



# Trait psychopathy, task performance, and counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization



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## ABSTRACT

On the basis of Lykken's (1995) two-factor theory of trait psychopathy, we examined how self-centered impulsivity and fearless dominance were related to the achievement (or lack of achievement) of organizational goals (i.e., task performance and counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization). We expected that self-centered impulsivity, characterized by behavioral impulsivity and disregard for responsibilities, would be positively related to counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization. We further expected that fearless dominance would be positively associated with counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization for individuals with low levels of education and low levels of a specific social skill called interpersonal influence and positively associated with task performance for individuals with high levels of education. The results provided support for the differential relations between the psychopathic personality factors and the criteria of interest as well as for the moderating role of education and the skill of interpersonal influence in the behavioral expressions of the fearless dominance factor.

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## 1. Introduction

Psychopathy in the workplace has thus far received much more attention from the public media than from scientific studies. Smith and Lilienfeld (2013) noted that this gap between popular and scientific attention is both substantial and troubling. The gap is substantial because in the public media, psychopathy is mostly portrayed as a unitary instead of a multifactorial construct, and the gap is troubling because there is a grossly negative characterization of individuals high on psychopathy. However, there might also be a bright side to these dark traits because there is reason to suspect that the different factors of psychopathy may be differentially related to behavior and performance and could potentially have a positive influence under certain circumstances (Hall & Benning, 2006; Lilienfeld, Watts, & Smith, 2015). Thus, using incomplete and prematurely undifferentiated concepts is risky as practitioners and the public may both potentially be led astray.

In scientific studies, psychopathy (Lykken, 1995) is mostly considered a personality construct (but see Harris, Skilling, & Rice, 2001, for a contrasting view) with hallmarks such as fearless dominance (FD; primary psychopathy) and self-centered impulsivity (SCI; secondary psychopathy; Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005; Miller & Lynam, 2012). Despite the grossly negative characterization of individuals high on psychopathy in popular sources (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013), a recent meta-analysis found that global psychopathy had only weak relations with

counterproductive work behavior ( $r = 0.06$ ) and job performance ( $r = -0.08$ ; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). Lilienfeld et al. (2012) reported that the performance of former U.S. presidents was positively associated with the FD factor of psychopathy. Schütte et al. (2015) analyzed the relations between FD and the *interpersonal dimensions* of counterproductive work behavior and performance. They also identified a bright side of fearless dominance: A specific social skill at work called interpersonal influence (II) moderated the behavioral expression of FD. When combined with II, FD was negatively associated with interpersonal counterproductive work behavior (e.g., publicly embarrassing someone at work) and positively associated with interpersonal performance, so-called contextual performance (e.g., sharing information, meeting deadlines).

In this research, we focus on task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization (CWB-O; Bennett & Robinson, 2000), thereby expanding previous searches for the bright side of FD as previous research focused on the *interpersonal dimensions* of work behavior and performance (Schütte et al., 2015). More specifically, we tested the hypothesis that SCI (but not FD) is directly associated with CWB-O. Further, we tested the hypothesis that educational achievement and II moderate how FD is related to TP and CWB-O. TP involves the core substantive duties that are formally recognized as part of a job. The higher a person's TP, the more the person contributes to the achievement of organizational goals (Motowidlo, 2003). CWB-O is dysfunctional individual work behavior (e.g., embezzlement, fraud, using drugs; Bennett & Robinson, 2000) that results in a lack of achievement of organizational goals.

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By combining different streams of research, the current study sought to contribute to the literature by providing an integrated and more fine-grained view on psychopathy (a) by showing that the distinction between different factors of psychopathy enhances the understanding of the effects of trait psychopathy in the workplace, (b) by examining moderating effects that buffer the dark and augment the bright behavioral expressions of FD at work, and (c) by finding support for the role of educational level as a manifestation of an effective socialization into society (Wentzel, 2015) that is based on intelligence (Lykken, 1995).

## 2. Maladaptive and adaptive features of psychopathy

The differential configuration model of psychopathy presumes that psychopathy is an amalgam of two or more distinct factors rather than being a unitary construct (Hall & Benning, 2006; Lilienfeld et al., 2015). According to Lykken's (1995) use of the concept of psychopathy, primary psychopathy (fearless dominance; FD) is essentially characterized by fearlessness, whereas secondary psychopathy (self-centered impulsivity; SCI) is characterized by impulsivity, irresponsibility, and a lack of self-control. These two factors of psychopathy have also been found in recent research (Drislane et al., 2014; Miller & Lynam, 2012).

With reference to secondary psychopathy, Lykken (1995) noted that individuals with high levels of this factor tend to "act impulsively, 'without thinking,' without giving themselves time to assess the situation, to appreciate dangers, to foresee the consequences, or even to anticipate how they will feel about their action themselves when they have time to consider it" (p. 122). This SCI factor indicates that such individuals seek thrills, lack diligence, and are unconcerned with deadlines or responsibilities (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005). Consistent with research on psychopathy, Schütte et al. (2015) found that SCI is positively related to *interpersonal deviance* and negatively related to contextual performance (i.e., social performance at work). Expanding on Schütte et al. (2015), in this paper, we focus on CWB-O, thereby complementing previous research on interpersonal deviance and providing a more complete portrayal of the relation between SCI and CWB-O. CWB-O is comprised of individual behaviors such as taking property from work without permission, littering the work environment, failing to follow instructions, using illegal drugs or alcohol on the job, and communicating confidential company information to unauthorized persons. We expected that SCI would be positively related to CWB-O.

**Hypothesis 1.** Self-centered impulsivity (SCI) is positively associated with organizationally directed counterproductive work behavior (CWB-O).

The FD component of psychopathic personality consists of high fearlessness, high social attention seeking, and an immunity to stress. With reference to this trait, Lykken (1995) suggested that persons high on fearlessness who are effectively socialized into society on the basis of their intelligence tend to be successful in life and are able to avoid engaging in antisocial behavior; however, persons high on fearlessness who are not effectively socialized into society tend to fail in life and display antisocial behavior.

A similar distinction was made by McClelland (1970) with reference to the power motive. The personalized power motive is associated with aggressive, reprehensible behaviors, sexual aggression, and extreme risk-taking, whereas the socialized power motive creates a desire for prosocial influence. Socialization is the process whereby a person learns and accepts the norms, values, behaviors, and social skills of competent functioning in the culture in which the person is growing up (Wentzel, 2015). Being well socialized implies that a person is more cautious, conservative, conventional, responsible, unselfish, charming, and confident (Lykken, 1995)

Building on Lykken's ideas and on the basis of previous research, we determined that level of education would be a good proxy for an effective socialization that is based on intelligence (Ceci, 1991; Deary, Strand,

Smith, & Fernandes, 2007). Ng and Feldman (2009) defined educational level as the academic credentials or degrees an individual has obtained. Many studies have found a strong association between education and effective socialization into society (Hjalmarsson, Holmlund, & Lindquist, 2015; Jung, 2015; Meyer, 2015).

Being well-socialized on the basis of one's intelligence is also associated with work behavior (Marcus, Wagner, Poole, Powell, & Carswell, 2009). In their meta-analysis, Ng and Feldman (2009) found significant but weak correlations between educational level and organizational citizenship behavior directed at the organization. In addition, they found significant but weak negative correlations between educational level and self-rated workplace aggression, on-the-job substance use, objective measures of absenteeism, and sickness- and nonsickness-related absence. These meta-analytic findings support the idea that educational level is a proxy for an effective socialization that is based on intelligence with effects on workplace behavior.

On the basis of Lykken's (1995) conception of primary psychopathy and socioanalytic theory (Hogan & Shelton, 1998), we suggest how FD can interact with socialization to impact employees' work behavior: FD ignites (high social attention seeking) and energizes (low fear and an immunity to stress) the individual, whereas successful socialization into society (i.e., behaving in a manner that is more cautious, conservative, conventional, responsible, unselfish, charming, and confident) provides socially acceptable goals and gives direction to behavior and performance in organizational and work contexts. Through effective socialization, one is able to transform one's drives into actions that are positively perceived and evaluated by others. The socialization process also consists of training individuals to "hide or at least delay, their real desires and urges and, instead to behave in ways that are consistent with the norms of civilized adult conduct" (Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007, p. 1282). Effective socialization allows a person to achieve his or her goals just as hand-eye coordination allows a person to hit a tennis ball accurately and avoid unnecessary and costly mistakes "that may secure minor short-term benefits but at the expense of significant long-term costs" (Kaiser, LeBreton, & Hogan, 2015, p. 58). On the other hand, individuals with low levels of socialization and with high FD want to immediately satiate their urge for high social attention and act regardless of any possible long-term negative consequence because of their high levels of fearlessness and immunity to stress. Therefore, we suggest that the interplay between FD and educational level, indicating effective socialization, is associated with CWB-O.

**Hypothesis 2.** Educational level (EL) moderates the relation between fearless dominance (FD) and counterproductive work behavior toward the organization (CWB-O). If EL is low (high), there is a positive (zero) relation between FD and CWB-O.

In their meta-analysis, Ng and Feldman (2009) also found a significant positive but weak correlation between EL and peer ratings of TP. The relation between EL and TP stems from intelligence; meta-analyses have shown that intelligence predicts training success and TP (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004). However, the weak relation between EL and TP can be augmented if intelligent individuals work with high energy and perseverance (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1994) such as high fearlessness and immunity to stress (FD). In addition, related previous empirical research found that socialization directed the behavioral expression of the power motive. A high sense of responsibility (socialization) combined with a strong power motive was associated with a desire for prosocial influence (Magee & Langner, 2008). Therefore, we suggest that the interplay between FD and EL, indicating effective socialization based on intelligence, is also associated with TP.

**Hypothesis 3.** Educational level (EL) moderates the relation between FD and task performance (TP). If EL is high (low), there is a positive (zero) relation between FD and TP.

On the basis of socioanalytic theory, Schütte et al. (2015) found that a social skill at work called II acquired by targets through organizational socialization could counterbalance FD at work. Interpersonally influential persons have a rapport-inducing, effective communication style. They are able to adapt and calibrate their behavior in situationally appropriate ways that engender others' favorable evaluations of their high contextual performance (e.g., sharing information, fulfilling deadlines) and low interpersonally directed counterproductive work behavior. FD combined with high II enhances contextual performance and reduces interpersonal deviance. Therefore, we suggest that the interplay between FD and II is also associated with CWB-O. More specifically, we predict that II will moderate the relation between FD and CWB-O. A lack of the social skills needed to present a rapport-inducing and effective communication style in those with high FD should be associated with high levels of CWB-O because their urges for high social attention and their readiness to act regardless of the possible negative consequence are unbridled by effective socialization.

**Hypothesis 4.** Interpersonal Influence (II) moderates the relation between FD and counterproductive work behavior toward the organization (CWB-O). If II is low (high), there is a positive (zero) relation between FD and CWB-O.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants and procedure

We sent email invitations, including information about our study, a link to the online platform, and a personal login code to 523 German employees from a broad range of jobs. After completing the self-assessment, which included demographic information, the interpersonal influence ratings, and the psychopathy dimensions, employees were asked to provide the email addresses of a least two coworkers. Next, these coworkers were automatically invited via email to take part in the study. The coworkers then provided their ratings of the target's job performance and counterproductive work behavior toward the organization.

Our final sample consisted of 161 target–coworker triads. Target employees were almost equally male (45%) or female (55%) and had a mean age of 42 years ( $SD = 12.15$ ). Employees' mean job tenure was 10 years ( $SD = 8.91$ ). The average amount of time spent working per week was 40 h ( $SD = 9.7$ ), and the targets' mean hierarchical position in the organization was 57% (0% = bottom level, 100% = top level).

#### 3.2. Measures

##### 3.2.1. Self-centered impulsivity (SCI)

We assessed SCI with the corresponding 76 items of the German version of the *Psychopathic Personality Inventory – Revised* (PPI-R; Alpers & Eisenbarth, 2008). Target employees provided self-ratings on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = False, 4 = True;  $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

##### 3.2.2. Fearless dominance (FD)

Targets' FD dispositions were assessed with the corresponding 40 items from the German version of the PPI-R (Alpers & Eisenbarth, 2008). Target employees provided self-ratings on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = False, 4 = True;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

##### 3.2.3. Educational level (EL)

EL was assessed with one item, ranging from 1 (*left school without graduation*) to 8 (*doctoral degree*).

##### 3.2.4. Task performance (TP)

We used a German adaptation (Blickle et al., 2011) of the job performance rating scale by Ferris, Witt, and Hochwarter (2001) to assess TP.

It was measured via five items, rated on a 5-point scale with the following increments: 1 (*weak or bottom 10%*), 2 (*fair or next 20%*), 3 (*good or next 40%*), 4 (*very good or next 20%*), and 5 (*best or top 10%*). Due to the aggregation of the two coworker ratings, estimates of interrater agreement were computed. For TP, the ICC (1, 1) was 0.36, and the ICC (1, k) was 0.53. The mean *rwg* was 0.92, ranging from 0.00 to 1.00. Cronbach's alpha for the aggregated measure was  $\alpha = 0.84$ .

##### 3.2.5. Counterproductive work behavior toward the organization (CWB-O)

Targets' CWB-O was assessed with the German version (Zettler & Hilbig, 2010) of the Workplace Deviance Scale (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Coworkers evaluated target employees' CWB-O on 12 items with anchors ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*daily*). Estimates of interrater agreement displayed an ICC (1, 1) of 0.34 and an ICC (1, k) of 0.50. The *rwg* was 0.95, ranging from 0.00 to 1.00. Cronbach's alpha for the aggregated measure was  $\alpha = 0.81$ .

##### 3.2.6. Interpersonal influence (II)

Targets' II was measured with the corresponding four items from Ferris et al. (2005). A validated German translation (Lvina et al., 2012) was used. Target employees rated their level of interpersonal influence on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*;  $\alpha = 0.74$ ).

##### 3.2.7. Control variables

In the present paper, we wanted to test Lykken's (1995) original model of primary and secondary psychopathy, which does not include the coldheartedness facet from the PPI-R. Therefore, we focused on the FD and SCI components of trait psychopathy, yet we included coldheartedness as a control variable. As such, we were able to capture the entire range of psychopathic personality traits. Coldheartedness was assessed with 15 items ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ; Alpers & Eisenbarth, 2008). Further, we controlled for gender, age, working hours per week, years of job tenure, and hierarchical position (cf. Momm et al., 2015).

#### 3.3. Statistical analyses

To test our hypotheses, we computed hierarchical (moderated) regression analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). All predictor variables were centered prior to the analyses. For each criterion (i.e., CWB-O and TP), we ran the following sets of hierarchical regression analyses: First, we entered the control variables; second, we entered the psychopathy factors, the specific moderator variable, and the specific interaction terms (FD  $\times$  EL, FD  $\times$  II). Finally, as recommended by Bono and McNamara (2011), we tested the pure interaction model without controlling for other variables as these could artificially remove relevant variance. According to this conservative statistical approach, we should accept effects only if they hold statistically in both the full and pure models.

### 4. Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. As expected, FD and SCI were uncorrelated ( $r = -0.09$ ). Further, EL was positively ( $r = 0.17, p < 0.05$ ) but weakly associated with TP and negatively associated with CWB-O ( $r = 0.15, p < 0.05$ , one-tailed) as rated by coworkers. In line with Hypothesis 1, SCI was positively correlated with CWB-O ( $r = 0.34, p < 0.01$ ; Table 1). In addition, as displayed in Table 2, we found the hypothesized main effect. We found the main effect of SCI on CWB-O in both models in question ( $0.29 \leq \beta \leq 0.30, p < 0.01$ , Models 1b and 1d). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data.

In line with Hypothesis 2, we found a significant FD  $\times$  EL interactive effect on CWB-O, with (Table 2, Model 1b) and without control variables, accounting for an additional 4.61% of the variance (Table 2, Model 1c). The interaction plot based on Model 1c (Fig. 1) showed support for the hypothesized effects. When EL was low, coworkers reported

**Table 1**  
Means, standard deviations, alphas, and study variable correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Gender	0.45	0.50												
2 Age	41.48	12.15	0.17*											
3 Working hours/week	39.81	9.70	0.32**	−0.10										
4 Job tenure (years)	10.17	8.91	0.14	0.63**	−0.07									
5 Hierarchical position	56.99	22.78	0.14	0.30**	0.31**	0.19*								
6 Coldheartedness	2.10	0.34	0.20*	−0.05	0.10	−0.16*	−0.12	(0.72)						
7 Self-centered impulsivity	1.84	0.24	0.06	−0.14	0.12	−0.02	−0.02	0.05	(0.88)					
8 Fearless dominance	2.61	0.37	0.15	−0.15	0.16*	−0.22**	0.05	0.31**	−0.09	(0.85)				
9 Interpersonal Influence	5.29	0.79	0.01	−0.12	−0.01	−0.02	0.19*	−0.05	−0.11	0.24**	(0.74)			
10 Educational level	5.83	1.63	0.04	0.01	0.19*	−0.07	0.14	0.04	0.02	−0.06	0.06			
11 Task performance	3.89	0.57	0.02	0.00	0.07	−0.07	0.09	0.06	−0.12	0.08	−0.02	0.17*	(0.84)	
12 CWB-O	1.38	0.44	0.14	−0.23**	−0.05	−0.10	−0.34**	0.09	0.34**	0.05	−0.14	−0.15	−0.29**	(0.81)

Note. *N* = 161 target-coworker triads. Gender (0 = female; 1 = male), educational level (1 = no formal school degree to 8 = doctoral degree), hierarchical position (0 = job floor level, 100 = top tier level). Task performance (TP) and counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization (CWB-O) were other-rated.

\* *p* < 0.05.  
\*\* *p* < 0.01.

a significantly higher level of CWB-O when levels of FD were high (*B* (*SE*) = 0.39 (13), *p* < 0.01). However, when EL was high, elevated levels of FD were slightly negatively (but nonsignificantly) associated with lower levels of CWB-O. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

In line with Hypothesis 3, we found a positive effect of the interaction between FD and EL on TP, with (Table 3, Model 2b) and without control variables, accounting for an additional 7.76% of the variance (Table 3, Model 2c). We plotted the interaction at one standard deviation above and below the mean of EL. The interaction depicted in Fig. 2 and based on Model 2c shows that, as expected, a high EL was associated with significantly enhanced ratings of TP when FD was high, (*B* (*SE*) = 0.49(0.16), *p* < 0.01). By contrast, when EL was low, we found a slightly negative (but nonsignificant) effect. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

In line with Hypothesis 4, we found a significant FD × II interactive effect on CWB-O, with (Table 2, Model 1d) and without control variables, accounting for an additional 5.52% of the variance (Table 2, Model 1e). The interaction plot based on Model 1e (Fig. 3) shows support for the hypothesized effects. When II was low, coworkers reported a significantly higher level of CWB-O when levels of FD were high, (*B* (*SE*) = 0.34 (14), *p* < 0.05). However, when II was high, elevated levels of FD were slightly negatively (but nonsignificantly) associated with lower levels of CWB-O. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

**Table 2**  
Hierarchical moderated regression analyses predicting other-rated counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization.

Variables Predictors	DV = counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization (CWB-O)									
	Model 1a		Model 1b		Model 1c		Model 1d		Model 1e	
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	β	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	β	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	β	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	β	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	β
Gender	0.20 (0.07)	0.23**	0.17 (0.07)	0.19*			0.16 (0.07)	0.18*		
Age	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.22*	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.13			−0.01 (0.00)	−0.18†		
Working hours/week	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.04	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.05			−0.00 (0.00)	−0.06		
Job tenure (years)	0.00 (0.01)	0.07	0.00 (0.01)	0.02			0.00 (0.00)	0.07		
Hierarchical position	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.31**	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.30**			−0.01 (0.00)	−0.29**		
Coldheartedness	0.01 (0.10)	0.01	−0.01 (0.10)	−0.01			−0.03 (0.10)	−0.02		
Self-centered impulsivity			0.57 (0.13)	0.30**			0.55 (0.13)	0.29**		
Fearless dominance (FD)			0.08 (0.09)	0.06	0.07 (0.09)	0.06	0.11 (0.09)	0.09	0.11 (0.10)	0.09
Educational level (EL)			−0.04 (0.02)	−0.14†	−0.05 (0.02)	−0.19*				
FD × EL			−0.11 (0.05)	−0.14*	−0.16 (0.06)	−0.22**				
Interpersonal influence (II)							−0.07 (0.04)	−0.13†	−0.11 (0.05)	−0.19*
FD × II							−0.30 (0.10)	−0.20**	−0.35 (0.11)	−0.24**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.19		0.31		0.07		0.33		0.08	
<i>F</i> <sub>(<i>R</i><sup>2</sup>)</sub> ( <i>df</i> 1, <i>df</i> 2)	5.83 (6, 154)**		6.65 (10, 150)**		3.98 (3, 157)**		7.26 (10, 150)**		4.73 (3, 157)**	
Δ <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			0.12				0.14			
<i>F</i> <sub>(Δ<i>R</i><sup>2</sup>)</sub> ( <i>df</i> 1, <i>df</i> 2)			6.60 (4, 150)**				7.85 (4, 150)**			

Note. *N* = 161 target-coworker triads, control variables, moderators, and predictors were centered.

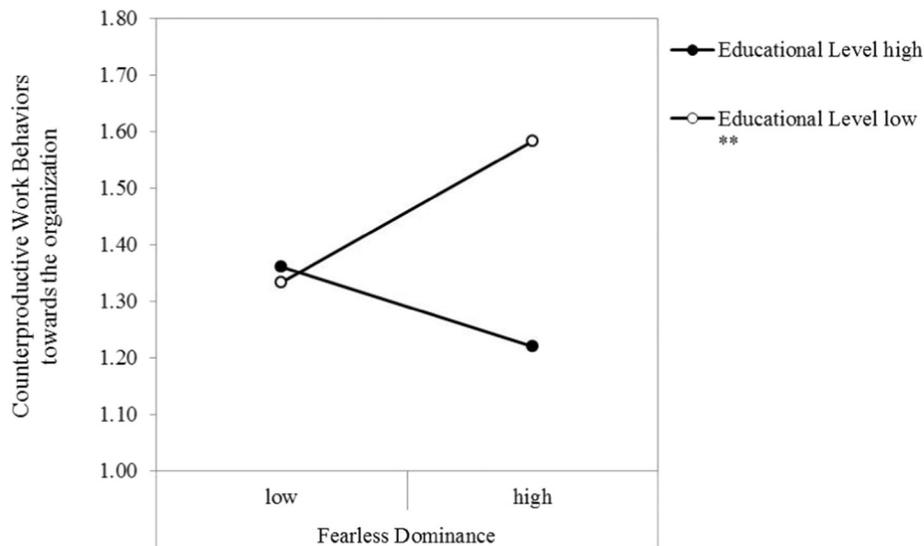
† *p* < 0.10.  
\* *p* < 0.05.  
\*\* *p* < 0.01.

Finally, to assess the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the effects of FD and EL on TP and CWB-O, we jointly tested the FD × II and FD × EL interactions (Table 4). For TP, the significance, direction, and graphical pattern of the FD × EL interaction remained nearly unchanged. However, in reference to the analyses for CWB-O, the FD × EL interaction was no longer statistically significant (*p* > 0.05), whereas the FD × II interaction remained significant.

We therefore computed a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013) in order to test whether the interaction between FD × II would mediate the relation between FD × EL and CWB-O. The indirect effect was significant (size of indirect effect = −0.0631, *SE* = 0.0314, 95% CI [−0.1501, −0.0143]) when we used 5000 bootstrapped samples for bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals. These findings were consistent with our expectation that the positive socialization effect of and through education on individuals with high FD would translate into an improved acquisition of social skills at work. Accordingly, effective socialization into society was found to lay the groundwork for effective socialization into the organization.

### 5. Discussion

It was the goal of the present research to contribute to a more nuanced view of psychopathy in the workplace. Thus, our research was



**Fig. 1.** Hierarchical moderated regressions predicting counterproductive work behavior toward the organization (FD  $\times$  EL). Note.  $N = 161$  target-coworker triads; the plot displays Model 1c; \*\* $p < 0.01$  (slope).

designed to provide a clearer picture of the effects of psychopathy at work than popular sources have done so far (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

### 5.1. Contributions

Our findings support the distinction between two orthogonal trait factors of psychopathy previously described by Lykken (1995) and subsequently empirically documented by other researchers (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005; Miller & Lynam, 2012). We suggested (Hypothesis 1) and found that SCI is the toxic factor of trait psychopathy. Complementing previous research by Schütte et al. (2015) who found that SCI is toxic in interpersonal relationships in the workplace, the present findings demonstrate that SCI is also toxic with reference to the organization. We found that SCI is directly associated with counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization.

Furthermore, on the basis of Lykken's theory of primary psychopathy and socioanalytic theory (Hogan & Shelton, 1998), we suggested that the toxic nature of FD is not guaranteed. Contingent upon an (un)-successful socialization into society that is manifested in educational success/failure and the (lack of a) command of a rapport-inducing,

effective communication style, FD may manifest in productive or counterproductive behavior in the workplace. We predicted (Hypothesis 2) and found dark manifestations of FD (i.e., CWB-O) in combination with a low EL and low II (Hypothesis 4). However, when high FD was combined with a high EL or high II, there was no increase in dark behavioral manifestations directed toward the organization associated with an increase in fearless dominance. The present findings complement previous research by Schütte et al. (2015) who found that there was no increase in dark behavior directed toward others or toxic interpersonal performance associated with an increase in FD when the command of a rapport-inducing, effective communication style (II) was high.

Finally, in line with Lykken (1995), who referred to antisocial criminals and heroes as twigs from the same branch of primary psychopathy (FD), we predicted (Hypotheses 3) that high levels of FD combined with high levels of effective socialization into society on the basis of intelligence (high levels of educational success) would be associated with high levels of task performance. Our data supported this prediction of successful psychopathy in the workplace. These results are in line with findings concerning the power motive. The personalized power motive

**Table 3**

Hierarchical moderated regression analyses predicting other-rated task performance.

Variables Predictors	DV = Task performance					
	Model 2a		Model 2b		Model 2c	
	B (SE)	$\beta$	B (SE)	$\beta$	B (SE)	$\beta$
Gender	−0.01 (0.10)	−0.01	0.03 (0.10)	0.02		
Age	0.00 (0.01)	0.05	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.01		
Working hours/week	0.00 (0.01)	0.04	0.00 (0.01)	0.01		
Job tenure (years)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.11	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.06		
Hierarchical position	0.00 (0.00)	0.08	0.00 (0.00)	0.06		
Coldheartedness	0.08 (0.14)	0.05	0.05 (0.14)	0.03		
Self-centered impulsivity			−0.23 (0.19)	−0.10		
Fearless dominance (FD)			0.05 (0.13)	0.03	0.11 (0.12)	0.07
Educational level (EL)			0.07 (0.03)	0.20*	0.08 (0.03)	0.22**
FD $\times$ EL			0.22 (0.08)	0.23**	0.23 (0.07)	0.25**
$R^2$	0.02		0.11		0.10	
$F_{(R^2)}(df1, df2)$	0.55 (5, 154)		1.85 (10,160) <sup>†</sup>		5.48 (3, 157)**	
$\Delta R^2$			0.09			
$F_{(\Delta R^2)}(df1, df2)$			3.73 (4, 150)**			

Note.  $N = 161$  target-coworker triads, control variables, moderators, and predictors were centered.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

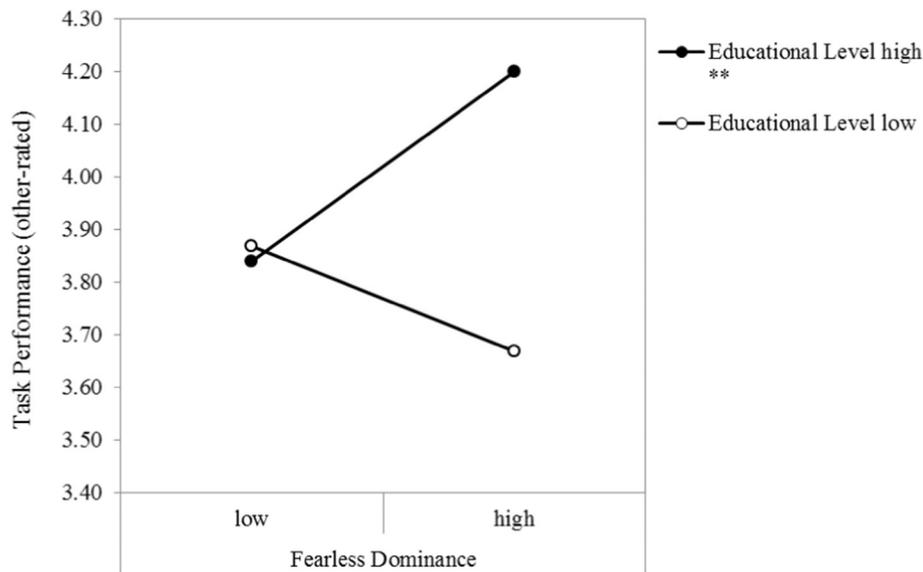


Fig. 2. Hierarchical moderated regressions predicting task performance (FD × EL). Note.  $N = 161$  target-coworker triads; the plot displays Model 2c;  $**p < 0.01$  (slope).

has toxic behavioral manifestations, whereas the socialized power motive has prosocial manifestations (Magee & Langner, 2008).

Our findings extend previous research that found that FD was associated with high performance in a very specific workplace, namely the U.S. presidency (Lilienfeld et al., 2012). In this respect, our research contributes to the literature in two ways: First, our research extends previous research, which focused on a specific job, to a broad range of jobs in a broad range of organizations. Second, on the basis of Lykken's (1995) theorizing, we added specific conditions to Lilienfeld et al.'s (2012) previous findings. FD has a bright side if combined with successful socialization into society.

### 5.2. Implications for future research and limitations

Future research should analyze the situational and individual triggers that allow the toxic influence of SCI to manifest in the workplace. Kaiser et al. (2015) suggested that a low motivation to manage one's impression on others, the experience of psychological threat, cognitive overload, stress, and physical exhaustion are among the situational triggers. Individual factors that may influence the expression of SCI are an

individual's awareness of this dark potential, the motivation to suppress its behavioral manifestation, and the availability of techniques for managing these disruptive effects.

We used behavioral and performance ratings made by coworkers, thereby avoiding mono-source bias. Future research should assess objective work outcomes (e.g., raises in pay and status, work accidents, and firings). In addition, we cross-sectionally assessed psychopathic traits, task performance, and counterproductive work behavior. However, longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether or not persons with strong tendencies to display fearless dominance use interpersonal influence to deceive others while selfishly extracting resources from the group (Jones, 2014).

### 5.3. Implications for practice

These findings have practical implications with regard to selecting personnel and vocational coaching. We start with three implications for selecting personnel: First, it is important to note that in the United States and other countries, it is illegal for companies to discriminate against workers on the basis of a disability. However, psychopathic

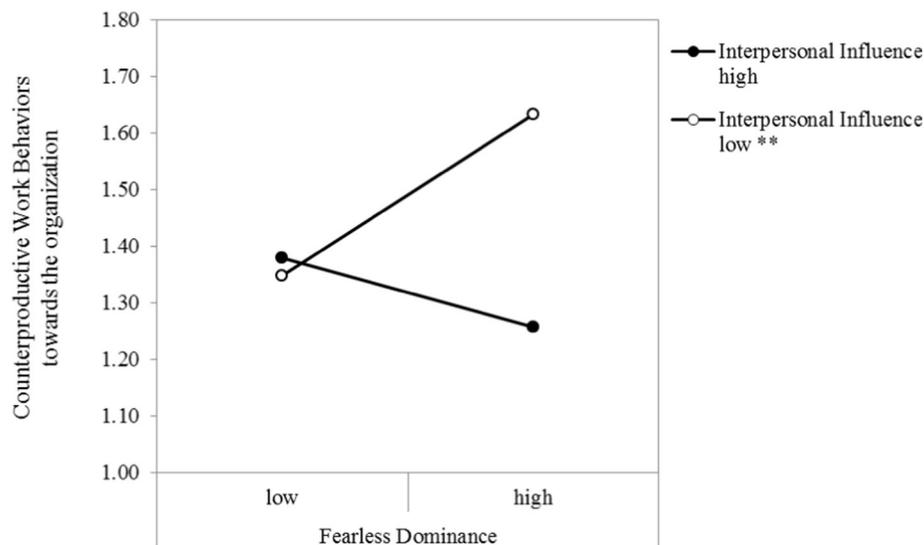


Fig. 3. Hierarchical moderated regressions predicting counterproductive work behavior toward the organization (FD × II). Note.  $N = 161$  target-coworker triads; the plot displays Model 1e;  $**p < 0.01$  (slope).

**Table 4**  
Hierarchical moderated regression analyses including interpersonal influence.

Variables Predictors	DV = Task performance		DV = CWB-O	
	B (SE)	β	B (SE)	β
Gender	0.04 (0.10)	0.03	0.16 (0.07)	0.17*
Age	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.03	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.16
Working hours/week	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.01	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.94
Job tenure (years)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.06	0.00 (0.00)	0.05
Hierarchical position	0.00 (0.00)	0.08	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.28**
Coldheartedness	0.03 (0.14)	0.02	−0.02 (0.10)	−0.01
Self-centered impulsivity	−0.24 (0.20)	−0.10	0.54 (0.13)	0.29**
Fearless dominance (FD)	0.08 (0.14)	0.05	0.10 (0.09)	0.08
Educational level (EL)	0.07 (0.03)	0.21*	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.12†
Interpersonal influence (II)	−0.04 (0.06)	−0.06	−0.07 (0.04)	−0.12
FD × II	0.14 (0.16)	0.08	−0.27 (0.11)	−0.18*
FD × EL	0.20 (0.08)	0.21*	−0.06 (0.06)	−0.08

Note.  $N = 161$  target–coworker triads. Control variables, moderators, and predictors were centered.

†  $p < 0.10$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

personality has never been classified as a disorder. Second, organizations should avoid hiring individuals with higher levels of self-centered impulsivity as toxic behavioral expressions are more likely to occur with higher scores. Third, in order to assess fearless dominance with high reliability, practitioners in personnel selection might want to consider using the PPI-R's (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005) 55 original items. As the toxic nature of fearless dominance can rear its head under certain circumstances, organizations should be very cautious when applicants display high levels of fearless dominance but low levels of education and low levels of interpersonal influence because this could involve high levels of CWB-O and low levels of TP.

We close with implications for vocational coaching. To avoid vocational derailment, persons with elevated levels of SCI should seek vocational coaching and counseling in order to become aware of its disruptive effects; learn to avoid potential situational triggers such as the experience of threat, stress, cognitive overload, and physical exhaustion; develop a strong motivation to suppress these toxic tendencies; and learn social techniques that can help to minimize the negative consequences once toxic behaviors have been released (e.g., apologizing; Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Kaiser et al., 2015).

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine some adaptive and maladaptive features of psychopathy in the workplace. We hope that this study will spur longitudinal research that also uses objective measures of job performance and counterproductive work behavior directed toward the organization.

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