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## A two-dimensional model of psychopathy and antisocial behavior: A multi-sample investigation using items from the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised



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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether a subset of items from the 20-item Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) could be used to construct a two-dimensional model (fearlessness, disinhibition) of adult temperament relevant to psychopathy and antisocial behavior. This theory-guided model was created by combining six items from the interpersonal and affective facets of the PCL-R into a single dimension (fearlessness) and taking four items from the lifestyle facet and forming a second dimension (disinhibition). A confirmatory factor analysis performed on a sample of 2753 adult offenders and forensic patients was used to compare the two-dimensional model to several alternate models. The results indicated that the two-dimensional model achieved a significantly better fit than a one-dimensional model and demonstrated better absolute fit than the traditional two-, three-, and four-factor models and the recently proposed triarchic model of psychopathy. In addition, latent factor scores derived from both dimensions of the two-dimensional model displayed incremental validity relative to Facet 4 (antisocial) of the PCL-R in predicting subsequent offending. These findings indicate that a theoretically derived two-dimensional model of temperament may be of assistance in clarifying psychopathy and other crime-related constructs.

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### 1. Introduction

Despite its rapidly expanding role in psychological and criminological research and growing presence in the criminal justice field, the psychopathy construct is not without its detractors. One detraction centers around the construct's factor structure. The controversy began shortly after [Cooke and Michie \(2001\)](#) published a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R: [Hare, 2003](#)) and Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version (PCL:SV: [Hart, Cox, & Hare, 1995](#)). Their results challenged the traditional two-factor model of PCL-assessed psychopathy (F1, the core interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy, and F2, deviant behavior: [Harpur, Hakstian, & Hare, 1988](#)) and implied that the two-factor model should be replaced by a hierarchical three-factor model composed of a superordinate psychopathy factor and three first-order factors: Arrogant and Deceitful Interpersonal Style (Factor 1), Deficient Affective Experience (Factor 2), and Impulsive and Irresponsible Behavioral Style (Factor 3). Several years later [Neumann, Hare, and Newman \(2007\)](#) added a fourth factor (antisocial) to Cooke and Michie's

three-factor model to create a four-factor model. This intensified the debate and raised questions about whether antisocial behavior should be considered a core feature of psychopathy. [Neumann et al. \(2007\)](#) insist that it should, [Cooke and Michie \(2001\)](#) maintain that it should not.

The triarchic model of psychopathy was created in an attempt to synthesize and integrate these and other conceptualizations of psychopathy ([Drislane, Patrick, & Arsal, 2014](#)). Similar to [Cooke and Michie's \(2001\)](#) three-factor PCL-R model, the triarchic approach is composed of three general factors: boldness, meanness, and disinhibition ([Patrick, Fowles, & Krueger, 2009](#)). Boldness represents an imperturbable temperament accompanied by such traits as dominance, grandiosity, and indomitability. Meanness (unkind or spiteful) portends a callous-aggressive temperament marked by weak empathy, shallow affect, and a tendency toward interpersonal cruelty. Disinhibition involves a general externalizing dimension characterized by impulsivity, irresponsibility, and poor self-control. One way the triarchic model differs from the [Cooke and Michie \(2001\)](#) model is that while Cooke and Michie locate need for stimulation and thrill-seeking (PCL Item 3) in the third (impulsive) factor of their three-factor model, [Patrick et al. \(2009\)](#) assign need for stimulation and thrill-seeking to the first

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(boldness) and second (meanness) factors of their three-factor model. Patrick (2010) designed the 58-item self-report Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM) to assess the three dimensions of the triarchic model of psychopathy and there is research that supports both its reliability and validity (Drislane et al., 2014; Sellbom & Phillips, 2013; Stanley, Wygant, & Sellbom, 2013).

Walters (2008) introduced a two-dimensional model of general antisocial behavior that overlaps extensively with the triarchic model as well as Fowles and Dindo's (2009) dual process model, Patrick and Bernat's (2009) two-process theory, and the fearless, dominance and impulsive antisociality factors of the Psychopathic Personality Inventory (PPI: Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996). Walters' two-dimensional model postulates the existence of two underlying temperament dimensions—fearlessness and disinhibition—that place a person at risk for future psychopathy and general antisocial behavior. The fearlessness dimension derives from Lykken's (1957) low-fear hypothesis in which primary psychopathy is characterized by weak fear conditioning and diminished electrodermal reactivity whereas the disinhibition dimension derives from Krueger and colleagues' work on the externalizing spectrum (Krueger, Markon, Patrick, Benning, & Kramer, 2007) and emphasizes the impulsive and irresponsible aspects of psychopathy and antisocial behavior. These overlapping dimensions have been identified in self-report measures of psychopathy, antisocial personality, and criminal lifestyle and offer the possibility of a general theory of antisociality and crime-related behavior (Walters, 2008).

Several areas of research were consulted in an effort to identify items from the PCL-R that could serve as proxies for the two-dimensional model. First, there is evidence that people with strong psychopathic traits experience deficient fear conditioning and attenuated emotional reactivity (Marsh et al., 2011). Second, this emotional/affective deficit appears to be the result of inactivity in a neural circuit that runs from the limbic system to the prefrontal cortex and which includes the amygdala, orbitofrontal cortex, insula, and anterior cingulate (Birbaumer et al., 2005). Third, the ability of those diagnosed with psychopathy to con and deceive others is at least partially the result of weak electrodermal response to guilt (Farrell, 2001) and the callousness observed in these same individuals may be the result of weak electrodermal response to distress cues (Blair, Jones, Clark, & Smith, 1997). Fourth, decreased social anxiety and increased interpersonal aggression may both stem from an early fearlessness temperament capable of predicting psychopathy 25 years later (Glenn, Raine, Venables, & Mednick, 2007). Fifth, in presenting their triarchic model, Patrick et al. (2009) assert that boldness and meanness, which essentially represent Facets 1 and 2 of the PCL-R, can both be considered expressions of fearlessness. These results suggest that the affective and interpersonal facets of the PCL-R (minus grandiosity and failure to accept responsibility, neither of which imply diminished emotional reactivity) are reasonable facsimiles of the fearlessness dimension, and the lifestyle facet (minus parasitic orientation, which may be irrelevant to behavioral control) is a reasonable facsimile of the disinhibition dimension.

This study is the third step in a three-step process carried out by the author. The first step was to identify facets from the PCL-R capable of representing the fearlessness (Facets 1 and 2) and disinhibition (Facet 3) dimensions of temperament. This was a purely rational/conceptual exercise. The second step was to remove items that seemed to load weakly onto each dimension (grandiosity and failure to accept responsibility in the case of fearlessness and parasitic orientation in the case of disinhibition) and verify this against prior factor analytic studies. In two large-scale confirmatory factor analyses (Cooke & Michie, 2001; Hare & Neumann, 2006) failure to accept responsibility and parasitic orientation were the weakest loading items on their respective facets and grandiosity was the second to third weakest loading item on its

facet. The third step was to cross-validate these assignments by comparing the relative fit of the two-dimensional (fearlessness, disinhibition) model to that achieved by a one-dimensional model and comparing the absolute fit of the two-dimensional model to that achieved by the two-factor, three-factor, four-factor, and triarchic models. It was further reasoned that both dimensions of the two-dimensional model (fearlessness and disinhibition) would predict offending even after controlling for Facet 4 (antisocial) of the PCL-R.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Eleven individual samples from eight different studies were combined to form a total sample of 2753 adult participants. This cohort included both prisoners and mentally disordered offenders. The vast majority of participants were male (98.7%,  $n = 2717$ ) and the mean age of participants in the full sample was 34.05 years. The sample size, sex, age, and percentage of white participants in each individual study are listed in Table 2.

### 2.2. Measures

The Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R: Hare, 2003) is a 20-item rating procedure designed to assess the construct of psychopathy. Each PCL-R item is rated on a three-point scale (0 = not present, 1 = possibly or partially present, 2 = present) to create a total score that can range from 0 to 40. The total PCL-R score can be subdivided into two factor scores (core personality characteristics of psychopathy and behavioral deviance) and four facet scores (interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial). The inter-rater reliability of the PCL-R in research settings has been found to be good (Hare, 2003).

### 2.3. Procedure

All but one of the studies contributing participants to the current investigation made use of the PCL-R. Heilbrun et al. (1998) utilized the original 22-item Psychopathy Checklist (PCL: Hare, 1980), which includes the 20 PCL-R items plus two additional items (previous diagnosis as a psychopath and antisocial behavior not due to alcohol intoxication). These two additional PCL items were not analyzed as part of the current study. Analyses were not conducted separately by sex and race because of the small number of female and non-white participants available for analysis.

Seven different models were tested in this study. The two-dimensional model removed grandiosity from the interpersonal facet, failure to accept responsibility from the affective facet, and parasitic orientation from the lifestyle facet because none of these items showed evidence of the underlying fearlessness or disinhibition that the two-dimension model is designed to measure. After removing these three items, the remaining interpersonal and affective items were merged into a single six-item fearlessness factor and the remaining lifestyle items were combined to form a four-item disinhibition factor.

The one-dimensional model loaded all 10 PCL-R items from the two-dimensional model onto a single factor. The two-dimensional-full model was identical to the 10-item two-dimensional model except that all 13 items from Facets 1, 2, and 3 were loaded onto the two dimensions. The traditional two-factor model consisted of 8 items loaded onto a core personality traits factor and 10 items loaded onto a behavioral deviance factor. The traditional three-factor model consisted of four items loaded onto an arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style factor, four items loaded onto a

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