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A multi-wave cross-lagged regression analysis of the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory and Self-Reported Offending

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study sought to clarify the relationship between psychopathy and self-reported offending using a measure of psychopathy that did not directly assess criminal behavior; i.e., the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI).

Methods: Cross-lagged correlations between five pairs of waves from the Pathways to Desistance study were used to assess the psychopathy-offending relationship in 1354 (1170 male, 184 female) previously adjudicated delinquents. Structural equation modeling was used to assess these five pairs of waves, controlling for important demographic and criminological covariates and the outcome's antecedent.

Results: All five zero-order cross-lagged YPI → offending correlations and all five zero-order cross-lagged offending → YPI correlations were significant. All five YPI → offending regressions and all five offending → YPI regressions were significant, after controlling for the demographic/criminological/antecedent variables, although there were no significant differences between the two paths (YPI → offending vs. offending → YPI). All ten cross-lagged regressions were significant in male participants but only three of the regressions were significant in females.

Conclusions: Psychopathy, as measured by the YPI, and self-reported offending are reciprocally related, at least in boys and young men, such that offending is as likely to shape psychopathy as psychopathy is to shape offending.

Introduction

Early factor analyses of the Psychopathy Checklist and its derivatives—the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R: *Hare*, 2003), the Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version (PCL: SV: *Hart, Cox, & Hare*, 1995), and the Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL: YV: *Forth, Kosson, & Hare*, 2003)—identified two primary factors: a personality factor, characterized by the selfish, callous and remorseless use of others, and a behavioral deviance factor, characterized by impulsivity and antisocial behavior (*Harpur, Hakstian, & Hare*, 1988; *Harpur, Hare, & Hakstian*, 1989). This two-factor model was eventually replaced by a three-factor model that divided the personality factor into affective and interpersonal subcomponents and retained only the impulsive component of the behavioral deviance factor (*Cooke & Michie*, 2001). *Hare and Neumann* (2008) subsequently proposed a four-factor model that included all three components from the three-factor model but added the antisocial behavior component that was left out of the *Cooke and Michie* (2001) model. This theoretical/conceptual disagreement about whether or not antisocial behavior is a core feature of psychopathy has resulted in an intense and unabated controversy.

There is consensus that psychopathy and antisocial behavior are linked, but there is no consensus as to whether antisocial behavior is a defining characteristic of psychopathy or an entirely separate phenomenon predicted and explained, at least in part, by psychopathy. Over the last several decades psychologists have debated this issue. In their review of the research, including their own extensive work, *Skeem and Cooke* (2010) concluded that antisocial behavior was nothing more than a secondary manifestation or sequela of psychopathic personality disorder. In contrast, *Hare and Neumann* (2010) argued that their and others research support the perspective that antisocial behavior is a core feature of psychopathy. They concede, in part, that criminal behavior can be considered a dependent phenomenon. Theoretically, the debate over this issue has involved *Cleckley's* (1941/1976) groundbreaking book, *The Mask of Sanity*, upon which modern-day conceptualizations of psychopathy are based. In his book, Cleckly classified inadequately motivated antisocial behavior as a core feature of psychopathy. Fraud, forgery, adultery, theft, and fighting, often in the absence of a discernable long-term goal, were all identified as symptoms of inadequately motivated antisocial acts. Subsequent research by *Hare* (1999), which resulted in the original 20-item PCL-R, was based on prison samples. This research identified goal-directed, cold-blooded, and proactive forms of antisocial conduct, including vicious and serial forms of extreme violence, as central to the measurement of psychopathy. More recent research comparing the three- and four-

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factor PCL-R models, using a variety of statistical techniques such as confirmatory factor analysis and item response theory (IRT), have supported one position or the other but not both (*Cooke, Michie, & Skeem*, 2007; *Neumann, Hare, & Newman*, 2007; *Vitacco, Neumann, & Jackson*, 2005; *Walters*, 2012). In this article, it will be argued that this controversy very likely will never be resolved empirically no matter how innovative the statistical methodology.

The PCL-R is regarded by some as a "gold standard" measure of psychopathy based largely on the perception that it predicts both general and violent recidivism (*Hare*, 1996; *Hemphill, Hare, & Wong*, 1998). However, this key form of validity has typically been associated with the anti-social behavioral dimension or domain of the PCL- R (*Walters*, 2003). In essence, the key and now long standing validity concern of the PCL-R and PCL-YV has been that its key personality dimensions have not been predictive of central measures of criminality. More recently, in a series of studies encompassing ten different samples and nearly 2900 subjects, Walters and colleagues confirmed that the antisocial facet of the PCL consistently predicted general and violent recidivism above and beyond the contributions of the first three facets (interpersonal, affective, and lifestyle), but the first three facets consistently failed to display incremental validity relative to the antisocial facet in predicting these same two outcomes (*Walters & Heilbrun*, 2010; *Walters, Knight, Grann, & Dahle*, 2008; *Walters, Wilson, & Glover*, 2011). *Walters* (2012) subsequently reported that the first three facets of the PCL-R, which according to the results of factor and IRT analysis constituted the optimal model for PCL-R psychopathy in a group of Canadian offenders, failed to predict general or violent recidivism above and beyond the contributions of age and criminal history. These large-scale studies suggest that the PCL-R's ability to predict recidivism may be the result of a predictor-outcome confound created when antisocial and criminal items are included on the PCL-R. In other words, a major validity question with regards to this popular measure of psychopathy is whether its relationship with serious criminality is largely tautological.

Hare and Neumann (2010) have consistently asserted that general antisocial behavior, rather than criminality per se, is the focus of the PCL-R and its derivatives. Yet, three of the five items on Facet 4 (antisocial) of the PCL-R directly reference criminal behavior (i.e., juvenile delinquency, revocation of conditional release, and criminal versatility) and a fourth antisocial item (poor behavioral controls) can potentially be scored from criminal outcomes. In order to address this issue, there have been several studies that have excluded the explicitly criminal indicators from the Psychopathy Checklist (e.g. Corrado et al., & Vincent et al. plus) and found that the remaining antisocial and behavioral indicators remained the strongest predictors of violent criminality and recidivism (*Corrado, Vincent, Hart, & Cohen*, 2004; *Marshall, Egan, English, & Jones*, 2006; *Vincent, Odgers, McCormick, & Corrado*, 2008). Another option would be to use an instrument such as the Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI: *Andershed, Kerr, Stattin, & Levander*, 2002) that does not incorporate antisocial behavior, or at least criminality, as indicators in its definition of psychopathy.

There are several advantages to using the YPI to assess the relationship between psychopathy and crime. First, it utilizes *Cooke and Michie's* (2001) three-factor model of psychopathy and does not consider antisocial behavior a core feature of psychopathy. Accordingly, it is less vulnerable to charges of criterion contamination than a measure like the PCL-R/YV when correlated with offending behavior. Second, the YPI is a self-report measure. While self-report measures have obvious and inherent internal validity limitations (e.g., response styles, reading difficulties), they may provide a more reliable estimate of the cognitive and emotional features of psychopathy than a rating procedure based on data from an interview and a review of available records (*Lilienfeld & Fowler*, 2006). More specifically, the YPI exhibits strong internal consistency and temporal stability (*Andershed et al.*, 2002) and adequate to good convergent (*Andershed, Hodgins, & Tengström*, 2007; *Seals, Sharp, Michonski, & Ha*, 2012), predictive (*Chauhan et al.*, 2014; *Skeem & Cauffman*, 2003), and construct (*Declercq, Markey, Vandist, & Verhaeghe*, 2009; *Poythress, Dembo, Wareham, & Greenbaum*, 2006) validity.

Using data from a large Swedish twin cohort, *Forsman, Lichtenstein, Andershed, and Larsson* (2010) discerned that the total YPI score measured at age 16–17 predicted subsequent antisocial behavior at age 19–20, and that persistent antisocial behavior from age 8–9 to age 16–17 predicted the total YPI score measured at age 19–20. This is one of the first studies to report a potential reciprocal relationship between psychopathic personality traits and antisocial behavior. These results remain tentative, however, in light of several significant methodological limitations. First, the correlations used to identify the reciprocal relationship were not true cross-lag correlations. The T1 measure of persistent antisocial behavior ran from age 8–9 to age 16–17, whereas the T1 measure of psychopathy was taken at age 16–17. Second, there was a three-year lag between T1 and T2, a fairly long period of time that might allow additional variables to impact on the relationship. Third, other than sex, there were no control variables included in the analyses and there were no antecedent measures of the predictor or outcome that might help rule out the possibility that the reciprocal relationships observed in the *Forsman et al.* (2010) study were simply a function of variable relationships in place before T1.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether a measure of psychopathy that did not include items directly related to criminal behavior (i.e., the YPI) would form a reciprocal causal relationship with self-reported offending from adolescence through early adulthood. There were five pairs of cross-lagged correlations tested in this study. It was hypothesized that the majority of lags would be significantly different from zero but that none of the lag pairs (e.g., YPI-1 → self reported offending (SRO)-2 vs. SRO-1 → YPI-2) would be significantly different from each other. To test this hypothesis, three demographic control variables (age, race, sex) and seven control variables taken from currently popular theories of crime (differential association, biosocial theory, low self-control, family monitoring, social capital, and routine activities) and measured at baseline were included in the regressions. In addition, an antecedent measure of the outcome variable was included in each individual regression. For instance, SRO-1 was controlled in the YPI-1 → SRO-2 regression and YPI-1 was controlled in the SRO-1 → YPI-2 regression. Lastly, bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals were used to evaluate the significance of specific lags and determine whether lag pairs (YPI → SRO vs. SRO → YPI) differed significantly from one another.

Method

Participants

Adolescent male and female adjudicated delinquents from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Phoenix, Arizona areas were enrolled in the Pathways to Desistance study (*Mulvey*, 2012) sometime between November 2000 and January 2003. All 1354 members of the Pathways study (1170 males, 184 females) served as participants in this study. The ethnic breakdown of the Pathways sample was 20.2% white, 41.4% black, 33.5% Hispanic, and 4.8% other, the average age of participants at the time of the baseline interview was 16.04 years ($SD = 1.14$), the mean age at time of first offense was 10.42 years ($SD = 1.80$), and the average number of self-reported offenses in the year prior to enrollment was 152.45 ($SD = 372.99$, range = 0–3493).

Measures

Youth psychopathic traits inventory

The Youth Psychopathic Traits Inventory (YPI: *Andershed et al.*, 2002) is a 50-item self-report inventory designed to assess psychopathy as defined by *Cooke and Michie* (2001). Each YPI item is rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *does not apply at all*, 2 = *does not apply*