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## Psychopathy and the five factor model: Self and therapist perceptions of psychopathic personality

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### Abstract

The utility of psychopaths' self-reports have consistently been questioned in the literature. Extant literature attempts to assess the degree to which individuals with psychopathic tendencies can and do identify in themselves those traits associated with psychopathy. Typically, self-report measures are more highly correlated with Factor 2 of the PCL-R than Factor 1. This pattern suggests that psychopaths are better able to reliably assess their behavior than their personality or emotional traits. Unexplored is whether psychopaths perceive their personality differently than observers' when using the same measure. The current study assesses the congruence of offenders' self-report of personality and the personality ratings provided by their primary therapists using a uniform measure of personality, the NEO-PI-R. Results suggest that offenders' ability to accurately report on their personality characteristics is hampered by their emotional and affective deficits (psychopathy Facet 2). Implications for FFM-psychopathy research and psychopathy self-reports are discussed.

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*Keywords:* Psychopathy; Five factor model; Self-report of psychopathy

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## 1. Introduction

Existing models of psychopathy make an implicit assumption that psychopathy is qualitatively distinct from other forms of personality and therefore, must be assessed only with specialized measures (e.g., Psychopathy Checklist-Revised [PCL-R]; Hare, 1991/2003). Despite this trend, several theorists and researchers have suggested that psychopathy may be a variant of normally distributed personality traits and therefore can be assessed, at least partially, with a comprehensive model of personality (Harpur, Hart, & Hare, 2002; Lynam, 2002; Miller, Lynam, Widiger, & Leukefeld, 2001). One such comprehensive model is the Five Factor Model (FFM).

Psychopaths can be thought of as exhibiting a wide array of emotional and behavioral excesses and deficits. Characteristically, they are outwardly engaging, grandiose, impulsive, and sensation seeking. Simultaneously, they are lacking in remorse, genuine emotion, and anxiety. They are irresponsible and unable to maintain long-term plans or relationships. Harpur et al. (2002) posited that these characteristics within the FFM produce a broadly-defined descriptive profile of the psychopath that is high on extraversion (E) and low on neuroticism (N), openness to experience (O), agreeableness (A), and conscientiousness (C). Lynam (2002); see also Widiger and Lynam (1998) advanced a more detailed model of psychopathy based on the facets of the FFM. This description of psychopathy utilized 15 of the 30 FFM facets and mapped directly onto the items of the PCL-R. This description characterizes the psychopath as high in nearly all facets of antagonism (i.e., low agreeableness), and low in several facets of conscientiousness.

An unaddressed issue in FFM research of psychopathy is the questionable ability of individuals with psychopathic traits to accurately report on their own internal or interpersonal dynamics (Edens, Hart, Johnson, Johnson, & Olver, 2000; Hare, 1993; Lilienfeld & Fowler, 2006; Steuerwald & Kosson, 2000). As Cleckley (1941/1988) noted, “[The psychopath] has absolutely no capacity to see himself as others see him” (p. 350). Thus, even if the content of FFM measures, such as the NEO-PI-R, was sufficient to comprehensively describe the construct of psychopathy, the self-report nature of the measure would likely hinder its ability to do so. Reporting on personality, emotions, and affective experiences requires a certain amount of insight that psychopaths may lack (Lilienfeld & Fowler, 2006). The inability to accurately perceive one’s self certainly has implications for the use of self-report instruments such as the NEO-PI-R in samples where a moderate to high degree of psychopathy is expected, such as institutionalized samples.

In an attempt to empirically investigate the use of self-reports in individuals with psychopathy, we employed an alternative version of the NEO-PI-R (Form R). Form R was developed for expert observers to provide FFM ratings on their subjects. The current study employed both the self-reported NEO-PI-R (Form S) and Form R in an effort to clarify (1) whether the FFM (either self-rated or observer rated) could describe psychopathy in a sample of incarcerated females, a population not included in previous FFM-psychopathy research, (2) whether congruence between self and observer ratings would actually decrease among the more psychopathic participants, and (3) whether FFM ratings based on observer ratings would add incremental validity to the descriptions of psychopathy when used in conjunction with self ratings.

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