The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale

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MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale

ABSTRACT:

The emerging construct of successful psychopathy is characterized by traits largely considered beneficial or adaptive in daily life, which might also be callous and manipulative in nature. To date, successful psychopathy remains poorly understood, with inconsistent and competing theoretical positions, an absence of empirical literature, and no validated index of the construct.

In this two-study manuscript, we describe the development and validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale (SPS) to help bridge this research gap. Study 1 (n = 403) documents the development and testing of an item pool based on theoretical understandings and expert ratings and Study 2 (n = 309) outlines the convergent validity of the scale. The final SPS comprised 54-items over 6-facets: Callous-Unemotional traits, Decisiveness, Confidence, Stress Immunity, Social Potency, and Manipulation. Rasch analysis was used to validate items and establish reliability and internal validity of the SPS scale. The SPS satisfied expectations of unidimensionality with minor modifications resolved by creating super-items. The final SPS was validated against existing measures of psychopathic traits, success expectancy, and success motivation.

The SPS demonstrated strong internal consistency and convergent validity, showing expected relationships with established measures of psychopathy and constructs related to success. These findings support the conceptualization of successful psychopathy as a multidimensional construct that blends socially desirable traits with maladaptive tendencies, providing empirical evidence for the adaptive features within the broader psychopathy spectrum.

CUST_RESEARCH_LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

CUST_PRACTICAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

CUST_SOCIAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

Overall, the development of this novel scale represents a necessary advancement in the field of successful psychopathy and provides a basis for international application in areas of personality research and occupational behavior

Figure 1

Scree Plot for Component Criterion

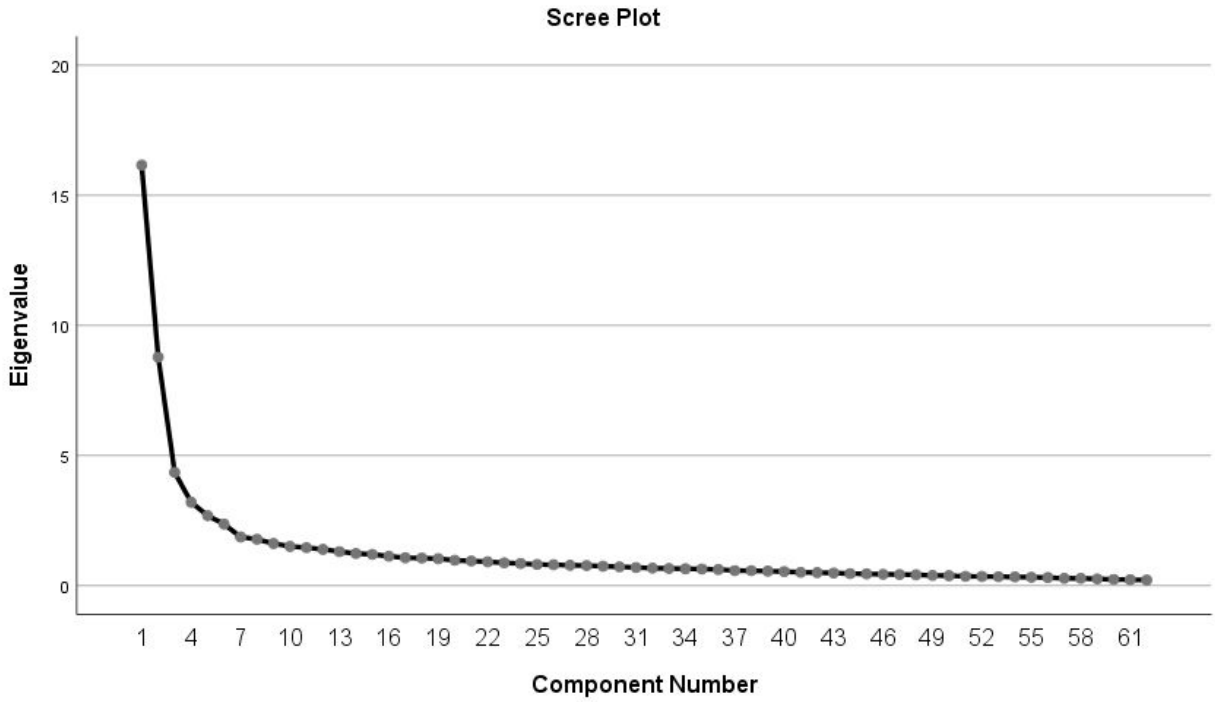


Figure 2

Disordered Individual Item Threshold

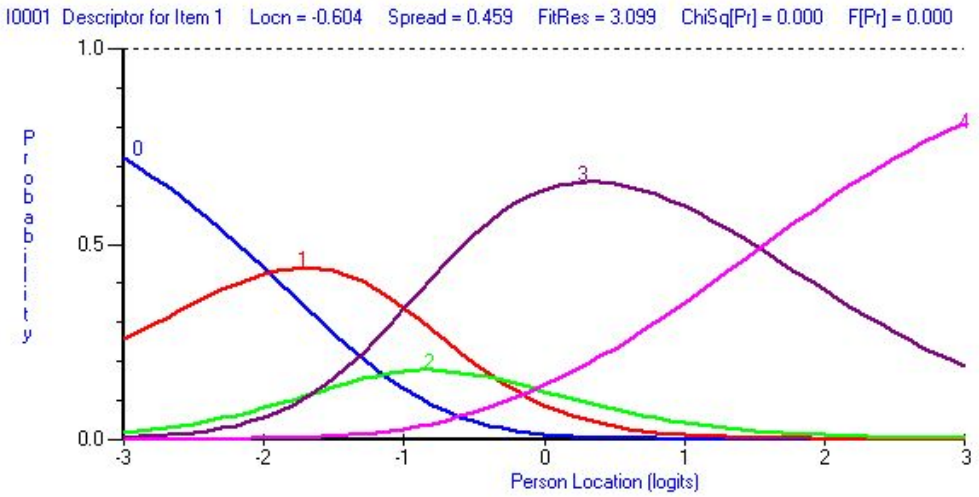


Figure 3

Ordered Individual Item Thresholds

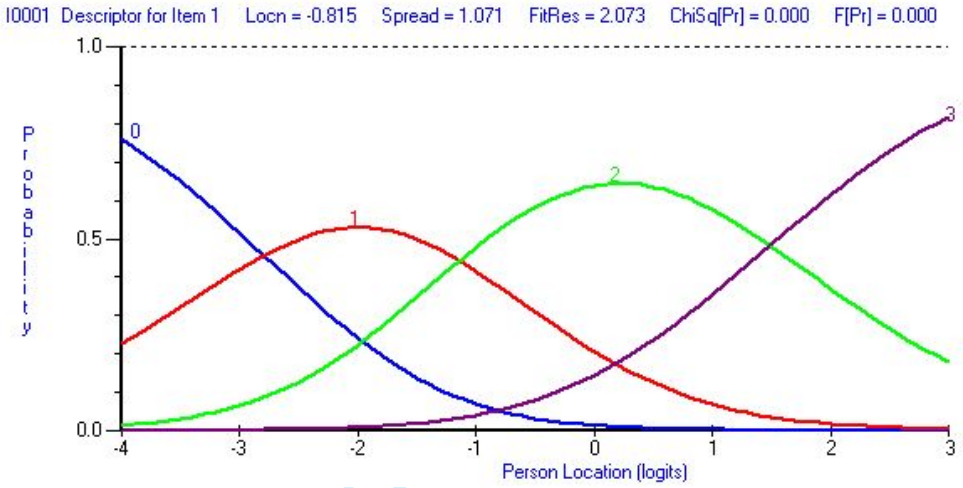


Figure 4

Person-Item Threshold Distribution of the Final Analysis.

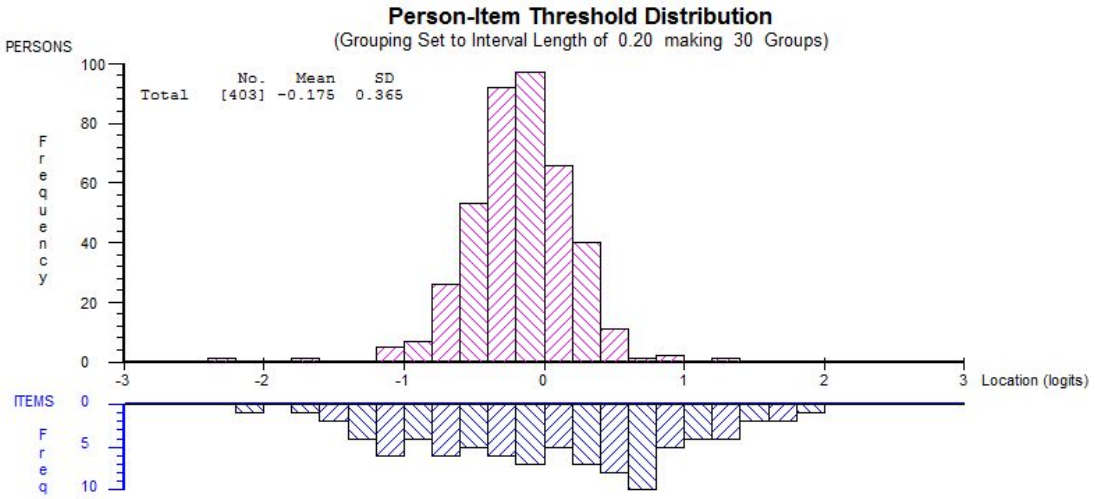


Table 1

Item loadings for the SPS

Item	Factor loadings					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am quite cold hearted	**.91**	-.20			.16	
I can often be arrogant †	**.85**				-.21	
I don't care about how others are feeling	**.67**	-.15	-.12	.25		
I don't care if someone gets hurt so I can get what I want	**.61**			.18		.11
I don't tend to feel guilty if I hurt someone's feelings	**.69**		-.11		.18	
I will always seek revenge	**.66**		-.16			
People often feel insulted when I talk to them	**.62**			.19	-.20	
I can be snobbish at times †	**.76**	.17	.25	-.25	-.20	-.15
I tend to be egotistical	**.64**	.15			-.19	.19
I rarely feel sorry for people who are having problems	**.64**	-.17	-.15		.32	
Playing to win is more important than playing fair	**.63**			.16	.16	.43
I would "walk over someone's dead body" to get what I want †	**.49**		-.10	.20		.15
I don't mind if I get punished, as long as I get what I want	**.56**			.32		.34
An act is only illegal if you get caught doing it	**.54**		-.19	.24		.23
When things go my way, I tend to be smug about it	**.58**	.12		-.17	-.14	.40
I am better than other people †	**.51**	.14	.29		.17	
I have the ability to get people out of their shells	-.21	**.82**	.12	.14		
I am skilled in interacting with other people	-.21	**.83**	.27	.16	.15	.13
I am good at keeping conversations flowing	-.19	**.87**		.17		
I am skilled at making people feel good	-.27	**.67**	.20			.14
I can use my emotional skills to change how another person is feeling		**.69**				
I know how to get people to do what I want	.34	**.68**	.21			
In groups I am a part of, I am usually the leader	.20	**.70**	.38	.30		
I do not struggle getting people see my point of view		**.53**	.19		.18	
I quickly become comfortable in the presence of others		**.61**	.17	.15	.29	
I am confident speaking my mind	.15	**.59**	.32	.19	.25	
I can often get people to do things they would not do for others	.34	**.57**	.17	.12		
When I argue I am good at getting my point across and convincing others		**.53**	.23	.11		
When I upset someone, I just use my charm to get them back onside	.34	**.54**				.14
I feel I have achieved a lot		.25	**.78**			.15
I am usually productive	-.14	.17	**.71**		.13	
I am successful in life		.33	**.68**		.20	.22
I put in the effort to get things I want	-.12	.18	**.51**			.10
I am skilled at lots of things		.27	**.59**	.23	.17	
I can handle high pressure situations †		.38	**.61**	.43	.25	
I get things done right away			**.58**	.12		.11
I can take in a lot of information without being overwhelmed		.29	**.57**	.35	.21	-.16
I know and value my own self-worth		.35	**.53**		.38	
I refrain from dangerous or risky situations	-.14			**-.79**		-.14
Dangerous situations excite me	.30	.20		**.78**		.27
I will often take risks	.23	.22		**.63**	.26	.34
I would not like a job where you are responsible for making lots of split-second decisions	-.19	-.21	-.41	**-.70**		.25
My fear of the unknown often prevents me from trying new things		-.29	-.16	**-.70**	-.41	.16
I pride myself on my ability to make split second decisions †	.14	.39	.37	**.61**	.20	
I am not a fast-paced person		-.16	-.41	**-.59**		
I enjoy games and activities where you have to make lots of split-second decisions	.18	.46	.20	**.60**	.21	

I feel flustered when I have to make up my mind quickly		-.28	-.35	**-.57**	-.22	.42
I don't like making decisions		-.40	-.38	**-.51**	-.24	.26
I find it easy to relax		.26			**.92**	.13
I often feel anxious		-.24		-.14	**-.89**	.39
The little things rarely bother me	.19				**.76**	
I get nervous easily		-.34	-.21	-.33	**-.70**	.40
When something bad happens, I get over it relatively quickly	.23		.31	.15	**.70**	
I can usually control my emotions, so they don't interfere with me achieving my goals			.49	.15	**.64**	.22
When things don't go my way, I bounce back quickly		.21	.38	.19	**.59**	
I am good at controlling my emotions			.37	.14	**.58**	.25
I will do almost anything to get what I want	.44	.16	.23	.29		**.58**
If I can get away with doing something then it must be right	.28					**.54**
I am motivated by financial gains	.17		.191			**.46**
The potential for social power motivates me to keep going	.19	.35	.23	.19		**.50**
I prefer tasks that offer immediate rewards †	.20	.13	-.14		-.14	**.36**
Gaining success can be tough; it's all about survival of the fittest			.15			**.28**

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Loadings > .1 were suppressed. † = items removed during Rasch analysis

Table 2

Inter-Item Correlations of the SPS

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SPS Total	-					
2. SPS CU	.610***	-				
3. SPS Social Potency	.696***	.068	-			
4. SPS Confidence	.588***	-.048	.562***	-		
5. SPS Decisiveness	.467***	.217***	.544***	.467***	-	
6. SPS Stress Immunity	.530***	.202***	.397***	.464***	.486**	-
7. SPS Manipulation	.678***	.452***	.311***	.303**	.306**	.256**

Note. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale *$p < .05$ **$p < .001$ ***$p < .001$

Table 3

Summary of Rasch model fit statistics for the initial and the final Rasch analyses (N = 403)

	Person mean		Goodness of fit		PSI	Unidimensionality *t*-tests	
Analyses	Value / SD		**χ2 (df)**	***p***		**%**	**Lower bound %**
A1 Initial (62 Items)	-0.19	0.49	997.99(531)	< .001	.93	>10	>5 (NO)
A2 (54 Items)	-0.21	0.50	860.81(486)	< .001	.93	>10	>5 (NO)
Final (5 Super items)	-0.09	0.29	51.20 (45)	.240	.82	5.7	3.6 (YES)

Table 4

Initial Rasch model fit statistics for individual items

No	Item Description	Location	Fit Resid	Chi Sq
1	I am quite cold-hearted	-0.60	3.10*	39.74
2	I can often be arrogant	-0.47	0.26	3.61
3	I don't care about how others are feeling	-0.60	-1.25	7.08
4	I don't care if someone gets hurt so I can get what I want	0.13	0.18	3.37
5	I don't tend to feel guilty if I hurt someone's feelings	0.33	1.98	20.99
6	I will always seek revenge	0.47	2.53	13.22
7	People often feel insulted when I talk to them	0.52	2.73*	17.51
8	I can be snobbish at times	0.20	-2.36	22.40*
9	I tend to be egotistical	-0.56	0.80	6.82
10	I rarely feel sorry for people who are having problems	-0.16	-0.36	8.51
11	Playing to win is more important than playing fair	0.43	-0.69	5.42
12	I would "walk over someone's dead body" to get what I want	0.01	0.04	0.99
13	I don't mind getting punished, as long as I get what I want	-0.05	2.84*	3.46
14	An act is only illegal if you get caught doing it	-0.39	-0.53	8.53
15	When things go my way, I tend to be smug about it	0.63	2.74*	17.39
16	I am better than other people	-0.29	-0.38	10.96
17	I have the ability to get people out of their shells	0.54	1.38	6.06
18	I am skilled in interacting with other people	0.25	-1.51	18.41
19	I am good at keeping conversations flowing	-0.15	-0.64	2.06
20	I am skilled at making people feel good	0.16	3.28*	21.58
21	I can use my emotional skills to change how another person is feeling	0.17	1.89	3.94
22	I know how to get people to do what I want	-0.22	0.72	5.00
23	In groups I am a part of, I am usually the leader	-0.50	1.29	10.92
24	I do not struggle getting people to see my point of view	-0.16	0.47	1.46
25	I quickly become comfortable in the presence of others	-0.50	0.53	5.64
26	I am confident speaking my mind	0.37	-1.36	11.33
27	I can often get people to do things they would not do for others	0.82	2.00	15.76
28	When I argue I am good at getting my point across and convincing others	-0.53	-1.09	8.01
29	When I upset someone, I just use my charm to get them back onside	0.24	-1.00	12.17
30	I feel I have achieved a lot	-0.91	3.49*	42.70*
31	I am usually productive	-0.20	-0.74	10.34
32	I am successful in life	0.65	2.03	23.25*
33	I put in the effort to get the things I want	-0.55	-0.22	4.74
34	I am skilled at lots of things	0.36	4.27*	5.68
35	I can handle high pressure situations	0.61	-0.10	1.60
36	I get things done right away	-0.48	-0.12	5.60
37	I can take in a lot of information without being overwhelmed	0.91	0.17	2.32
38	I know and value my own self-worth	-0.26	0.67	2.18
39	I refrain from dangerous or risky situations	0.37	1.53	1.76
40	Dangerous situations excite me	0.40	-0.41	10.50
41	I will often take risks	-1.04	0.92	1.66
42	I would not like a job where you are responsible for making lots of split-second decisions	-0.82	2.04	9.17
43	My fear of the unknown prevents me from trying new things	0.91	0.31	3.51
44	I pride myself on my ability to make split-second decisions	0.52	0.15	4.56
45	I am not a fast-paced person	0.49	-0.36	6.69
46	I enjoy games and activities where you have to make lots of split-second decisions	0.03	-1.69	24.64*
47	I feel flustered when I have to make my mind up quickly	-0.57	-1.29	23.19*
48	I don't like making decisions	0.22	6.89*	31.88*
49	I find it easy to relax	-0.26	1.80	8.22
50	I often feel anxious	-0.21	0.88	1.02
51	The little things rarely bother me	0.07	0.37	4.34
52	I get nervous easily	-0.44	1.59	5.38
53	When something bad happens, I get over it relatively quickly	-0.37	-2.29	30.97*
54	I can usually control my emotions, so they don't interfere with me reaching my goals	0.04	-2.74*	40.03*

59	I am motivated by financial gains	-0.07	-2.59*	29.71*
60	The potential for social power keeps me going	0.19	0.46	0.97
61	I prefer tasks that offer immediate rewards	-0.49	1.68	6.72
62	Gaining success can be tough; it's all about survival of the fittest	0.11	-0.74	7.00

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations (Pearson's R) Between the Psychopathy Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
[1] SPS Total	-	.578***	.802***	.573***	.505***	.494***	.713***	.588***	.607***	.364***	.205***	.451***	.462***	.340***	.385***	.204***	.371***	.368***
[2] SPS CU Traits		-	.152**	-.109	.318***	.038	.595***	.695***	.155**	.751***	.557***	.686***	.615***	.622***	.501***	.427***	.704***	.706***
[3] SPS Social Potency			-	.611***	.526***	.500***	.427***	.420***	.729***	.049	.022	.227***	.266***	.063	.276***	.061	.096	.086
[4] SPS Confidence				-	.351***	.539***	.157**	.040	.580***	-.187***	-.377***	-.126*	-.070	-.118*	-.072	-.156**	-.251***	-.273***
[5] SPS Decisiveness					-	.483***	.390***	.628***	.685***	.365***	.202***	.502***	.358***	.333***	.591***	.229***	.285***	.253***
[6] SPS Stress Immunity						-	.113*	.258***	.680***	.062	-.272***	.040	.003	.068	.059	-.012	-.139*	-.033
[7] SPS Manipulation							-	.521***	.237***	.436***	.406***	.534***	.509***	.397***	.438***	.318***	.585***	.528***
[8] TriPM Total								-	.574***	.808***	.674***	.811***	.647***	.613***	.750***	.504***	.641***	.643***
[9] TriPM Boldness									-	.187***	-.088	.305***	.270***	.190***	.346***	.108	.046	.060
[10] TriPM Meanness										-	.520***	.723***	.599***	.670***	.580***	.418***	.633***	.686***
[11] TriPM Disinhibition											-	.658**	.475***	.425***	.623***	.529***	.677***	.686***
[12] SRP Total												-	.806***	.799***	.849***	.676***	.725***	.729***
[13] SRP Interpersonal Manipulation													-	.580***	.550***	.381***	.594***	.656***
[14] SRP Callous Affect														-	.568***	.388***	.564***	.604***
[15] SRP Erratic Lifestyle															-	.452***	.611***	.550***
[16] SRP Antisocial Behavior																-	.502***	.406***

[17] LSRP Primary																	-	.764***
[18] LSRP Secondary																		-
M	154.3	23.1	37.2	28.0	24.2	23.8	13.0	54.9	26.5	12.5	15.8	124.4	33.2	32.7	36.0	22.5	1.88	1.86
SD	20.0	8.1	9.5	5.7	6.9	6.7	3.5	17.2	9.1	7.9	8.3	26.7	8.7	7.7	10.3	7.0	.39	.45
α	.84	.87	.90	.82	.82	.86	.66	.88	.87	.87	.85	.89	.84	.75	.84	.80	.84	.73

Note. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; SRP = Self Report Psychopathy; LSRP = Levenson's Self Report Psychopathy *p < .05 **p < .001 ***p < .001

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations (Pearson's R) Between the Success Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11†
[1] Generalised Expectancy for Success (GESS Total)	-	.954***	.915***	.900***	.155**	.338***	.409***	.303***	.310***	.286***	.152*
[2] GESS General Efficacy		-	.836***	.834***	.175**	.362***	.389***	.339***	.319***	.303***	.147*
[3] GESS Long-range Career Orientation			-	.732***	.233***	.381***	.316***	.259***	.311***	.317***	.141*
[4] GESS Personal Problem Solving				-	.090	.234***	.508***	.256***	.269***	.233***	.139*
[5] LSMS Status					-	.372***	.153**	.100	.430***	.588***	.141*
[6] LSMS Society						-	.330***	.513***	.602***	.598***	-.006
[7] LSMS Family							-	.339**	.404***	.389***	.155*
[8] LSMS Personal Fulfilment								-	.585**	.476***	.083
[9] LSMS Professional Fulfilment									-	.782***	.062
[10] LSMS Security										-	.020
[11] Socioeconomic Status											-
M	107.6	41.4	23.8	30.5	21.1	30.7	33.6	36.6	19.9	18.9	11.8
SD	17.7	7.3	4.8	5.4	6.2	6.3	7.5	3.8	3.5	3.6	.63
α	.98	.88	.80	.81	.85	.90	.92	.86	.77	.75	-

Note. GESS = Generalised Expectancy for Success Scale; LSMS = Life Success Measures Scale. † = Participants for this scale is n = 230 due to incompletes. *p < .05 **p < .001 ***p < .001

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations (Pearson's R) Between the psychopathy variables and success variables

Variable	GESS Total	GESS General Efficacy	GESS Long-range Career Orientation	GESS Personal Problem Solving	LSMS Status	LSMS Society	LSMS Family	LSMS Personal Fulfilment	LSMS Professional Fulfilment	LSMS Security	SES
SPS Total	.381***	.402**	.382***	.325***	.410***	.112	.121	.048	.100	.193**	.204**
SPS CU Traits	-.242***	-.199**	-.200**	-.240***	.373***	-.217***	-.197**	-.235***	-.194**	-.033	.084
SPS Social Potency	.551***	.538***	.535***	.488***	.281***	.275***	.238***	.185**	.209***	.246***	.142*
SPS Confidence	.657***	.647***	.606***	.581***	.076	.216***	.279**	.227***	.207**	.164*	.261***
SPS Decisiveness	.304***	.311***	.280***	.244***	.295***	.128	.037	.045	.030	.142*	.156*
SPS Stress Immunity	.549***	.495***	.521***	.486***	.120	.050	.058	.032	.022	.082	.166*
SPS Manipulation	.066	.108	.090	.063	.523***	.067	.036	-.037	.075	.223***	.102
TriPM Total	.00	.039	.042	-.064	.422***	-.046	-.146*	-.100	-.125	.059	.064
TriPM Boldness	.563***	.547***	.543***	.478**	.270***	.178**	.136*	.143*	.090	.169*	.198**
TriPM Meanness	-.251***	-.229***	-.208**	-.256***	.278***	-.296***	-.315***	-.250***	-.248***	-.111	.057
TriPM Disinhibition	-.356***	-.278***	-.286***	-.395***	.336***	-.001	-.149*	-.121	-.121	.052	-.130*
SRP Total	-.195**	-.142*	-.170*	-.204**	.337***	-.140*	-.218***	-.215***	-.215***	-.018	-.027
SRP Interpersonal Manipulation	-.174**	-.121	-.146*	-.181**	.335***	-.090	-.173**	-.127	-.127	.016	.067
SRP Callous Affect	-.178**	-.143*	-.181**	-.178**	.259***	-.227**	-.214***	-.182**	-.182**	-.033	.022
SRP Erratic Lifestyle	-.078	-.027	-.060	-.104	.262***	.001	-.139*	-.055	-.055	.044	-.081
SRP Antisocial Behavior	-.221***	-.196**	-.181**	-.209***	.214***	-.174**	-.183**	-.383***	-.383***	-.114	-.093
LSRP Primary	-.283***	-.252**	-.207**	-.279***	.430***	-.125	-.159*	-.268***	-.268***	.024	0.29
LSRP Secondary	-.275**	-.261**	-.226**	-.253***	.338***	-.200**	-.225***	-.299***	-.299***	-.046	-.024

Note. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; SRP = Self Report Psychopathy; LSRP = Levenson's Self Report Psychopathy; GESS = Generalised Expectancy for Success Scale; LSMS = Life Success Measures Scale. *p < .05 **p < .001 ***p < .001

Dear Dr Willmott,

Please find attached our manuscript entitled "The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale" for consideration in the Journal of Criminal Psychology.

Our research addresses a critical gap in the field by introducing and validating the Successful Psychopathy Scale (SPS), a novel measure designed to operationalize the emerging construct of successful psychopathy. The manuscript presents a two-study design: Study 1 outlines the theoretical development and psychometric refinement of the scale, while Study 2 establishes its convergent validity against existing measures.

We believe this work offers a significant contribution by providing a validated tool for future research into adaptive and maladaptive psychopathic traits in diverse contexts, including personality psychology and occupational settings.

We confirm that this manuscript is original, has not been published previously, and is not under consideration elsewhere.

Thank you for considering our submission. We look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the Journal of Criminal Psychology.

Sincerely,
Dr Louise Wallace

University of Leicester

The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale

Abstract

The emerging construct of *successful psychopathy* is characterised by traits largely considered beneficial or adaptive in daily life, which might also be callous and manipulative in nature. To date, successful psychopathy remains poorly understood, with inconsistent and competing theoretical positions, an absence of empirical literature, and no validated index of the construct. In this two-study manuscript, we describe the development and validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale (SPS) to help bridge this research gap. Study 1 (n = 403) documents the development and testing of an item pool based on theoretical understandings and expert ratings and Study 2 (n = 309) outlines the convergent validity of the scale. The final SPS comprised 54-items over 6-facets: Callous-Unemotional traits (CU), Decisiveness, Confidence, Stress Immunity, Social Potency, and Manipulation. Rasch analysis was used to validate items and establish reliability and internal validity of the SPS scale. The SPS satisfied expectations of unidimensionality with minor modifications resolved by creating super-items. The final SPS was validated against existing measures of psychopathic traits, success expectancy, and success motivation. Overall, the development of this novel scale represents a necessary advancement in the field of successful psychopathy and provides a basis for international application in areas of personality research and occupational behavior.

Keywords: *successful psychopathy, psychopathy, psychometrics, personality, scale development*

Introduction

Psychopathy is prototypically conceptualised as a constellation of interpersonal-affective deficits, including superficial charm, manipulativeness, callousness and a lack of empathy, combined with antisocial behaviour and poor behavioural control (Hare & Neumann, 2005). Indeed, meta-analytic findings affirm prototypical psychopathy is one of the most robust predictors of chronic, violent offending and recidivism thereafter (Azeredo et al., 2025; Fox & DeLisi, 2019).

On a theoretical level, the construct of psychopathy has long been debated, with competing models suggesting one (unitary; Hare, 1980; Jones & Paulhus, 2014), two (interpersonal-affective and antisocial-lifestyle; Benning et al., 2003), or three (boldness, meanness, disinhibition; Patrick et al., 2009) higher-order factors. Despite the predictive utility of psychopathy measures such as the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991) in forensic contexts, key theoretical and empirical challenges remain, namely, (i) whether antisocial behaviour is a core component of psychopathy or an associated outcome (Cooke & Michie, 2001; Cooke & Selbom, 2019), (ii) whether measures are appropriate for non-forensic populations (Debowska et al., 2018), and (iii) whether positively adjusted traits (e.g., charm, emotional resilience, and social poise) contribute and/or are central to the construct (Cleckley, 1941).

Focus on antisociality in psychopathy assessment has created a gap in understanding psychopathic traits in non-criminal populations, wherein some individuals with psychopathic traits do not engage in persistent criminal behaviour or overt aggression (Skeem & Cooke, 2010), and certain traits are negatively correlated with criminal thinking (e.g., Boldness; DeblaSio & Mojtahedi, 2023). Furthermore, while the PCL-R and its self-report derivatives reliably predict antisocial outcomes, they are less effective in identifying adaptive facets of psychopathy, such as emotional stability, charm, and goal-directed behaviour (Lilienfeld et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2022). This is a critical omission given that psychopathy is a

multifaceted construct with dimensional traits that are distributed within the general population (Edens et al., 2006; Neumann et al., 2015) and which can manifest in socially functional and adaptive ways (Boduszek et al., 2018), such as via high-levels of interpersonal-affective traits that can be utilised to achieve success in leadership, business, and competitive environments (Babiak & Hare, 2006).

Indeed, emerging evidence suggests that a subset of individuals, often labelled *successful psychopaths*, exhibit prototypical traits such as superficial charm, manipulativeness, and fearlessness, yet demonstrates an absence of antisocial or offending behaviour (Benning et al., 2018; Lilienfeld et al., 2015). Estimates suggest that approximately 3.5% of corporate executives (Babiak & Hare, 2006) and millions of individuals globally (Schuette et al., 2015) may score highly on measures of psychopathic traits while maintaining functional, and in some cases, highly successful lives. These individuals may capitalise on interpersonal boldness, social charm, and emotional resilience to navigate complex organisational hierarchies and attain positions of power (Babiak et al., 2010; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010). Nonetheless, their success is not without risk: such traits can also underlie exploitative behaviours, manipulative leadership styles, and unethical decision-making, which may have significant consequences in organisational or societal contexts (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Boddy, 2017).

Defining and Operationalising Successful Psychopathy

Despite a precise definition of *successful psychopathy* remaining elusive, Lilienfeld et al. (2015) proposed that such individuals exhibit the core traits of prototypical psychopathy, particularly interpersonal-affective features such as superficial charm, manipulativeness, and emotional detachment, yet avoid maladaptive behavioural outcomes, such as persistent criminality or aggression. Pertinent theoretical models include: the differential-severity model, which views successful and unsuccessful psychopathy as points along a single continuum of severity; the moderated-expression model, which posits that protective factors

(e.g., stable socioeconomic background, positive early experiences, and intact executive functioning) buffer against antisocial outcomes (Dargis et al., 2016; Ishikawa et al., 2001) and the differential-configuration model, which suggests successful psychopaths possess a unique configuration of traits, including adaptive features such as conscientiousness, social adeptness, and leadership skills (Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010).

Wallace et al.'s (2022) systematic review synthesises these models, identifying a core set of characteristics that define successful psychopathy, encompassing fearless dominance, social skill, stress immunity, and leadership ability. These traits, alongside goal-directed behaviour and status-seeking motives, may enable individuals to achieve success across various life domains, particularly in competitive, high-stakes environments where boldness, charm, and strategic thinking are advantageous (Persson & Lilienfeld, 2019). However, operationalising "success" in this context is complex. Success may encompass tangible outcomes such as socioeconomic status (SES), occupational achievement, and financial security, as well as more subjective measures such as well-being, resilience, and perceived life satisfaction (Shoja et al., 2019). Crucially, while psychopathic traits such as boldness and social dominance can facilitate agentic success, their interaction with moderating factors such as social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and networking ability (Schuette et al., 2015) may determine whether these traits result in adaptive functioning or maladaptive outcomes such as unethical behaviour or reputational harm (Boddy, 2017).

Importantly, while traits associated with successful psychopathy may appear superficially similar to other performance-enhancing constructs, such as mental toughness, the underlying psychological architecture differs in meaningful ways. Mental toughness is characterised by perseverance, confidence, and resilience under pressure (Gucciardi et al., 2021), often linked to positive affect and prosocial outcomes in achievement contexts. In contrast, successful psychopathy includes affective deficits such as low empathy and emotional detachment (Benning et al., 2018), which are not features of mental toughness.

Meta-analytic evidence reinforces this distinction, finding no significant correlation between prototypical psychopathy and mental toughness, despite some shared surface traits like fearlessness and goal orientation (Liang et al., 2024). This suggests that successful psychopathy constitutes a distinct psychological profile, with interpersonal-affective traits that may enable functional outcomes in specific contexts, but which also carry risk for exploitative or unethical conduct.

Understanding successful psychopathy is essential for broadening the scope of psychopathy research beyond forensic and correctional settings, identifying psychopathic traits in high-functioning individuals, and exploring how such traits manifest in domains such as leadership, organisational behaviour, and criminally relevant outcomes like white-collar crime, corruption, and fraud. Yet, a critical gap remains: no validated measure exists to specifically assess the construct of successful psychopathy, limiting our ability to systematically study its correlates, predictors, and consequences.

Manuscript Aims

Taken together, development of a psychometrically-sound measure of successful psychopathy would be beneficial for use within the general population. Contextualised within extant theoretical models, deductive rational strategy and recaptured scale techniques (Burisch, 1984) were used in Study 1 to develop an initial item pool, which was then tested using Classical Test Theory (CTT) to inform construction of the *Successful Psychopathy Scale* (SPS). Alongside these procedures, Rasch analysis was used to validate items and to establish both reliability and internal validity. In an independently sampled Study 2, cross-sectional analyses were used to explore the SPS's convergent and divergent validity with existing measures of prototypical psychopathy, and predictive validity of agentic success wherein successful psychopathy was hypothesised to positively predict variation in socioeconomic status, expectancy for success, and extrinsic motivators.

Study 1

Scale Development

Deductive Rational Strategy and recaptured scale techniques (Burisch, 1984) were employed. First, one hundred items were derived from theoretical models of successful psychopathy, adaptive traits, and professional success. Items tapping into the presence of impulsivity, social charm, CU traits, and boldness were aligned with Cleckley's (1941) original conceptualization of psychopathy, and items tapping into success reflected personality aspects such as drive (e.g., *"I put in effort to get things I want"*), persuasiveness (e.g., *"I know how to get people to do what I want"*), resilience (e.g., *"Stressful events rarely affect me as much as they do to others"*), and locus of control (e.g., *"I lead on tasks"*). Additional items reflecting the Big-5 (Goldberg, 1993) were also included owing to measures of (for example) low agreeableness and conscientiousness being correlated with psychopathic personality (Ross et al., 2004). Items reflected core themes within the successful psychopathy literature, including relevant aspects from the Psychopathic Personality Inventory (PPI; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996) and the Triarchic Psychopathic Measures (TriPM; Patrick et al., 2009), such as fearlessness (e.g., *"Dangerous situations excite me"*), stress immunity (e.g., *"When things don't go my way, I bounce back quickly"*), social charm (e.g., *"I have the ability to get people out of their shells"*), and callousness (e.g., *"I am rarely disturbed by the misfortunes of others"*). No item discussed specific contexts of success due to its subjectivity, and all items were scored on a 5-point Likert Scale.

Expert Ratings

Sixteen academic experts in psychopathy, who were actively publishing in this area over the last five years, and who were either associate professors or full professors were asked via email to estimate potential factor loadings (-1 to 1) of the same randomised subsample of items (n = 36) under a single component structure labelled 'successful psychopathy'. We did not ask experts to rate all items out of respect for their time and in the

hope of increasing response rates. Data was collected using Qualtrics to alleviate the added workload and confirmation bias born out of using interviews (Beatty & Willis, 2007). Clinicians were not contacted as this research focused on psychopathy as a personality construct over a clinical profile for diagnostic purposes.

Generally, expert raters found the items appropriately linked to the theoretical definition of successful psychopathy and reported high hypothetical factorability, with no experts indicating the need to remove any single item. However, there were points of contention. First, two experts indicated via follow up email that the item "*I make sure I am prepared before I start a task*" might be too context specific and thus fail to map onto a niche underpinning trait, which proved warranted due to the item subsequently being removed during the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) due to poor loading (< .2). Second, experts queried the presence of several consciousness-based items, but none were indicated as candidates for removal at this stage due to the relevance of consciousness within the differential-configuration model of successful psychopathy (Lilienfeld et al., 2015).

Participants

Once incomplete responses were removed (n = 3), four hundred participants (50% females, M_{age} = 34, SD = 13, age range = 18-73 years) were recruited via *Prolific*; a crowdsourcing platform that yields comparable data quality to that derived from laboratory recruitment (Peer et al., 2017). We further bolstered this reliability by ensuring that all response durations were within an appropriate timeframe (10-20 minutes). The sample size exceeds optimal estimates for both Rasch analysis (Linacre, 1994) and PCA (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Participants were required to be fluent in English, aged 18 years or over, and from the United Kingdom. All participants were reimbursed at a rate of £5.50 per hour. Ethical approval for the study was granted by [Removed for peer review] in [December, 2021], under reference number [Removed for peer review]. The study followed institutional and ethical guidelines as recommend by the British Psychological Society.

Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire advertised via *Prolific* and on average, the study took 20 min to complete. Participants provided consent in accordance with national ethical guidelines, before completing demographic questions and scale items. Participants were thanked for their time and debriefed.

Principal Component Analyses

An exploratory approach helped define the structure of the SPS. The initial 100 items were subjected to PCA using SPSS (v.25). PCA was selected as an initial data reduction technique to identify and retain items that explain the greatest total variance in the dataset, which is appropriate for the primary goal of streamlining a large item pool (Jolliffe, 2002) prior to deeper psychometric modelling (e.g., Rasch analysis). Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measured sampling adequacy at .89, above the recommended .60 (Kaiser, 1970) and Bartlett's test of Sphericity was statistically significant, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix ($p < .05$). Reliability analyses (two iterations) were conducted on the one component scale to earmark items with low inter-item correlations (< .2) for removal. Twelve items were removed leaving 88-items before PCA. Parallel Analysis (Vivek et al., 2017) advised a non-psychometrically sound twenty-component solution; thus some components were rejected due to a lack of conceptual clarity, weak interpretability, or sparse item loadings (e.g. components with fewer than three strong items or unstable loading patterns) (Worthington & Whitaker, 2006).

Based on the single component structure, the ideal model fit was conceptually either a four, five or six facet solution (see Figure 1). Three PCAs were conducted to explore these structures, with the 6-component structure providing the best interpretation of the data following varimax rotation. A further 29 items were removed due to cross-loadings (< .1 loading differences) and conceptualization implications, leaving 62-items (see Table 1). All eigenvalues were exceeded one, and the six factors explained 47.7% of the total variance.

Figure 1

Scree Plot for Component Criterion

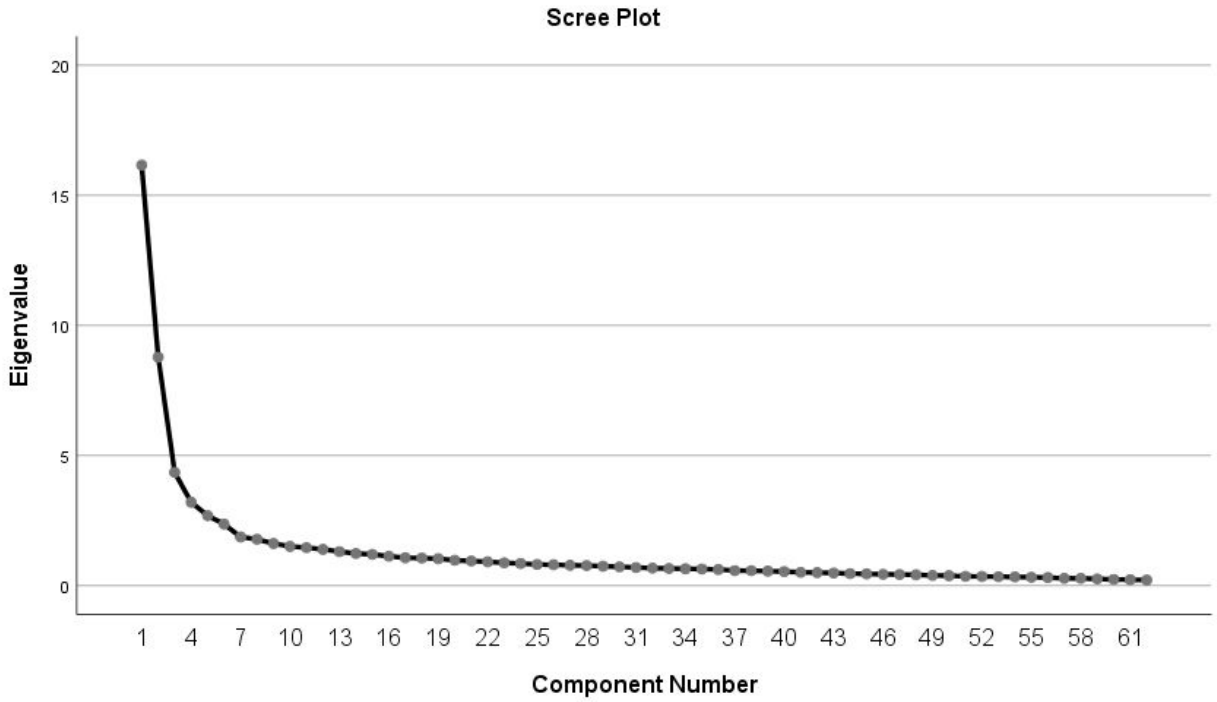


Table 1

Item loadings for the SPS

Item	Factor loadings					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am quite cold hearted	**.91**	-.20			.16	
I can often be arrogant †	**.85**				-.21	
I don't care about how others are feeling	**.67**	-.15	-.12	.25		
I don't care if someone gets hurt so I can get what I want	**.61**			.18		.11
I don't tend to feel guilty if I hurt someone's feelings	**.69**		-.11		.18	
I will always seek revenge	**.66**		-.16			
People often feel insulted when I talk to them	**.62**			.19	-.20	
I can be snobbish at times †	**.76**	.17	.25	-.25	-.20	-.15
I tend to be egotistical	**.64**	.15			-.19	.19
I rarely feel sorry for people who are having problems	**.64**	-.17	-.15		.32	
Playing to win is more important than playing fair	**.63**			.16	.16	.43
I would "walk over someone's dead body" to get what I want †	**.49**		-.10	.20		.15
I don't mind if I get punished, as long as I get what I want	**.56**			.32		.34
An act is only illegal if you get caught doing it	**.54**		-.19	.24		.23
When things go my way, I tend to be smug about it	**.58**	.12		-.17	-.14	.40
I am better than other people †	**.51**	.14	.29		.17	
I have the ability to get people out of their shells	-.21	**.82**	.12	.14		
I am skilled in interacting with other people	-.21	**.83**	.27	.16	.15	.13
I am good at keeping conversations flowing	-.19	**.87**		.17		
I am skilled at making people feel good	-.27	**.67**	.20			.14
I can use my emotional skills to change how another person is feeling		**.69**				
I know how to get people to do what I want	.34	**.68**	.21			
In groups I am a part of, I am usually the leader	.20	**.70**	.38	.30		
I do not struggle getting people see my point of view		**.53**	.19		.18	
I quickly become comfortable in the presence of others		**.61**	.17	.15	.29	
I am confident speaking my mind	.15	**.59**	.32	.19	.25	
I can often get people to do things they would not do for others	.34	**.57**	.17	.12		
When I argue I am good at getting my point across and convincing others		**.53**	.23	.11		
When I upset someone, I just use my charm to get them back onside	.34	**.54**				.14
I feel I have achieved a lot		.25	**.78**			.15
I am usually productive	-.14	.17	**.71**		.13	
I am successful in life		.33	**.68**		.20	.22
I put in the effort to get things I want	-.12	.18	**.51**			.10
I am skilled at lots of things		.27	**.59**	.23	.17	
I can handle high pressure situations †		.38	**.61**	.43	.25	
I get things done right away			**.58**	.12		.11
I can take in a lot of information without being overwhelmed		.29	**.57**	.35	.21	-.16
I know and value my own self-worth		.35	**.53**		.38	
I refrain from dangerous or risky situations	-.14			**-.79**		-.14
Dangerous situations excite me	.30	.20		**.78**		.27
I will often take risks	.23	.22		**.63**	.26	.34
I would not like a job where you are responsible for making lots of split-second decisions	-.19	-.21	-.41	**-.70**		.25
My fear of the unknown often prevents me from trying new things		-.29	-.16	**-.70**	-.41	.16
I pride myself on my ability to make split second decisions †	.14	.39	.37	**.61**	.20	
I am not a fast-paced person		-.16	-.41	**-.59**		
I enjoy games and activities where you have to make lots of split-second decisions	.18	.46	.20	**.60**	.21	
I feel flustered when I have to make up my mind quickly		-.28	-.35	**-.57**	-.22	.42
I don’t like making decisions		-.40	-.38	**-.51**	-.24	.26

I find it easy to relax		.26			**.92**	.13
I often feel anxious		-.24		-.14	**-.89**	.39
The little things rarely bother me	.19				**.76**	
I get nervous easily		-.34	-.21	-.33	**-.70**	.40
When something bad happens, I get over it relatively quickly	.23		.31	.15	**.70**	
I can usually control my emotions, so they don't interfere with me achieving my goals			.49	.15	**.64**	.22
When things don't go my way, I bounce back quickly		.21	.38	.19	**.59**	
I am good at controlling my emotions			.37	.14	**.58**	.25
I will do almost anything to get what I want	.44	.16	.23	.29		**.58**
If I can get away with doing something then it must be right	.28					**.54**
I am motivated by financial gains	.17		.19			**.46**
The potential for social power motivates me to keep going	.19	.35	.23	.19		**.50**
I prefer tasks that offer immediate rewards †	.20	.13	-.14		-.14	**.36**
Gaining success can be tough; it's all about survival of the fittest			.15			**.28**

Note. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Loadings > .1 were suppressed. † = items removed during Rasch analysis

Reliability and Inter-Item Correlations

The SPS showed high reliability for the total scale (α = .84) and CU traits (α = .87), Social Potency (α = .88), Confidence (α = .83), Decisiveness (α = .84) and Stress Immunity (α = .77) subscales. The Manipulation subscale demonstrated good reliability (α = .62). Facet intercorrelations are shown in Table 2. All subscales moderately to strongly correlated with the SPS total and each other, save for CU traits, which neither correlated with Social Potency nor Confidence.

Table 2

Inter-Item Correlations of the SPS

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SPS Total	-					
2. SPS CU	.61***	-				
3. SPS Social Potency	.70***	.07	-			
4. SPS Confidence	.59***	-.04	.56***	-		
5. SPS Decisiveness	.47***	.21***	.54***	.47***	-	
6. SPS Stress Immunity	.53***	.20***	.40***	.46***	.49**	-

7. SPS Manipulation	.68***	.45***	.31***	.30**	.30**	.25**

Note. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale *$p < .05$ **$p < .001$ ***$p < .001$

Rasch Analysis

After determining the component structure of the SPS, 62-items underwent Rasch analysis (RUMM2030; Andrich et al., 2010) to establish internal validity. For parsimony, we solely document our analyses below, but offer an in-depth explanation of Rasch here: https://osf.io/29g4z/?view_only=4985158e4fde43df837a86de142b8999

Initial Test of the Overall Model Fit. First, a likelihood ratio test was applied to determine an appropriate Partial Credit Rasch model (Masters, 1982). The likelihood-ratio test supported the unrestricted Partial Credit model as the only suitable model with significant differences between thresholds across individual items ($\chi^2(173) = 699.52$, $p < .001$). Rasch analysis was then conducted continually (Medvedev et al., 2016) until overall and individual item fit fulfilled the requirements of the unidimensional Rasch model. Measurement reliability was determined using the Person Separation Index (PSI), which represents how precisely individuals are distributed along the scale. PSI is a proportion of genuine variance differentiating between individuals and varying degrees of a latent trait. The initial analysis (A1) indicated good reliability (PSI = .93) but the overall fit was inadequate ($p < .001$).

Removing Items not Fitting to the Model. There were 8 misfitting items that had either extreme fit residual, significant chi square, and/or did not have conceptual importance leaving 54-items. The overall fit improved but item-trait interaction was still significant and no evidence of unidimensionality was obtained (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3

Summary of Rasch model fit statistics for the initial and the final Rasch analyses (N = 403)

	Person mean		Goodness of fit		PSI	Unidimensionality *t*-tests	
Analyses	Value / SD		**χ2 (df)**	***p***		**%**	**Lower bound %**
A1 Initial (62 Items)	-0.19	0.49	997.99(531)	< .001	.93	>10	>5 (NO)
A2 (54 Items)	-0.21	0.50	860.81(486)	< .001	.93	>10	>5 (NO)
Final (5 Super items)	-0.09	0.29	51.20 (45)	.240	.82	5.7	3.6 (YES)

Table 4

Initial Rasch model fit statistics for individual items

No	Item Description	Location	Fit Resid	Chi Sq
1	I am quite cold-hearted	-0.60	3.10*	39.74
2	I can often be arrogant	-0.47	0.26	3.61
3	I don't care about how others are feeling	-0.60	-1.25	7.08
4	I don't care if someone gets hurt so I can get what I want	0.13	0.18	3.37
5	I don't tend to feel guilty if I hurt someone's feelings	0.33	1.98	20.99
6	I will always seek revenge	0.47	2.53	13.22
7	People often feel insulted when I talk to them	0.52	2.73*	17.51
8	I can be snobbish at times	0.20	-2.36	22.40*
9	I tend to be egotistical	-0.56	0.80	6.82
10	I rarely feel sorry for people who are having problems	-0.16	-0.36	8.51
11	Playing to win is more important than playing fair	0.43	-0.69	5.42
12	I would "walk over someone's dead body" to get what I want	0.01	0.04	0.99
13	I don't mind getting punished, as long as I get what I want	-0.05	2.84*	3.46
14	An act is only illegal if you get caught doing it	-0.39	-0.53	8.53
15	When things go my way, I tend to be smug about it	0.63	2.74*	17.39
16	I am better than other people	-0.29	-0.38	10.96
17	I have the ability to get people out of their shells	0.54	1.38	6.06
18	I am skilled in interacting with other people	0.25	-1.51	18.41
19	I am good at keeping conversations flowing	-0.15	-0.64	2.06
20	I am skilled at making people feel good	0.16	3.28*	21.58
21	I can use my emotional skills to change how another person is feeling	0.17	1.89	3.94
22	I know how to get people to do what I want	-0.22	0.72	5.00
23	In groups I am a part of, I am usually the leader	-0.50	1.29	10.92
24	I do not struggle getting people to see my point of view	-0.16	0.47	1.46
25	I quickly become comfortable in the presence of others	-0.50	0.53	5.64
26	I am confident speaking my mind	0.37	-1.36	11.33
27	I can often get people to do things they would not do for others	0.82	2.00	15.76
28	When I argue I am good at getting my point across and convincing others	-0.53	-1.09	8.01
29	When I upset someone, I just use my charm to get them back onside	0.24	-1.00	12.17
30	I feel I have achieved a lot	-0.91	3.49*	42.70*
31	I am usually productive	-0.20	-0.74	10.34
32	I am successful in life	0.65	2.03	23.25*
33	I put in the effort to get the things I want	-0.55	-0.22	4.74
34	I am skilled at lots of things	0.36	4.27*	5.68
35	I can handle high pressure situations	0.61	-0.10	1.60
36	I get things done right away	-0.48	-0.12	5.60
37	I can take in a lot of information without being overwhelmed	0.91	0.17	2.32
38	I know and value my own self-worth	-0.26	0.67	2.18
39	I refrain from dangerous or risky situations	0.37	1.53	1.76
40	Dangerous situations excite me	0.40	-0.41	10.50
41	I will often take risks	-1.04	0.92	1.66
42	I would not like a job where you are responsible for making lots of split-second decisions	-0.82	2.04	9.17
43	My fear of the unknown prevents me from trying new things	0.91	0.31	3.51
44	I pride myself on my ability to make split-second decisions	0.52	0.15	4.56
45	I am not a fast-paced person	0.49	-0.36	6.69
46	I enjoy games and activities where you have to make lots of split-second decisions	0.03	-1.69	24.64*
47	I feel flustered when I have to make my mind up quickly	-0.57	-1.29	23.19*
48	I don't like making decisions	0.22	6.89*	31.88*
49	I find it easy to relax	-0.26	1.80	8.22
50	I often feel anxious	-0.21	0.88	1.02
51	The little things rarely bother me	0.07	0.37	4.34
52	I get nervous easily	-0.44	1.59	5.38
53	When something bad happens, I get over it relatively quickly	-0.37	-2.29	30.97*
54	I can usually control my emotions, so they don't interfere with me reaching my goals	0.04	-2.74*	40.03*

61	I prefer tasks that offer immediate rewards	-0.49	1.68	6.72
62	Gaining success can be tough; it's all about survival of the fittest	0.11	-0.74	7.00

Local Dependency. Item thresholds were disordered for the majority of the items. A typical item showing disordered threshold for response category 2 is displayed in Figure 2, indicating that the probability to choose response option 3 after option 1 is higher than to choose response option 2 after 1. Visual analysis showed that thresholds were disordered in the same way across other items, thus response categories were uniformly rescored for all items by collapsing response categories 1 and 2. Thresholds were perfectly ordered after this modification, evidenced by Figure 3 showing the same item (1) after rescoring. The overall model fit further improved after this modification, but the chi-square was still significant ($\chi^2(486) = 794.80$, $p < .001$) and unidimensionality was not confirmed.

Figure 2

Disordered Individual Item Threshold

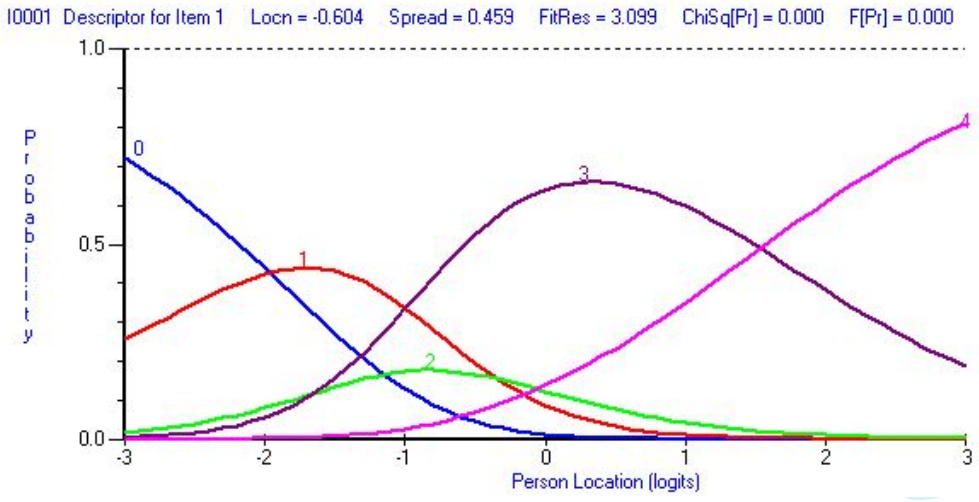
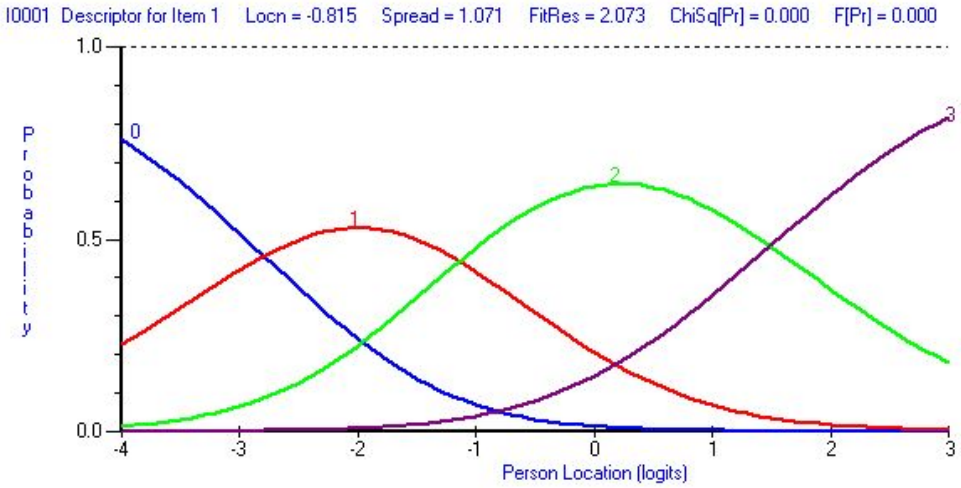


Figure 3

Ordered Individual Item Thresholds



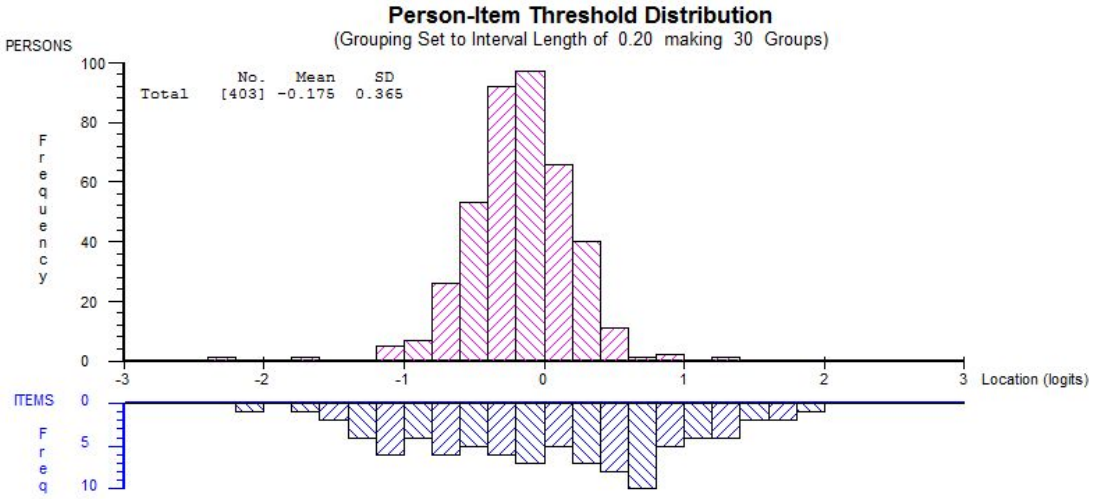
As model fit and dimensionality may be affected by residual correlations between individual items that can create local dependency if exceeding the magnitude of 0.20, the residual correlation matrix was examined. Residual correlations were found between six groups of items that reflected the facet structure derived by the PCA, and these items were combined into six super items to resolve local dependency issue. For simplicity, further information regarding the process of super item creation can be found here: https://osf.io/29g4z/?view_only=4985158e4fde43df837a86de142b8999. After this modification there was a noticeable improvement of the overall model fit with almost excellent sample targeting but the chi square was still significant ($\chi^2(54) = 155.22$, $p < .001$) and there was further local dependency between super-items 1 and 2. To resolve this, super items 1 and 2 were combined into one super item, which resulted in the best Rasch model fit, no significant chi square, strict unidimensionality, and good reliability (Table 3, Final).

Differential-Item Functioning (DIF). Testing for DIF examined influence of personal factors such as age and sex on functioning of individual items. No significant DIF was observed confirming scale invariance across sex and age. Therefore, the psychometric conditions necessary for producing ordinal-to-interval conversion tables was satisfied. Figure 4 shows person-item threshold distribution plot of the final analysis demonstrating item thresholds perfectly cover the sample levels of successful psychopathic traits. As the sample

mean is similar to item mean and person distribution is positively skewed, this suggests that while the SPS has ability to measure high trait levels outside of this sample distribution, individuals with high successful psychopathy trait may be underrepresented in the sample. Items and scoring instructions can be found here: https://osf.io/29g4z/?view_only=4985158e4fde43df837a86de142b8999.

Figure 4

Person-Item Threshold Distribution of the Final Analysis.



In line with other measures (e.g., Paulhus et al., 2014) administration of the full scale may not always be ideal, especially within a larger battery of instruments. As such, alongside the full 54-item version of the SPS, a 30-item short form was also subjected to Rasch Analysis to ascertain the psychometric viability of a briefer SPS. Psychometric support for this short form, items, and scoring instructions can be found in the link above.

Study 2

Study 1 reported on the development of the SPS, including its internal consistency, reliability, and unidimensionality. In Study 2, we investigated convergent and divergent validity of the SPS alongside its predictive validity for success expectancy and values.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited via Prolific, a crowdsourcing platform shown to produce data quality comparable to that obtained through laboratory-based recruitment (Peer et al., 2017). Eligibility criteria required participants to be fluent in English, aged 18 years or older, and residing in the United Kingdom. Informed consent was obtained in accordance with national ethical guidelines, and all participants were reimbursed at a rate of £5.50 per hour. After removing outliers and incomplete responses, (n = 24), n = 306 participants remained (51.3% females, M_{age} = 36, SD = 14.4, age range = 18-74 years); reflecting similar studies (Durand, 2019; Ruchensky et al., 2017).

Measures

Successful Psychopathy Scale (SPS). A 54-item (α = .84) measure of successful psychopathy across 6 subscales: CU Traits (12 items; α = .87), Social Potency (12 items; α = .90), Confidence (8 items; α = .83), Decisiveness (9 items; α = .82), Stress Immunity (8 items; α = .86), and Manipulation (5 items; α = .64). All items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*, where higher scores reflect greater component alignment.

The Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick et al., 2010). A 58-item (α = .88) measure of psychopathy across three phenotypic components: Boldness (19 items; α = .87), Meanness (19 items; α = .87), and Disinhibition (20 items; α = .85). The TriPM is measured using a 4-point Likert scale from 3 (*True*) to 0 (*False*). Seventeen items were reversed scored, with higher totals scores indicating higher levels of psychopathic traits.

Self-Report Psychopathy, Version III (SRP-III; Paulhus et al., 2009). A 64-item (α = .89) measure of psychopathy across four facets : Interpersonal Manipulation (16 items; α = .84), Callous Affect (16 items; α = .76), Erratic Lifestyle (16 items; α = .85), and Antisocial Behaviors (16 items; α = .80). Responses are provided using a 5-point Likert scale from

Disagree Strongly to *Agree Strongly* with higher totals scores indicating higher levels of psychopathic traits.

Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRP; Levenson et al., 1995). A 26-item (α = .83) measure of psychopathy across two facets: Primary Psychopathy or Factor 1 (16 items; α = .84) and Secondary Psychopathy or Factor 2 (10 items; α = .73). Items were measured on a 4-point Likert scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, with higher scores reflecting greater facet alignment.

The Generalised Expectancy for Success Scale (GESS; Fibel & Hale, 1978). A 30-item (α = .98) measure of success across three facets: General Efficacy (10 items; α = .79), Career Orientation (7 items; α = .87) and Personal Problem Solving (8 items; α = .79).5 items contributed to the total GESS score, but were not grouped as a facet due to interpretability issues as highlighted by the scale's author (see Fibel & Hale, 1978). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from *Highly Improbable* to *Highly Probable* and were prefixed with "*In the future I will*". Higher scores indicated participants' greater expectancy for success in the future and greater motivation to face difficult challenges.

The Life Success Measures Scale (LSMS; Parker & Chusmir, 1992). A 42-item measure of six theoretically-distinct dimensions of life success; Status/Wealth (8 items; α = .84), Societal Contribution (8 items; α = .89), Familial Relationships (8 items; α = .92), Personal Fulfilment (8 items; α = .86), Professional Fulfilment (5 items; α = .77), and Security (5 items; α = .75). Item importance was measured on a 5-point Likert scale to the participant on a scale of 1 (*Never important*) to 5 (*Always important*).

Socioeconomic Status (SES). A total SES score was calculated from four items; Household income measured across 8 steps, starting with 1 = *less than £6,000* and increasing incrementally to 8 = *£64,000 or more*, educational attainment which was measured across 7 steps, starting with 1= *Primary School Level* to 7 = *Doctorate Level,* and employment status

which was measured across 4 steps, starting with 1= *Unemployed* to 4 = *Full-time Employed*. Higher scores indicate higher SES, and reflects methodology used in Truhan et al. (2022) and Persson & Lilienfeld (2019) whereby individual indices are group-averaged to create a composite mean score. Only 230 participants completed all required items.

Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire advertised via *Prolific* and on average, the study took 12 min to complete. Participants provided consent in accordance with national ethical guidelines, before completing demographic questions and the scales the scales detailed above in a randomised order to reduce order effects. Afterwards, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Results

Convergent Validity

Using bivariate correlations, the SPS showed moderate-to-strong positive correlations with all composite and sub-measures of psychopathic traits (TriPM; SRP-III; LSRP; see Table 5). Of note, correlations between SPS and LSRP Primary Psychopathy were stronger than those with LSRP Secondary Psychopathy, suggesting primary traits might drive the successful psychopathy construct. This differentiation between prototypical and successful psychopathy is also reflected in relationships with other psychopathy subscales. For example, the strong positive associations between SRP Interpersonal Manipulation and both TriPM Boldness and Meanness opposed weaker correlations between the SPS and both SRP Antisocial Behavior and TriPM Disinhibition. Regarding bivariate correlations between measures of prototypical psychopathy and their subscales, moderate-to-strong positive correlations are seen throughout Table 5, save for TriPM Boldness, which was neither associated with TriPM Disinhibition, SRP Antisocial Behavior, nor either LSRP Primary or Secondary Psychopathy.

Predictive Validity

The SPS showed moderate-to-strong positive correlations with each aspect of success expectancy (GESS; see Table 6). As expected, additional psychopathy measures and their subscales (TriPM; SRP; LSRP) were negatively associated with Success Expectancy, aside from TriPM Boldness which was positively associated. Regarding motivation and values of success, each psychopathy measure (including the SPS), were positively associated with Status Seeking. Lastly, the SPS was moderately and positively associated with higher Socioeconomic Status, whereas all other measures save for TriPM Boldness, were negatively associated. Each success measure was strongly-to-moderately and positively intercorrelated with one another (see Table 7), aside from the association between Societal Contribution and Socioeconomic Status which were negatively associated. Status Seeking demonstrated no association with Problem Solving or Personal Fulfilment; and Personal Fulfilment, Professional Fulfilment, and Security were not associated with Socioeconomic Status.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations (Pearson's R) Between the Psychopathy Variables.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
[1] SPS Total	-	.58***	.80***	.57***	.50***	.49***	.71***	.59***	.60***	.36***	.20***	.45***	.46***	.34***	.38***	.20***	.37***	.37***
[2] SPS CU Traits		-	.15**	-.11	.31***	.04	.59***	.69***	.15**	.75***	.55***	.69***	.61***	.62***	.50***	.42***	.70***	.70***
[3] SPS Social Potency			-	.61***	.52***	.50***	.42***	.42***	.72***	.04	.02	.22***	.27***	.06	.28***	.06	.01	.09
[4] SPS Confidence				-	.35***	.53***	.15**	.04	.58***	-.19***	-.38***	-.12*	-.07	-.11*	-.07	-.15**	-.25***	-.27***
[5] SPS Decisiveness					-	.48***	.39***	.62***	.68***	.36***	.20***	.50***	.35***	.33***	.59***	.22***	.28***	.25***
[6] SPS Stress Immunity						-	.11*	.25***	.68***	.06	-.27***	.04	.00	.07	.06	-.01	-.13*	-.03
[7] SPS Manipulation							-	.52***	.23***	.43***	.40***	.53***	.50***	.39***	.43***	.31***	.58***	.52***
[8] TriPM Total								-	.57***	.81***	.67***	.81***	.64***	.61***	.75***	.50***	.64***	.64***
[9] TriPM Boldness									-	.19***	-.09	.30***	.27***	.19***	.34***	.11	.04	.06
[10] TriPM Meanness										-	.52***	.72***	.60***	.67***	.58***	.41***	.63***	.69***
[11] TriPM Disinhibition											-	.65**	.47***	.42***	.62***	.52***	.67***	.69***
[12] SRP Total												-	.80***	.80***	.84***	.68***	.72***	.72***
[13] SRP Interpersonal Manipulation													-	.58***	.55***	.38***	.59***	.65***
[14] SRP Callous Affect														-	.57***	.39***	.56***	.60***
[15] SRP Erratic Lifestyle															-	.45***	.61***	.55***
[16] SRP Antisocial Behavior																-	.50***	.40***
[17] LSRP Primary																	-	.76***
[18] LSRP Secondary																		-
M	154.3	23.1	37.2	28.0	24.2	23.8	13.0	54.9	26.5	12.5	15.8	124.4	33.2	32.7	36.0	22.5	1.88	1.86
SD	20.0	8.1	9.5	5.7	6.9	6.7	3.5	17.2	9.1	7.9	8.3	26.7	8.7	7.7	10.3	7.0	.39	.45
α	.84	.87	.90	.82	.82	.86	.66	.88	.87	.87	.85	.89	.84	.75	.84	.80	.84	.73

Note. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; SRP = Self Report Psychopathy; LSRP = Levenson's Self Report Psychopathy *$p < .05$ **$p < .001$ ***$p < .001$

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations (Pearson's R) Between the Success Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11†
[1] Generalised Expectancy for Success (GESS Total)	-	.95***	.91***	.90***	.15**	.34***	.41***	.30***	.31***	.29***	.15*
[2] GESS General Efficacy		-	.83***	.83***	.17**	.36***	.39***	.34***	.32***	.30***	.15*
[3] GESS Long-range Career Orientation			-	.73***	.23***	.38***	.32***	.26***	.31***	.32***	.14*
[4] GESS Personal Problem Solving				-	.09	.23***	.51***	.26***	.27***	.23***	.14*
[5] LSMS Status					-	.37***	.15**	.10	.43***	.59***	.14*
[6] LSMS Society						-	.33***	.51***	.60***	.60***	-.01
[7] LSMS Family							-	.34**	.40***	.34***	.15*
[8] LSMS Personal Fulfilment								-	.58**	.48***	.08
[9] LSMS Professional Fulfilment									-	.78***	.06
[10] LSMS Security										-	.02
[11] Socioeconomic Status											-
M	107.6	41.4	23.8	30.5	21.1	30.7	33.6	36.6	19.9	18.9	11.8
SD	17.7	7.3	4.8	5.4	6.2	6.3	7.5	3.8	3.5	3.6	.63
α	.98	.88	.80	.81	.85	.90	.92	.86	.77	.75	-

Note. GESS = Generalised Expectancy for Success Scale; LSMS = Life Success Measures Scale. † = Participants for this scale is $n = 230$ due to incompletes. *$p < .05$ **$p < .001$ ***$p < .001$

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations (Pearson's R) Between the psychopathy variables and success variables

Variable	GESS Total	GESS General Efficacy	GESS Long-range Career Orientation	GESS Personal Problem Solving	LSMS Status	LSMS Society	LSMS Family	LSMS Personal Fulfilment	LSMS Professional Fulfilment	LSMS Security	SES
SPS Total	.38***	.40**	.38***	.32***	.41***	.11	.12	.05	.10	.19**	.20**
SPS CU Traits	-.24***	-.19**	-.20**	-.24***	.37***	-.22***	-.20**	-.23***	-.19**	-.03	.08
SPS Social Potency	.55***	.53***	.53***	.49***	.28***	.28***	.24***	.18**	.21***	.25***	.14*
SPS Confidence	.65***	.64***	.61***	.58***	.08	.22***	.28**	.22***	.21**	.16*	.26***
SPS Decisiveness	.30***	.31***	.28***	.24***	.29***	.13	.04	.04	.03	.14*	.16*
SPS Stress Immunity	.54***	.49***	.52***	.49***	.12	.05	.06	.03	.02	.08	.17*
SPS Manipulation	.06	.11	.09	.06	.52***	.07	.04	-.04	.07	.22***	.10
TriPM Total	.00	.04	.04	-.06	.42***	-.05	-.15*	-.10	-.12	.06	.06
TriPM Boldness	.56***	.55***	.54***	.48**	.27***	.18**	.14*	.14*	.09	.17*	.20**
TriPM Meanness	-.25***	-.23***	-.20**	-.25***	.28***	-.30***	-.31***	-.25***	-.25***	-.11	.06
TriPM Disinhibition	-.35***	-.27***	-.29***	-.40***	.34***	-.00	-.15*	-.12	-.12	.05	-.13*
SRP Total	-.19**	-.14*	-.17*	-.20**	.34***	-.14*	-.22***	-.21***	-.21***	-.02	-.03
SRP Interpersonal Manipulation	-.17**	-.12	-.14*	-.18**	.33***	-.09	-.17**	-.13	-.13	.02	.07
SRP Callous Affect	-.17**	-.14*	-.18**	-.18**	.26***	-.23**	-.21***	-.18**	-.18**	-.03	.02
SRP Erratic Lifestyle	-.07	-.03	-.06	-.10	.26***	.00	-.14*	-.05	-.05	.04	-.08
SRP Antisocial Behavior	-.22***	-.20**	-.18**	-.21***	.21***	-.17**	-.18**	-.38***	-.38***	-.11	-.09
LSRP Primary	-.28***	-.25**	-.20**	-.28***	.43***	-.12	-.16*	-.27***	-.27***	.02	.30
LSRP Secondary	-.27**	-.26**	-.22**	-.25***	.34***	-.20**	-.22***	-.30***	-.30***	-.05	-.02

Note. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; SRP = Self Report Psychopathy; LSRP = Levenson's Self Report Psychopathy; GESS = Generalised Expectancy for Success Scale; LSMS = Life Success Measures Scale. *$p < .05$ **$p < .001$ ***$p < .001$

General Discussion

Discussion

This manuscript has documented the development and validation of a novel measure of successful psychopathic traits, the Successful Psychopathy Scale (SPS), across two independent samples. The SPS demonstrated strong internal consistency and reliability across its total score and subscales, alongside meaningful and theoretically coherent associations with established psychopathy measures and indices of success. Rasch analysis further supported the structural validity of the SPS, showing no differential item functioning (DIF) across demographic groups. Collectively, these findings provide robust initial evidence for the psychometric soundness of the SPS and importantly challenge the longstanding forensic bias in psychopathy research, which tends to conflate psychopathic traits with antisocial behaviour and criminality (Skeem & Cooke, 2010). By offering a measure grounded in individual differences rather than criminal outcomes, the SPS broadens the lens through which psychopathy can be conceptualised and operationalised.

The SPS findings reaffirm the centrality of callous-unemotional (CU) traits, long considered the core of the psychopathy construct (Crego & Widiger, 2022; Dinić et al., 2021), while also highlighting the significance of moderating traits that differentiate individuals with psychopathic tendencies who avoid antisocial outcomes. This aligns with theoretical models such as the differential-configuration and moderated-expression frameworks (Lilienfeld et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2022), which suggest that the interaction of core traits (e.g., callousness, superficial charm) with adaptive qualities (e.g., confidence, stress immunity) underpins the "successful" psychopathy subtype. This perspective challenges traditional views of prototypical psychopathy typically characterised by chronic antisocial behaviour, criminality and impulsivity (Hare, 2003) by demonstrating that individuals with high levels of core psychopathic traits can, under certain conditions, avoid maladaptive outcomes and function effectively within prosocial domains.

Recent work supports the need for this reconceptualisation. For instance, Brazil (2024) critiques evolutionary perspectives that view psychopathy as inherently protective or adaptive only in antisocial contexts, advocating instead for models that account for variation in developmental pathways and outcomes. The SPS contributes to this shift by illustrating how certain traits such as lack of empathy or interpersonal charm may coexist with adaptive functioning in domains such as leadership, social influence, and financial stability. Similarly, Zabek et al. (2025) demonstrates how individuals high in psychopathic traits may utilise cold calculating styles rather than impulsive aggressive ones indicating differences in processing styles across the psychopathy spectrum.

The convergent and divergent validity evidence further supports the SPS's conceptualisation of successful psychopathy as distinct from prototypical psychopathy. While the SPS correlated moderately to strongly with existing measures of psychopathic traits, particularly those capturing affective and interpersonal dimensions, it demonstrated weaker associations with maladaptive facets such as antisocial behaviour and disinhibition. This pattern is consistent with the view that prototypical psychopathy measures, particularly those grounded in forensic contexts (e.g., the PCL-R; Hare, 2003) may overemphasise behavioural deviance at the expense of capturing adaptive, non-criminal manifestations of psychopathy (Skeem & Cooke, 2010). Recent work further reinforces this distinction, with Lee et al. (2025) demonstrating that individuals high in psychopathic traits do not uniformly exhibit externalising behaviours, supporting the premise that psychopathic traits do not uniformly translate into maladaptive outcomes.

Importantly, the SPS emerged as a positive predictor of socioeconomic status (SES) in Study 2, in contrast to existing psychopathy measures, which negatively predicted SES. This finding underscores a critical limitation of prototypical models of psychopathy in forensic psychology, where success is often narrowly defined and antisocial behaviour is assumed to be the inevitable outcome of psychopathic traits (Walsh & Kosson, 2007). The

SPS highlights the importance of protective traits, such as social confidence, resilience, and stress immunity, which may act as buffers against antisocial tendencies, facilitating functional outcomes such as occupational success, leadership, and financial stability (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Lilienfeld et al., 2014). The association between confidence and SES further reinforces this point, suggesting that confidence-related traits may be a key driver of success among those with psychopathic tendencies, a finding with implications for understanding white-collar crime, corporate misconduct, and occupational psychopathy in forensic contexts.

Findings relating to the General Expectancy for Success Scale (GESS) further illuminate the adaptive potential of successful psychopathy. While the SPS showed positive associations with expectancy for success, CU traits and manipulativeness were negatively or not associated, supporting the idea that core affective-interpersonal traits are necessary but not sufficient for functional outcomes. Positive adjustment traits such as stress immunity and social potency, as conceptualised by Cleckley (1941), appear to moderate the maladaptive potential of psychopathic traits, enabling individuals to avoid externalising problems such as antisocial behaviour, aggression, and impulsivity, key components of prototypical psychopathy (Hare, 2003).

The role of status-seeking as a motivational driver across psychopathy measures further underscores the theoretical significance of the SPS. Status-seeking has long been associated with psychopathic tendencies (Glenn et al., 2017), yet our findings suggest that it is primarily those with successful psychopathic traits, rather than those scoring high on prototypical measures, who are able to achieve status-related outcomes such as high SES. This reinforces the differential-configuration model (Lilienfeld et al., 2015), which posits that it is the presence of buffering traits (e.g., confidence, social adeptness) that mitigates the antisocial tendencies typically associated with psychopathy and facilitates goal attainment in legitimate contexts. From a forensic psychology perspective, these findings challenge static, trait-based models of criminal risk by underscoring the importance of protective factors that

may attenuate antisocial expression. This supports a broader criminological shift toward interactionist and context-sensitive frameworks that recognise how individual traits interface with environmental and motivational factors to shape behavioural outcomes (Boduszek et al., 2018; Brazil, 2024; Glenn et al., 2017).

Limitations

While the findings of this study are encouraging, further construct validation of the SPS and its subscales is necessary. Although widely used, self-report tools are subject to biases such as social desirability and limited self-awareness, which may impact the responses pertaining to psychopathic traits as concerns remain about their validity, given the core traits of deception, manipulation, and limited self-awareness, which may lead to social desirability bias or malingering (MacNeil & Holden, 2006). Nonetheless, meta-analytic findings show a negative relationship between self-reported psychopathy and social desirability (Ray et al., 2013), and further evidence suggests this reflects genuine psychopathic traits, such as norm violation, rather than response bias (Verschuere et al., 2014). These findings indicate that individuals high in psychopathic traits are often willing and able to report socially undesirable characteristics accurately, and do not necessarily engage in positive impression management (Ray et al., 2013). However, triangulating self-report data with behavioural or informant-based measures would strengthen validity.

To strengthen both predictive and construct validity, future validation efforts should extend to a broader range of outcome variables, including antisocial behaviour, aggression, interpersonal relationships, and occupational success. While this study explored some career-related indicators, further research should incorporate diverse success metrics and examine the scale's applicability across cultural contexts. Traits such as charm, manipulation, and success may be perceived differently across cultures, making cross-cultural generalisability essential. As such, translating, culturally adapting, and validating the SPS in varied populations will be crucial for establishing its global relevance and utility.

Conclusion

This research presents the Successful Psychopathy Scale (SPS) as a promising, psychometrically robust tool for assessing the adaptive expression of psychopathic traits. The SPS provides a means to differentiate individuals with core psychopathic characteristics particularly those high in callous-unemotionality and interpersonal dominance who nevertheless exhibit functional outcomes in domains such as socioeconomic attainment, status, and well-being. By incorporating the moderating influence of protective traits such as confidence, stress immunity, and social adeptness, the SPS offers a more nuanced conceptualisation of psychopathy than existing measures rooted in prototypical forensic models, which predominantly emphasise antisociality and criminality.

The findings challenge longstanding assumptions in criminal psychology that psychopathy is inherently maladaptive and invariably linked to antisocial behaviour. Instead, they underscore the need to reconceptualise psychopathy as a dimensional construct, where the interaction of core traits with moderating factors can produce divergent life outcomes. This has significant implications for forensic assessment, risk management, and intervention, as it suggests that not all individuals with psychopathic traits are destined for criminality or antisocial conduct. The SPS may therefore serve as a valuable tool in forensic and applied contexts, aiding in the identification of individuals whose psychopathic tendencies are buffered by adaptive traits, potentially informing profiling, organisational selection processes, and leadership development programs.

Future research should aim to extend validation of the SPS by comparing it with other psychopathy measures (e.g., PPI, EPA, CAPP) and by incorporating broader indices of objective and subjective success, including income, occupational attainment, and social relationships. Further work is also needed to explore the developmental and environmental factors that influence the expression of successful psychopathy, including early life experiences, family dynamics, and socio-structural moderators such as socioeconomic

adversity. Ultimately, the SPS offers a foundational step toward understanding how psychopathy manifests across diverse contexts, from criminality to corporate success and how this knowledge can inform theory, practice, and policy in the field of forensic psychology.

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