short term and with a reduced sensitivity to stress, tendencies toward arrogance, high self-esteem, leadership, exploitativeness and exhibitionism (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). Vulnerable narcissism describes the maladaptive facet of the disorder, with individuals showing an emotionally fragile style, having low self-esteem and internalizing pathologies (Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010). It is related to aggression and impaired interpersonal relationships (Campbell, Rudich & Sedikides, 2002; Locke, 2009). A widely used instrument to assess this personality disorder is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Its structure is not clear, and several factorial solutions have been proposed in past years, ranging from two-factor (Corry, Merritt, Mrug, & Pamp, 2008; Kubarych, Deary, & Austin, 2004) to seven-factor solutions (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Cain, Pincus, and Ansell (2008) reported that this self-report measure embeds both adaptive and maladaptive content; therefore, it is difficult to understand which specific aspects this inventory actually measures and what the total score may indicate.¹

Both psychopathy and narcissism may manifest differently in men and women. For example, some traits associated with offending behavior in psychopathy seem to be differently expressed in the two genders: Impulsivity may be expressed as aggression and violence against others in men and as self-harming behavior in women (Forouzan & Cooke, 2005). Narcissistic personality resembles the male sex-role stereotype in Western culture, including physical aggression, leadership, a need for power and a dominant style (Akhtar & Thomson Jr, 1982; Carroll, 1989; Haaken, 1983). Tschanz, Morf, and Turner (1998) observed how exploitativeness and feelings of entitlement were more central to the manifestation of narcissism in men compared to women, whereas Ryan, Weikel, and Sprechini (2008) reported how exploitativeness and entitlement in women might be related to more coercive types of manipulation tactics.

Several self-report measures have been developed and widely used for the assessment of psychopathy and narcissism. These tools are generally useful to detect behavioral tendencies and psychological attitudes in normal and pathological personalities, but measuring both traits, or their common features, may need two or more questionnaires and take a long time. Furthermore, several aspects of the mentioned personalities could make their measurement more difficult and problematic with respect to other traits. Compared to other disorders, individuals with these traits exhibit grandiosity and superiority; thus, they have a strong tendency to present themselves in an unrealistic and positive light. They are likely to respond to questionnaires in a socially desirable way by attempting to minimize or deny their maladaptive or antisocial behavior, egocentrism, mistreatment of and exploitation of others. Indeed, the possibility to fake and distort results was evidenced on the PPI-R (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005), especially toward more adapted and normal scores (Edens, 2004). Both psychopaths and narcissists are characterized by callous affectivity, impairment in emotional regulation and poor self-consciousness and introspection (Hare, 1993, 2003). Hence, psychopaths and narcissists may have a weak understanding of how their behavior can affect others' lives and how others may perceive them. Furthermore, psychopaths appear to be impaired in their ability to process the affective component of verbal material (Hare,

Williamson, & Harpur, 1988). This may have an influence on their comprehension of emotionally oriented sentences, such as those in personality questionnaires. As a last point, psychopathic individuals show impulsivity and impatience; therefore, any testing (questionnaire, interview or otherwise) requiring a relatively long interval of time may lead to higher rates of dropout or assessment rejection. All listed issues could increase variability within and between these individuals and make the assessment of these two traits more difficult.

The aim of this pilot study was to devise a quick measure of psychopathic and narcissistic traits useful for screening large samples of participants and for decreasing dropouts (due to test length), which may lead to sampling bias. We developed a new instrument, the Capability to Influence Others² (CIO) Inventory, which is aimed at investigating the personality traits shared by psychopathy and narcissism, such as being manipulative, lying, showing aggression and exhibiting social dominance. Participants were asked to evaluate 10 verbal items through a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from most negative to most positive evaluation. Each item consisted of a single verb in its infinitive form describing an action, such as deceiving, humiliating or manipulating. We chose single-word items to reduce the experimental demand characteristic and the influence of social desirability, which may more easily occur in questionnaires based on sentences. For the same reasons, the instrument was expected to be less sensitive to respondents with a strong motivation to present a positive image of themselves (such as narcissistic individuals). The infinitive verbal form made items more impersonal and less self-directed. We hypothesized that suspicious and deceptive individuals at the statistical extreme of the investigated personality trait would respond more spontaneously to items not specifically referring to themselves. A test of the validity of this tool was planned to demonstrate its theoretically expected association with other known personality measures investigating the same construct; i.e., psychopathic traits in a community population, such as the LSRP (Levenson et al., 1995) and the NPI (Raskin & Terry, 1988), assessing narcissistic facets. The LSRP has a two-factor structure ("primary" and "secondary" psychopathy) that matches the traditional description of psychopathy as characterized by two main dimensions: emotional detachment and antisocial behavior. The "primary" factor evaluates a predisposition toward meanness, callousness and egocentricity, whereas the "secondary" factor assesses social deviance and impulsive-aggressive behavior.

We hypothesized that the average evaluation of our ten items would show positive associations with the LSRP "primary" psychopathy factor and with the NPI total score and its seven subscales (Raskin's factorial solution). We also expected to observe different correlation patterns in data gathered from men and women. Psychopathy and narcissism have rather different distributions in the two genders, with men showing higher rates than women (for a review, see Grijalva, Newman, Tay, Donnellan, Harms, Robins & Yan, 2015). In addition, the literature shows that, compared with women, men have higher levels of NPI narcissistic traits (Foster, Campbell & Twenge, 2003; Grijalva et al., 2015), whereas women have greater specific traits of feminine narcissism, such as those represented by histrionic personality disorder (DSM-5, APA, 2013). However, gender differences in the overlap between these two constructs have not been clarified so far. Thus, we hypothesized that men would have shown stronger associations between the score achieved from the CIO Inventory and the NPI subscales assessing authority, superiority and entitlement, whereas we hypothesized that women would have shown greater associations between the CIO Inventory and the NPI subscales assessing exhibitionism and vanity.

¹ Notwithstanding the debate on the factor structure underlying the NPI, a rapid review of past literature suggested that this was the most common inventory used to investigate the narcissistic traits of personality; for this reason, we used the Italian version of this questionnaire to validate our new inventory.

² CIO does not refer to the real capacity of the inventory to measure the ability to influence others; rather, this name was adopted with the aim to evoke in the assessed individual the context within which to evaluate the presented verbs' features.

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