

Self-Construal and Psychopathy

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Introduction

Self-Construal has been defined as how individuals perceive their identity or relative to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Three types of self-construal have been theorized (Cross et al., 2007):

Independent self-construal is how an individual defines themselves in terms of traits and personal characteristics (e.g., I am hardworking)

Relational self-construal is how an individual defines themselves by their close relationships (e.g., I am a mother)

Collective self-construal is how an individual defines themselves by their membership in large communities or social groups (e.g., I am a student).

Psychopathy has been defined as a personality construct characterized by high levels of four core traits (Vitacco et al., 2005):

- Emotional Callousness
- Antisocial Behavior
- Manipulative Tendency
- Impulsivity

An alternative conceptualization of psychopathy is the Triarchic model, which proposes three core traits (Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1990):

- Boldness
- Meanness
- Impulsivity

Prior research suggests that psychopathy is negatively related to interdependent self-construal and weakly related to independent self-construal (Robertson et al., 2016; Jonason et al., 2017). However, previous research has relied on overly general measures of psychopathy that fail to distinguish among core psychopathic traits.

Goal: To clarify the relations between core psychopathic traits and different types of self-construal by using two comprehensive measures of psychopathy and a wider range of self-construal measures than prior research.

Method

Participants

- $N = 163$ Participants; 7 participants were excluded from the analysis due to failure to respond correctly to four or more attention items embedded within study measures.
- Students were enrolled in General Psychology courses at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.
- Males $n = 46$; Female $n = 110$

Procedure

- Participants completed an online survey via Qualtrics. In which they completed measures of self-construal, psychopathy, and several other measures that were not considered in the current analyses.
- Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn how different types of self-perception were related.
- Presentation of psychopathy and self-construal measures were counterbalanced as two groups.
 - Within each group of measures, individual measures were further counterbalanced.
- Participants received debriefing information after completing all the measures.

Materials

- **Self-Report Psychopathy Scale–Version III (SRP-III;** Paulhus, Neumann, & Hare, 2015).
 - Assesses 4 psychopathic traits: Callous Affect (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$), Interpersonal Manipulation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), Erratic Lifestyle (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$), Criminal Tendencies (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$).
 - 5-point Likert-scale.
- **Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Short Form (PPI-SF;** Lilienfeld & Hess, 2001).
 - A shortened version of the full-length PPI
 - Measures Cold Heartedness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$), Self-Centered Impulsivity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$), and Fearless Dominance (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$).
 - 4-point Likert scale.
- **Self-Construal Scale (SCS;** Singelis, 1994).
 - Measures the Independent Self (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$) and the Interdependent Self (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$).
 - 7- point Likert scale.
- **Relational-Interdependence Self-Construal Scale (RISC;** Cross et al, 2000).
 - Measures the degree to which one thinks of themselves in relation to others (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$).
 - 7- point Likert scale.
- **Collective Self-Construal Scale (CISC;** Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 1999).
 - Measures the degree to which one thinks of themselves as a member of a larger social group or collective (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).
 - 7- point Likert scale.

Results

Table 1.

Standardized beta weights for the simultaneous prediction of self-construal subscales by sex and psychopathic traits

	Self- Construal Subscales			
	SCS-IND	SCS- INT	CICS	RISC
SRP				
Sex	-.17*	.06	-.06	-.08
Callous Affect	.17	-.26*	-.25*	-.22
Interpersonal Manipulation	-.13	.20	.05	-.02
Erratic Lifestyle	.01	-.10	.19	.25*
Criminal Tendencies	-.09	-.08	-.00	-.03
R ²	.07	.09	.05	.07
PPI				
Sex	-.05	.04	.01	-.04
Cold Heartedness	-.10	-.39*	-.23*	-.31*
Self-Centered Impulsivity	-.23*	-.06	-.01	.01
Fearless Dominance	.53*	.11	.20*	.23*
R ²	.32	.17	.08	.13

Note: * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). SRP = Self Report Psychopathy Scale. PPI = Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Short Form. SCS-IND = Self-Construal Scale- Independent. SCS-INT = Self-Construal Scale- Interdependent. CICS = Collective Self-Construal Scale. RISC = Relational-Interdependence Self-Construal Scale. Sex (male = 0, female = 1).

Discussion

The results indicated differing relations between psychopathic traits and self-construal depending on the psychopathic trait and measure of psychopathy considered.

SRP:

- Callous Affect was uniquely and positively associated with independent self-construal. Moreover, the trait was uniquely negatively associated with all three measures of interdependent self-construal.

- Erratic Lifestyle was uniquely and positively related to collective and relational self-construal.

PPI:

- Cold heartedness was uniquely and negatively associated with all three measures of interdependent self-construal.

- Self-Centered Impulsivity was uniquely and negatively associated with independent self-construal.

- Fearless Dominance was uniquely and positively associated with independent, relational, and collective self-construal.

Comparison of the associations suggest conceptual similarity in the two measures of psychopathy. Specifically, Callous Affect and Cold-Heartedness appeared to demonstrate conceptual overlap as did Fearless Dominance and Erratic Lifestyle.

Limitations: Statistical power may be too low to distinguish between certain relationships and could be due to the low sample size. Certain non-significant beta weights may lead to a Type II error.

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