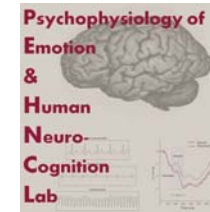


# The Relationship between Alexithymia and Psychopathy among a Subclinical Sample

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## BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Psychopathy and alexithymia have each been extensively studied in the past. The lack of emotional processing in clinical and subclinical levels of psychopathy has produced interest in studying a potential relationship between the constructs (Kroner & Forth, 1995; Louth, Hare, & Linden, 1998). Such studies have produced mixed results, with some indicating relationships between alexithymia and both primary and secondary psychopathy (Grieve & Mahar, 2010), others finding a positive relationship only with secondary psychopathy (Lander, Lutz-Zois, Rye & Goodnight, 2011; Ridings, 2011), and one between emotion management, a subcomponent of alexithymia and psychopathy but only for males (Lishner, Swim, Hong, & Vitacco, 2011).

**AIMS:** This study aims (1) to examine associations between alexithymia and psychopathic traits using the two factors and subscales in the Psychopathic Personality Inventory-Revised (PPI-R; Lilienfeld, 1990) and (2) to determine if the relationships are represented in both genders.

## METHOD AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted with 206 participants from a university population. 67% were female (N=138) and 33% were males (N=68). All analyses were conducted with the full sample and then split by gender. Participants completed the Toronto Alexithymia Scale-20 (TAS-20; Bagby, Parker, & Taylor, 1994) and PPI-R. The PPI-R consists of two factors: Fearless Dominance (FD) and Self-Centered Impulsivity (SCI). FD consists of social influence, fearlessness, and stress immunity, while SCI consists of Machiavellian egocentricity, blame externalization, carefree non-planfulness, and rebellious non-conformity. Though Coldheartedness is not included in either factor, it was included in all analyses as it is often considered an important trait of psychopathy. The TAS-20 includes three factors: difficulty describing feelings (DDF), difficulty identifying feelings (DIF), and externally oriented thinking (EOT).

Table 1. Total Sample Means (and Ranges) for PPI-R and TAS-20 Scales

	BE	C	CN	F	ME	RN	SoI	STI	PPI-R	DDF	EOT	DIF	TAS-20
Min.	24	36	11	21	28	22	61	20	258	5	8	7	22
Mean	33.90	46.88	56.98	33.50	41.83	32.65	44.21	32.12	322	13.28	18.3	15.54	47.24
Max.	50	57	68	46	59	55	54	41	408	23	29	32	77

Table 2. Correlations between PPI-R Factors and TAS-20 Subscales for the Total Sample

	PPI-R FD	PPI-R SCI	PPI-R Total	DDF	EOT	DIF	TAS-20 Total
PPI-R FD	1						
PPI-R SCI	.111	1					
PPI-R Total	.700	.759	1				
DDF	-.280	.376	.070	1			
EOT	-.189	.059	-.052	.295	1		
DIF	-.290	.486	.124	.747	.243	1	
TAS-20 Total	-.323	.410	.069	.865	.611	.878	1

p < .05; p < .01

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## LEGEND

BE: blame externalization  
 C: coldheartedness  
 CN: carefree nonplanfulness  
 F: fearless dominance  
 ME: Machiavellian egocentricity  
 RN: rebellious nonconformity  
 SoI: Social Influence  
 STI: stress immunity  
 PPI-R: psychopathy total score  
 DDF: difficulty describing feelings  
 EOT: externally oriented thinking  
 DIF: difficulty identifying feelings  
 TAS-20: alexithymia total score

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results are generally consistent with the current literature. A positive Pearson correlation was found between SCI and alexithymia (Table 2) indicating that the traits of secondary psychopathy such as impulsivity and risk taking were associated with difficulty identifying and describing feelings. This is consistent with the description of an individual who acts without thinking, taking risks perhaps because of the difficulty in fully recognizing the possible negative personal impact. In contrast, a negative correlation was found between FD and alexithymia indicating traits of primary psychopathy, such as being manipulative particularly with use of social charm, are associated with intact abilities for identifying and describing feelings. Here, the description is one of an individual with social ease and skill in interpreting and appropriately portraying social affects.

Splitting the sample by gender (Tables 3 and 4) revealed a negative relationship between total psychopathy and externally oriented thinking for males. This suggests that as men display more traits of psychopathy they internalize their thoughts. In contrast, females displayed positive relationships between blame externalization (a PPI-R subscale) and alexithymia. Thus, women who tend to blame others for their own failings are less skillful at identifying and describing their feelings.

Table 3. Correlations between PPI-R Subscales and TAS-20 Subscales for the Females Only

	BE	C	CN	F	ME	RN	SoI	STI	PPI-R	DDF	EOT	IF	TAS-20
BE	1												
C	.011	1											
CN	.205	.145	1										
F	.194	-.007	.034	1									
ME	.231	.119	.387	.186	1								
RN	.365	.025	.184	.602	.416	1							
SCI	.082	.096	-.208	.302	.114	.355	1						
STI	-.167	.148	-.203	.277	-.229	.049	.351	1					
PPI-R	.467	.327	.326	.672	.559	.760	.581	.303	1				
DDF	.372	-.019	.196	.116	.237	.199	-.284	-.272	.117	1			
EOT	-.041	.165	.262	.071	.101	.005	-.203	-.119	.035	.289	1		
IF	.461	-.116	.313	.103	.288	.238	-.261	-.346	.153	.722	.245	1	
TAS-20	.361	-.005	.332	.123	.275	.199	-.317	-.324	.136	.857	.609	.876	1

p < .05; p < .01

Table 4. Correlations between PPI-R Subscales and TAS-20 Subscales for the Males Only

	BE	C	CN	F	ME	RN	SoI	STI	PPI-R	DDF	EOT	IF	TAS-20
BE	1												
C	-.227	1											
CN	.071	-.023	1										
F	.116	-.142	-.147	1									
ME	.360	.191	.311	.118	1								
RN	.225	.111	.091	.528	.457	1							
SCI	.104	.077	-.619	.142	-.044	.230	1						
STI	-.181	.165	-.486	.269	-.181	.068	.492	1					
PPI-R	.419	.289	.047	.546	.648	.780	.432	.316	1				
DDF	.101	-.191	.539	-.029	.278	0	-.632	-.493	-.129	1			
EOT	-.135	-.004	.274	-.176	-.006	-.393	-.338	-.334	-.317	.283	1		
IF	.192	-.184	.530	-.054	.419	.197	-.511	-.468	.034	.796	.229	1	
TAS-20	.082	-.164	.570	-.106	.311	-.052	-.620	-.546	-.152	.877	.604	.884	1

p < .05; p < .01

## CONCLUSION

These data suggest that the characteristics of both psychopathy and alexithymia are distributed across the population at subclinical levels and are significantly related to each other. Both primary (FD) and secondary (SCI) psychopathy are associated with alexithymia while Coldheartedness, although often considered a component of psychopathy, is not. Moreover, the relationship of the components of psychopathy and alexithymia is similar for males and females despite specific differences in the manifestation of psychopathy.

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