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# Psychopathy and the detection of faking on self-report inventories of personality

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## Abstract

This study examined whether psychopathic traits enabled faking on self-report inventories. Two hundred undergraduates completed a psychopathy measure under standard conditions prior to answering personality and validity scales under faking good, faking bad, and standard instructions. Given the deceptiveness of psychopaths, successful fakers were expected to score higher on psychopathic traits than respondents caught faking. Results showed that although successful and unsuccessful fakers did not differ on general psychopathy, respondents successful at faking good scored higher than unsuccessful fakers on factors of machiavellian egocentricity and blame externalization and lower on stress immunity.

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*Keywords:* Psychopathy; Faking good; Faking bad; Self-report; Deception

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## 1. Introduction

Validity for self-report inventories assumes honest, straightforward answering. Given that accounts of psychopaths indicate their willingness and skill in lying, deceiving, and manipulating (Hare, Forth, & Hart, 1989), this validity assumption may not apply to individuals who score high on measures of psychopathy. The present research investigates this issue.

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Psychopathy, a pattern of interpersonal, affective, and antisocial symptoms (Hart & Hare, 1997), is characterized by callous, remorseless disregard for others and by chronic antisocial lifestyles (Hare, 1991). Psychopathy is a socially relevant personality disorder existing both in general and prison populations (Hare, 1996). Despite intuition linking successful deception to psychopathy, evidence confirming this is lacking. Specifically, the influence of psychopathy on the ability to fake successfully on self-report inventories remains to be established.

Deception, defined as deliberately misleading others by falsifying or concealing information (Ekman, 2001), is common in everyday interactions. Psychopaths engage in deception more persistently and with more panache than do others (Hare et al., 1989) and may be more successful in doing so. For example, Billings (2004) indicates that, among persons making either true or false videotaped statements judged for truthfulness, individuals scoring higher rather than lower on psychopathic traits were better at deceiving judges. Seto, Khattar, Lalumière, and Quinsey (1997) report that psychopathy correlates positively with deceptive tactics in nonsexual and sexual contexts. Successful positive, as opposed to negative, dissimulation may enhance successful mating and reproduction, and as such, psychopathy could be evolutionarily adaptive (Lalumiere, Harris, & Rice, 2001).

Deception strategies in self-report can be classified into “faking good” and “faking bad” response sets. Faking bad is more heterogeneous than faking good, because it includes the malingered of various mental and physical health conditions (Lanyon, 1996). One mechanism for detecting faking on self-report is through validity indices and most popular inventories contain at least one scale assessing the accuracy of self-presentation (Lanyon, 2004).

Given the deceptive nature of psychopaths and their negative social impact, it is important to determine how psychopathy affects successful dissimulation on self-report inventories. Ascertaining the veracity of test-takers' answers can have major implications for assessment contexts (e.g., parole, child custody, criminal sentencing, etc.). Therefore, the empirical relationship between psychopathy and the ability to fake successfully on self-report inventories is an important, yet insufficiently addressed, topic.

### *1.1. Faking good*

Research on faking good demonstrates that, when instructed, individuals high on psychopathy can lower their psychopathy scores more than those low on psychopathy (Edens, Buffington, Tomicic, & Riley, 2001; Rogers et al., 2002). For example, Edens et al. (2001) found that undergraduates who scored higher on the Psychopathic Personality Inventory (PPI; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996) were more adept than lower scorers in reducing PPI levels. Book, Holden, Starzyk, Wasyliw, and Edwards (in press) found enabled faking good respondents had higher psychopathy scores than individuals caught faking. Evidence, therefore, suggests that the ability to fake good successfully on self-report inventories differs as a function of psychopathy.

### *1.2. Faking bad*

Laboratory studies typically find that faking bad successfully is unrelated to psychopathy. Book et al. (in press) indicated that when faking bad, successful and unsuccessful fakers did not differ in psychopathy. Edens, Buffington, and Tomicic (2000) reported that students faking

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