Self-Construal and Psychopathy

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 himself in terms of traits and personal characteristics (e.g., I am hardworking).
- **Relational self-construal** is how an individual defines himself by their close relationships (e.g., I am a mother).
- **Collective self-construal** is how an individual defines himself 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
- Manipulative Tendency
- Impulsivity
- Antisocial Behavior

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

- Boldness
- Meaningness
- 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.
- With 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; Pauhus, Neumann, & Hare, 2015), o Assesses 4 psychopathic traits: Callous Affect (Cronbach’s α = .79), Interpersonal Manipulation (Cronbach’s α = .84), Erratic Lifestyle (Cronbach’s α = .82), Criminal Tendencies (Cronbach’s α = .72).
- 5-point Likert-scale.

- **Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Short Form** (PPI-SF; Lilienfeld & Hess, 2001), o A shortened version of the full-length PPI o Measures Cold Heartedness (Cronbach’s α = .75), Self-Centered Impulsivity (Cronbach’s α = .82), and Fearless Dominance (Cronbach’s α = .86).
- 4-point Likert scale.

- **Self-Construal Scale** (SCS; Singelis, 1994), o Measures the degree to which one thinks of himself in relation to others (Cronbach’s α = .84).
- 7-point Likert scale.

- **Relational-Interdependence Self-Construal Scale** (RISC; Cross et al., 2000), o Measures the degree to which one thinks of himself as a member of a larger social group or collective (Cronbach’s α = .80).
- 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 | .05     | .01  | .02  |
| Erratic Lifestyle | .01     | -.16    | -.19  | .25* |
| Criminal Tendencies | -.09 | .08     | -.00 | -.03 |
| R²               | .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 | .51* | .11     | .20*  | .23* |
| R²               | .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.

**PPI:** Cold heartedness was uniquely and negatively associated with all three measures of interdependent 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.

References


Contact Information

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