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Successful Psychopathy Predicts Variation in Ambition and Motivations for Life Success

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Abstract. Purpose: Though psychopathic personality has long been considered a robust predictor of antisocial and criminal behavior throughout one's life, more recent attention has turned to the construct of *successful psychopathy*. This subtype depicts individuals who are callous and unemotional at their core, yet who are characterised by traits largely considered beneficial or adaptive in daily life and which contribute to positive outcomes in business and social arenas. Though emerging work on this construct has outlined associated markers of success, further investigation is required to better understand what drives this success. **Methodology:** This study recruited a general population sample of $n = 224$ adults from the United Kingdom. Hierarchical regression models were used to determine whether, beyond demographic factors, successful psychopathic traits (*Successful Psychopathy Short-Form*) could account for further variance in measures of ambition (*Self-perceived Employability Scale*) and life success (*Life Success Measures Scale*), including facets related to status/wealth seeking, professional fulfillment, personal fulfillment, and security. **Findings:** Successful psychopathic traits were positively associated with career ambition and appeared to drive variation in status/wealth seeking, professional fulfillment, personal fulfillment, and security. **Originality:** Results are discussed in terms of their theoretical and practical implications for organizational dynamics and potential for employee screening, training, and development.

Keywords: Successful Psychopathy, Corporate Psychopathy, Ambition, Organizational Psychology, Personality.

Introduction

Around three million employees (Schuette et al., 2015) and 3.5% of top executives worldwide (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Babiak et al., 2010) are thought to exhibit high psychopathic tendencies. Though traditionally examined within forensic settings as a diagnosable disorder that predicts criminal behavior (DeLisi, 2009) and in popular media as a storytelling device to explain extreme violence (Hayward & Hall, 2021), contemporary research considers psychopathic tendencies to be continuously, albeit non-normally, distributed within the general public (Edens et al., 2006; Marcus et al., 2004; Neumann et al., 2015). In this context, psychopathic traits are associated with achieving power, success, resources, and social status (Cheng et al., 2010; Watts et al., 2017), often through exerting minimal effort (Watts et al., 2017). Said individuals use bold, dominant, and persuasive interpersonal styles (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Hare, 1999; Lobaczewski, 2007), appear confident, decisive, and socially potent (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2002; Wallace et al., 2022), and their actions are unhampered by shame, guilt, or remorse (Lilienfeld & Windows, 2005). However, individuals with these traits are often associated with antisocial behavior (Leistico et al., 2008) and on-going criminality (Bergström & Farrington, 2022). Previously, individuals with these prototypical psychopathic traits who were able to evade the law were characterised as “successful psychopaths” (Gao & Raine, 2010; Widom, 1977), although this definition has since been relegated due to its simplistic view of the construct, whereby success is defined only by the absence of being caught and incarcerated.

More recent literature has redefined the construct of successful psychopathy by focusing on its specific traits and the achievement of positive outcomes (Lilienfeld et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2022). Individuals with successful psychopathic traits are characterized by resilience, confidence, social potency, and conscientiousness (Wallace et al., 2025), along with intact executive functioning (Lantrip et al., 2016). Despite still exhibiting callous and manipulative traits central to prototypical psychopathy, they avoid legal issues and effectively integrate into society, often excelling in their environments (Lilienfeld et al., 2015). Until recently, there has not existed a rigorously-developed psychometric tool to index successful psychopathy in a quantitatively meaningful manner. Wallace et al.’s (2025) *Successful Psychopathy Scale* (SPS) was developed through expert-informed item construction and Rasch analysis to improve instrument precision and quality, and showed theoretically meaningful validation against measures of prototypical psychopathic personality. Specifically, positive associations with Boldness and Meanness, and a lack of association with Disinhibition (as measured by the TriPM; Patrick, 2009). Moreover, the SPS showed positive associations with aspects of life success such as stable socioeconomic status and success expectancy (Wallace et al., 2025). While successful psychopathy has been convincingly linked to objective measures of success, its ability to predict broader ambition and the motivation to succeed remains unclear. This knowledge

gap is important given that ambition plays a crucial role in various domains, including education, sports, and politics (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Pettigrove, 2007), and significantly influences work and career behaviors (Jones et al., 2017). Motivation, defined as the disposition to initiate or sustain goal-directed behavior, can be seen as the driving force behind ambition, suggesting that both are essential for success (Yager & Kay, 2023).

Drawing from literature pertaining to prototypical psychopathy, we know that prototypical psychopathic traits are associated with pleasure-seeking, high social status, and control over others (Glenn et al., 2017); however, individuals high in such traits may not genuinely value or feel motivated to achieve these goals despite expressing a desire for them. Moreover, these prototypical individuals place more value on self-enhancement through power attainment rather than achievement or goal completion (Glenn et al., 2017), and thus would not be considered ambitious, but instead, opportunistic (Babiak, 2015). In practice, such literature helps to depict why those with high prototypical psychopathic traits attain high power positions but are unable to maintain these indefinitely (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Cooke & Michie, 2001). We see a similar pathway when applying these findings to career ambition, specifically.

Career ambition refers to the desire to climb the organizational hierarchy via promotions (Judge et al., 2004; Metz, 2004) and has been positively associated with both occupational commitment (Desrochers & Dahir, 2000) and career success (Ashby & Schoon, 2010). As above, those with high prototypical psychopathic traits are adept at seating themselves in positions of power and leadership (see Babiak & Hare, 2006; Wille et al., 2013); however their antisocial tendencies, lack of commitment, and counter-productive workplace behaviors hinder their progress (Boddy, 2014; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Schilbach et al., 2020), indicating that i) some of their traits were maladaptive to maintaining success, and ii) they lacked the objective ambition needed to ultimately achieve their goals long-term.

Despite a dearth of research pertaining to successful psychopathy and ambition, it is clear that individuals scoring high on this subtype of psychopathy may be more likely to demonstrate objective ambition and goal-striving. The argument for this is three-fold. Firstly, they do not exhibit the same trait structure as their prototypical counterparts. Specifically, there is an absence of outward antisocial, erratic, and disinhibited natures (see Lilienfeld, 2015; Michels & Roth, 2021; Steinert et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2022). Secondly, they exhibit more self-efficacy and belief that they will attain their goals (Wallace et al., 2025), with self-efficacy long being associated with ambition (Ćurić Dražić et al., 2018; Hirschi & Spurk, 2021; Vvan Vianen, 1999) and career success (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Ballout, 2009; Jayawardena et al., 2013). Lastly, adaptive traits associated with psychopathy (which are the forefront of the successful psychopathy structure) have been positively associated with higher socioeconomic status

(Persson & Lilienfeld, 2019; Wallace et al., 2025), which is significantly driven by ambition (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

Overview of study

Seemingly, there is both a theoretical and economic need to begin to establish a psychological understanding of how successful psychopathy relates to ambition, and the motivations for success that may be driving this relationship. Initially, we sought to understand whether successful psychopathy predicted higher levels of career ambition. Here, we hypothesized that higher scores on a measure of successful psychopathy would positively predict ambition, above and beyond the baseline demographics of age and sex. In turn, we wanted to establish what specific elements of potential life success acted as motivators for individuals with high levels of successful psychopathic traits, and what drives their ambition. Here, we hypothesized that these individuals would value status and wealth, in addition to being motivated by professional fulfilment (e.g., career satisfaction and pride in their work), which may be important in distinguishing their long-term potential. On a practical level, we envisage our results impacting organizational behavior and leadership development, by means of developing training programs which promote objective goal setting, whilst leveraging the advantageous traits within the successful psychopathy construct to reduce the potential detriment of counterproductive workplace behaviors.

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised $n = 224$ participants ($M_{age} = 41.8$ years, $SD = 15.6$; 83% female) who were recruited through professional networks held by the researchers. Supported through automated prompts, which alerted participants to missed answers, all participants provided full data sets. Our inclusion criteria required participants to be 18 years of age or older, currently living in the United Kingdom (to control for societal influences of success), and fluent in English. Data was collected in April 2024.

Materials

Demographics

Participants were asked to report their age and sex via open text boxes.

Successful Psychopathy Short-Form Scale (SPS-SF; Wallace et al., 2025)

The SPS-SF is a 30-item measure of successful psychopathic traits for use within the general population. All items (e.g., “*I am motivated by financial gains*”) are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*, with higher total scores ($\alpha = .84$) reflecting greater presence of successful psychopathic traits. Alpha values reported for all scales within this section are derived from our data.

Self-perceived Employability Scale (SES; Rothwell et al., 2008)

Career ambition was assessed by the *Ambition subscale* within the SES. This subscale is made up of 6-items (e.g., “*I regard myself as highly ambitious*”) that are rated on 5-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*, with higher total scores ($\alpha = .60$) reflecting a greater presence of career ambition.

Life Success Measures Scale Measures of Life Success (LSMS; Parker & Chusmir, 1992)

The LSMS is a 42-item self-report survey consisting of six dimensions of life success including Status/Wealth (8 items, e.g., “*Having a job that pays more than my peers earn*”, $\alpha = .80$), Contribution to society (8 items, e.g., “*Being able to give help, assistance, advice and support to others*”, $\alpha = .86$), Family relationships (8 items, e.g., “*Being a good parent*”, $\alpha = .86$), Personal fulfilment (8 items, e.g., “*Having inner peace and contentment*”, $\alpha = .81$), Professional fulfilment (8 items, e.g., “*Getting good performance evaluations*”, $\alpha = .73$), and Security (5 items, e.g., “*Having long-term job security*”, $\alpha = .65$). The LSMS is measured using a 5-point Likert scale rating the importance of the item to the participant on a scale of 1 - *Never important* to 5 - *Always important*. No items are reversed and subscale totals were calculated.

Procedure

This study was ethically approved by a College Research Committee within a UK-based higher education institution. After clicking the study link, participants were taken to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics wherein they read a participant information sheet before providing consent via a button press. Participants initially entered their demographic information before completing the SPS-SF, the ambition subscale of the SES, and the LSMS. Measures were randomly presented to reduce order effects. Finally, participants were provided with debrief information and on average the study took 12 minutes to complete. Of note, the term ‘psychopathy’ was omitted from all participant-facing documents, save for the debrief, so as not to bias our data by evoking affective responses born out of common, yet academically inaccurate, misunderstandings about what psychopathy is (see Berryessa & Wohlstetter, 2019; Vione et al., 2023, for further information on psychopathy labelling effects).

RESULTS**Correlations and sex-based comparisons between variables of interest**

First, we ran bivariate correlational analyses to explore associations between our variables of interest (see Table 1.). Being male was associated with greater self-reported successful psychopathic traits and being motivated by status/wealth, and being female was associated with being motivated by family relationships. Moreover, age was negatively associated

with ambition and reports of being motivated by status/wealth and the need for security, but positively associated with being motivated by family relationships. Greater successful psychopathic traits were associated with ambition and being motivated by status/wealth, personal and professional fulfilment, and having security, but not contribution to society or family relationships. All other motivators were positively associated with one another, save for the non-significant relationship between being motivated by status/wealth and family relationships.

Second, we used t-tests to compare our outcome variables across sex. Males scored higher on successful psychopathy ($M = 87.38$, $SD = 11.30$, $t(222) = 2.18$, $p = .030$, $d = 0.34$) and being motivated by status/wealth ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 5.15$, $t(222) = 2.13$, $p = .035$, $d = 0.33$) than females ($M = 83.62$, $SD = 11.09$ and $M = 18.55$, $SD = 5.17$, respectively). Conversely, females scored higher on being motivated by family relationships ($M = 35.35$, $SD = 4.75$, $t(222) = 3.20$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.50$) than males ($M = 32.62$, $SD = 7.34$). Neither means for ambition, nor being motivated by either contributions to society, professional fulfilment, or security were statistically significant.

Table 1. Correlations between variables of interest

		[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]
[1]	Sex	-	1.65*	-.145*	-.018	-.141*	.088	.210**	.113	.063	.037
[2]	Age		-	-.117	-.213**	-.307***	.054	.193**	-.007	-.044	-.134*
[3]	Successful Psychopathy			-	.375***	.334***	.056	.034	.186**	.172**	.184**
[4]	Ambition				-	.270***	.245***	.144*	.370***	.440***	.385***
[5]	Status/Wealth					-	.164*	.012	.140*	.405***	.498***
[6]	Contribution to Society						-	.162*	.404***	.345***	.313***
[7]	Family Relationships							-	.288***	.382***	.340***
[8]	Personal Fulfilment								-	.537***	.436***
[9]	Professional Fulfilment									-	.582***
[10]	Security										-

Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Hierarchical regression model summaries featuring standardized coefficients of the additive role of successful psychopathy predicting indices of ambition and motivation.

		Ambition	Status/Wealth	Contribution to Society	Family Relationships	Personal Fulfilment	Professional Fulfilment	Security
Step 1	Sex	.01 [-1.12, 1.30]	-.10 [-2.77, .33]	.09 [-.53, 2.71]	.18** [.67, 4.07]	.11 [-.17, 2.16]	.07 [-.44, 1.51]	.05 [-.61, 1.40]
	Age	-.21** [-.09, -.02]	-.29*** [-.14, -.05]	.04 [-.03, .06]	.16* [.01, .11]	-.03 [-.04, .03]	-.06 [-.04, .02]	-.14* [-.06, .01]
	Model	$F(2, 220) = 5.23$, $p = .006$	$F(2, 220) = 12.78$, $p < .001$	$F(2, 220) = 1.21$, $p = .300$	$F(2, 220) = 8.16$, $p < .001$	$F(2, 220) = 1.42$, $p = .245$	$F(2, 220) = .80$, $p = .449$	$F(2, 220) = 2.33$, $p = .100$
	R^2	.05	.10	.01	.07	.01	.01	.02
Step 2	Sex	.06 [-.62, 1.67]	-.06 [-2.25, .73]	.10 [-.42, 2.85]	.19** [.80, 4.22]	.141* [.07, 2.38]	.10 [-.26, 1.68]	.08 [-.43, 1.58]
	Age	-.18** [-.08, -.01]	-.26*** [-.13, -.05]	.05 [-.03, .06]	.17* [.02, .11]	-.01 [-.03, .03]	-.04 [-.03, .02]	-.13 [-.05, .01]
	SPS	.36*** [.08, .17]	.29*** [.08, .19]	.08 [-.03, .10]	.08 [-.02, .11]	.21** [.03, .11]	.18** [.01, .09]	.18** [.01, .09]
	Model	$F(3, 219) = 15.28$, $p < .001$	$F(3, 219) = 16.90$, $p < .001$	$F(3, 219) = 1.22$, $p = .302$	$F(3, 219) = 5.97$, $p = .001$	$F(3, 219) = 4.16$, $p = .007$	$F(3, 219) = 3.00$, $p = .032$	$F(3, 219) = 4.03$, $p = .008$
	R^2	.17	.19	.02	.08	.05	.05	.05

Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. SPS = Successful Psychopathy Scale

Prediction of indices of ambition and motivation

We conducted a series of hierarchical multiple regression to explore whether self-reported successful psychopathic traits, over and above sex and age, predicted variation in indices of ambition and motivation. In each analysis, age and sex (0 = male, 1 = female) were entered at Step 1, and successful psychopathic traits were entered at Step 2. The dependent variables were scores on ambition and the motivators of status/wealth, contribution to society, family relationships, personal fulfilment, professional fulfilment, and security. All models met the assumptions required for hierarchical multiple regression analysis.

In Step 1, sex (being female) and age positively contributed to the prediction of being motivated by family, and age also negatively contributed to the prediction of ambition and being motivated by status/wealth and security. In addition to these findings mostly holding at Step 2 (save for age no longer predicting security), introducing successful psychopathic traits explained further variation in ambition (12%), and being motivated by status/wealth (9%), personal fulfilment (4%), professional fulfilment (4%) and security (3%). All associations were positive in nature. There were no significant increases in the explained variances of being motivated by contribution to society or family relationships (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

This study explored the utility of successful psychopathic traits as a focal predictor of both career ambition, as well as specific elements of life success. Successful psychopathic traits were positively associated with career ambition and appear to be driven by status/wealth seeking, professional fulfilment, personal fulfilment, and security. Below, each result pertaining to a specific facet of ambition and success is discussed, before elaborating on the theoretical and applied benefits of this research thereafter.

Theoretical Implications

Confirming our initial hypothesis, successful psychopathic traits positively predicted career ambition, above and beyond age and sex. The concept of ambition involves a sense of competitiveness, desire for power, high status, and sense of achievement (Hogan & Hogan, 1995). Although linked to achievement motivation and a desire for power, ambition is distinct from these underlying motivations (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). In particular, whereas achievement motivation focusses on how well one performs and a desire for power encompasses one's need to manage others, ambition is primarily concerned with the outcome of task performance (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). As such, ambition is much more suitable for long-term goal setting and attainment. Whilst individuals with high prototypical psychopathic traits desire power and

achievement (see Glenn et al., 2017), their opportunistic natures and antisocial tendencies act as a barrier to success, for example low performance evaluations preventing career advancement (Babiak, 2015; Blickle et al., 2023; Boddy, 2014; O'Boyle et al., 2011; Schilbach et al., 2020). From a theoretical perspective, unlike their prototypical counterparts, those high in successful psychopathic traits may not experience these barriers and instead demonstrate levels of ambition, which could be more effective in gaining and maintaining success long-term over more fallible traits such as desire and achievement striving.

Regarding specific life motivators, the attainment of status and wealth were the most important life motivators for individuals with successful psychopathic traits. Prototypical psychopathy has long been associated with being power-hungry and having desires to hold positions which afford them status, power, freedom, and wealth (Boddy, 2017). We hypothesized that, like prototypical psychopathic traits, those with successful psychopathic traits would value self-enhancement motivators like status and wealth, which our results confirmed. However, in the context of successful psychopathic traits being positively associated with ambition, individuals high in these traits may thus be better equipped to both achieve and maintain their goals.

Professional fulfilment can be defined as a way in which individuals pursue their career goals, how they evaluate their career goals (Oliveria-Silva et al., 2019), their sense of engagement and eudemonic gratification from their work (Brown & Gunderman, 2006; Simons & Baldwin, 2021), and job satisfaction (Eisenbarth et al., 2018). Our results demonstrate that successful psychopathic traits predicted being motivated by professional fulfilment, above and beyond demographics. This finding is empirically different to previous research investigating prototypical psychopathic traits and job satisfaction, whereby Boddy (2011) concluded that as prototypical psychopathic traits increase, job satisfaction decreased, which could in part be explained by their antisocial tendencies. Individuals with prototypical psychopathic traits can be characterized as impulsive in their decision-making and by hostility towards others, potentially hindering their ability to achieve organizational rewards such as salary increases or higher positions (Berg et al., 2013; O'Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2013). Therefore, this lack of advancement due to their own antisocial tendencies could influence their overall job satisfaction and thus lead to devaluation of professional fulfilment as a motivator for success. Although findings obtained here will need to be replicated, it is possible to suggest that placing meaning and importance on professional fulfillment could play a key role in differentiating prototypical psychopathic workplace performance from successful psychopathic performance, with the latter being much more conducive to long-term success due to their lack of overt antisocial traits such as impulsivity and hostility.

Personal fulfillment is defined as having one's intrinsic needs met, such as contentment with life, maintained high levels of self-esteem and

respect, as well as a strong sense of self-worth and acceptance (Parker & Chusmir, 1992). Here, successful psychopathic traits predicted valuing and being motivated by attaining personal fulfillment. In terms of more intrinsic values, there is very little extant literature examining any form of psychopathic traits and this kind of fulfillment, however Glenn et al. (2017) indicated that whilst individuals with prototypical psychopathic traits did not value self-acceptance, they do yield high self-esteem (Cleckley, 1941; Hare, 2003). The concept of self-acceptance highlights that people should value and accept themselves for who they are (Ellis 1977). Contrarily, self-esteem is dependent on the value that people place on themselves and is thus often influenced by how competent and effective people believe they are as well as whether or not they have reached their goals (Crocker & Wolfe 2001; Leary et al. 2007; also see Gilbert & Irons, 2005). Therefore, compared to self-acceptance, self-esteem may be more fragile, less useful at protecting against self-deficit information, and more likely to cause a defensive reaction in response to such information (Chamberlain & Haggga 2001; MacInnes 2006). Based on our initial findings, the differentiation between self-esteem and self-acceptance across psychopathy subtypes could yield interesting findings with application to organizational performance

Moreover, our results indicate that successful psychopathic traits predict one's value of and being motivated by security. Security, as per the LSMS (Parker & Chusmir, 1992) is a desire to have economic stability, the lack of which has been associated with a host of detrimental outcomes, such as relationship breakdown (Larson et al., 1994), depression (Meltzer et al., 2010), and suicide (Blakely et al., 2003). This desire for economic stability in those with high successful psychopathic traits appears to be the opposite of what we have come to expect from prototypical psychopathy, with the latter being negatively associated with economic success (Andersen et al., 1999; Harpur et al., 1989; Ullrich et al., 2008) and more likely to experience difficulty in gaining employment and financial stability than individuals with low prototypical psychopathic traits (Boccio & Beaver, 2015), thus perhaps leading to more disadvantageous life outcomes. Considering the associations between successful psychopathy and professional fulfillment desires, as well as the desire to attain status and wealth reported above, this finding indicates that the need for economic stability may be a key factor in predicting long-term goal attainment.

Similarly to prototypical psychopathic traits, these individuals are still very much governed by self-enhancement (see Glenn et al., 2017), and thus garner no extrinsic or intrinsic reward from helping others and would much prefer to maintain their resources for their own needs (see da Silva et al., 2015), therefore as expected our results indicated no associations between successful psychopathic traits and contribution to society or valuing familial relationships. This is reflective of what we understand about prototypical psychopathic traits whereby they engage in "fast life" strategies, meaning their focus is on mating, with little investment of their

resources in interpersonal relationships or parenting (Del Giudice, 2014; Glenn et al., 2011), therefore there appears to be limited differences in the psychopathy subtypes when it comes to interpersonal relationships. However, it is worth noting that the LSMS items pertaining to this aspect of life success are mostly centred around marriage and child-rearing, which may not fit with contemporary societal needs such as economic stability and independence (Gui, 2020), and successful psychopathy may value interpersonal relationships, perhaps just not the traditional kind. Therefore, it would be worth exploring the role of successful psychopathic traits within different types of interpersonal relationships.

Practical Implications

Findings reported here have practical implications for employee selection, employee training, and individual differences within the workplace. Initially, our results suggest that those scoring higher in successful psychopathic traits are more likely to exhibit career ambition, a beneficial quality that can be leveraged within a company to achieve results and meet organizational goals. However, despite their advantages in professional attainment, their values and motivations are primarily self-enhancing; suggesting that whilst they may provide benefits to the company, this may only be the case when sufficient rewards and resources are provided. Thus, there is need to explore the utility of using the SPS (Wallace et al., 2025) as a pre-employment screening tool to examine an individual's suitability to certain roles (see Stabile, 2001 for a review on the use of pre-employment screening tools). For example, an individual with high levels of successful psychopathic traits may be suited to a target-based role (e.g., sales) but less suited to a role involving employee relations (e.g., human resources). It is important to note, however, that the use of personality tests as screening tools for employment remains controversial (Diekmann et al., 2018; Tippins et al., 2021) and should be grounded in compliance with company policies and law.

Moreover, these findings suggest a need to better understand the impact of incorporating ambition-driven, objective goal setting in workplace training, and how this might enhance employee performance (Awan et al., 2020; Latham, 2020). Specifically, for individuals with high levels of successful psychopathic traits, how might one be able to leverage their unique qualities for mutual benefit. Future research should focus on using the SPS (Wallace et al., 2025) to develop targeted training programs aimed at improving effective goal setting, fostering self-acceptance, and enhancing resilience within the workforce.

Limitations

Results documented here should be discussed in light of limitations. First, by nature the research is correlational in nature and lacks useful insight from a comparison group (i.e., those high in prototypical psychopathic traits), which could help to further validate successful

psychopathy as a distinct concept. Nevertheless, as prototypical psychopathy has long been acknowledged to be detrimental to long-term workplace gains (Boddy, 2005, 2006, 2011), this decision allowed us to maintain focus on factors relevant to promoting positive organizational outcomes. Second, whilst robust, the sample comprised mainly females, which limits our understanding of the interaction between sex and ambition in the context of successful psychopathy. In turn, this attenuates the generalisability of our data to sectors which predominantly attract male candidates (e.g., Science, Technology, Engineering, Math; Howcroft & Taylor, 2023). On this topic, it also remains to be seen as to whether the SPS can predict one's likelihood of seeking out particular roles as well as the reasons behind said choices. Third, we acknowledge that the family and relationships aspect of the LSMS (Parker & Chusmir, 1992) may be both theoretically and terminologically outdated. All forms of success are subject to societal change, but none may have been quite as impacted by modern society as the value placed on family and marriage, with more individuals than ever choosing not to marry or have children (see Priyashantha et al., 2022). Therefore, this may have impacted the findings for this life success motivator given that marriage and child-rearing are no longer seen as key markers of life success, and future research should consider other measures regarding the value of interpersonal relationships beyond the traditional forms. Finally, the ambition subscale of the SES was found to only have an α of .60 within our data; indicating that the items – at least in our context – did not reliably measure the same underlying construct of ambition. On reflection, though the items were contextually appropriate, a post-hoc literature review of studies that have used the SES within UK samples revealed similar poor reliability (Rothwell et al., 2008, 2009). Thus, there is a clear need to replicate these findings using a more robust measure of ambition.

Conclusion

This paper is the first to investigate the relationship between successful psychopathic traits, ambition, and motivations for life success. Using a psychometrically sound index of successful psychopathy, results indicate that successful psychopathic traits have a positive predictive relationship with career ambition, which suggests that these individuals are goal-orientated and take pride in not only their attainment but also their performance in task-based situations. In addition, we also demonstrated that there are several key motivators for these individuals namely, status/wealth, professional fulfilment, personal fulfilment, and security. This indicates that individuals with successful psychopathic traits differ from their prototypical counterparts in terms of what drives them, but also that they may be averse to some of the potential barriers within the workplace which prevents individuals with particular personality profiles from getting ahead. Furthermore, the notion that successful psychopathic traits appear to be

driven by both extrinsic and intrinsic values offers an interesting insight for future research to explore.

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Availability of Data and Material

The data which supports the findings within this study can be found here: https://osf.io/db47v/overview?view_only=41676a11d27d4b07bd4216a786267a12

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest have been disclosed.

Author's Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to the research and preparation of manuscript.

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent

This research was approved by the University of Leicester: School of Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy on 24th April 2024. Informed consent was provided by all participants.

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