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Psychopathic Traits and Relationship Satisfaction in Intimate Partners: A Dyadic Approach

Frederica M. Martijn^{a,e*} , Liam Cahill^a , Mieke Decuyper^b  and Katarzyna (Kasia) Uzieblo^{c,d#} 

^aNottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK; ^bThomas More University College, Antwerp, Belgium; ^cHelpline 1712, Center of General Welfare Oost-Brabant, Belgium; ^dVrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium; ^eResearch and Data Centre (WODC), Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, The Hague, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Maladaptive personality traits, including psychopathic traits, are inherently associated with interpersonal deficits and can undermine relationship quality. This study examined self- and partner-reported psychopathic traits (Interpersonal Manipulation, Callous Affect, Erratic Lifestyle, Antisocial Tendencies) and relationship satisfaction in 85 male-female couple dyads using Actor-Partner Interdependence Modeling. Higher psychopathic traits were related to lower relationship satisfaction; most consistently, perceiving one's partner as more psychopathic was related to lower actor-effect relationship satisfaction, while higher self-rated Interpersonal Manipulation and partner-rated Callous Affect were related to lower partner-effect relationship satisfaction. Findings highlight complex associations between psychopathic traits and relationships, underscoring the importance of partner perceptions.

KEYWORDS

Psychopathy; APIM; relationship satisfaction; dyadic analyses

Introduction

Personality traits influence how individuals typically behave in interactions with others, and influence relationship characteristics, including relationship satisfaction (Back et al., 2011). Personality traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (per the Five Factor Model; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Schaffhuser et al., 2014), and trait emotional intelligence (Malouff et al., 2010; Parker et al., 2021) are positively related to relationship satisfaction. While some personality

CONTACT Frederica M. Martijn  fredericamartijn@outlook.com  School of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ, UK.

*Frederica M. Martijn conducted part of the research while affiliated with Thomas More University College

#Katarzyna Uzieblo conducted part of the research while affiliated with The Forensic Care Specialists (De Forensische Zorg Specialisten)

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traits promote relationship satisfaction, other personality traits are assumed to impact relationships negatively (Decuyper et al., 2018). One such constellation of personality traits (i.e., construct) is psychopathy. In this study, we used the characterization of psychopathy as a clinical construct defined by a cluster of four problematic trait facets, with two main factors: Factor 1, comprising Interpersonal Manipulation (glib/superficial charm, grandiose self-worth, conning/manipulative) and Callous Affect (lack of guilt and remorse, shallow affect, callous/lack of empathy, not accepting responsibility for actions); and Factor 2, comprising Erratic Lifestyle (impulsivity, irresponsibility, parasitic lifestyle, need for stimulation), and Antisocial Tendencies (poor behavioral control, early behavioral problems and juvenile delinquency, criminal behavior; Cleckley, 1941; Hare & Neumann, 2005, 2008).

While not a gender-specific construct, psychopathy was historically studied and diagnosed in men, primarily (Guay et al., 2018; Hicks et al., 2004; Nicholls et al., 2005). Psychopathy is more prevalent in men, but the gendered prevalence seems disproportionally skewed: this might be due to the different ways psychopathic traits manifest in men and women (de Vogel & Lancel, 2016; Kreis & Cooke, 2012). Patterns of impulsive, anti-social, and destructive behavior tend to be differently framed or interpreted in men and women, and psychopathy instruments may not capture the manifestations of these traits in women adequately (Chun et al., 2017; Sprague et al., 2012). Differential gender manifestations notwithstanding, personality traits defining psychopathy affect interpersonal relationships negatively, such as antagonism (Kotov et al., 2017; Krueger et al., 2007), low trait emotional intelligence (Megías et al., 2018), callousness (Golmaryami et al., 2021), and, per the Five Factor Model, high angry-hostility, impulsivity, and low altruism (Decuyper et al., 2009; Samuel & Widiger, 2008).

Psychopathic traits and relationship quality

Research on the determinants of relationships and relationship satisfaction is important as higher relationship quality is related to better health (Robles et al., 2014) and increased well-being (Proulx et al., 2007). Conversely, unhappy relationships are related to decreased wellbeing (Hawkins and Booth, 2005) and depression (Goldfarb and Trudel, 2019). Given the interpersonal impairments and maladaptation underlying the psychopathy construct, it is no surprise that exhibiting psychopathic traits can be detrimental to one's own and one's partner's relationship quality and satisfaction. A growing number of studies evidences the detrimental impacts of psychopathic traits on relationships: for instance, having a preference for short-term relationships (Jonason et al., 2012), and negatively impacting relationship duration and divorce (Weiss et al., 2018). People with more psychopathic traits are also more sexually indiscriminate (Burtäverde et al.,

2021), are sexually precarious and more prone to sexually coercive behavior (Harris et al., 2007; Süssenbach & Euteneuer, 2024), and are more likely to engage in infidelity (Jones & Weiser, 2014). Individuals high in psychopathic traits also have volatile and lower quality relationships: they show less commitment and stability (Kardum et al., 2018), have more anxious and avoidant attachment styles (Conradi et al., 2016), engage in more controlling and destructive behavior (Brewer et al., 2018), and exhibit more violent behavior toward their partners (Mager et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2020). However, while psychopathic traits may generally be detrimental to attracting prospective partners, there is also some evidence that psychopathic traits can be attractive in women who are looking for short-term dating or sexual encounters (Jonason et al., 2015), or for younger women who themselves have more psychopathic traits (Blanchard et al., 2016).

Relationships might also be a protective factor for some of the potential detrimental outcomes of psychopathic traits: for example, getting married is related to a decrease in antisocial and criminal behavior, especially in young adult men (Sampson et al., 2006; (Zoutewelle-Terovan et al., 2014)). Psychopathic traits are, however, also related to lower quality relationships, and an increase of negative relationship outcomes such as domestic violence (Robertson et al., 2020). As such, understanding partner dynamics related to maladaptive personality traits is potentially very useful in both assessment and treatment, for both individuals and couples, but also from a wider health perspective.

Partner Perceptions in Relationship

But, to what extent do we really know our partners? There might be good reasons to want to conceal or manipulate a partner's appraisal of (the full scope of) one's own maladaptive traits. We will therefore assess the associations between how we see ourselves and how we see our partners in this study, illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1 with our guest couple "Nadia" and "David". We will assess Actual Similarity, i.e., "*how does Nadia see herself and how does David see himself?*"; Perceptual Accuracy, i.e., "*how does Nadia see herself and how does David see Nadia?*"; and Perceptual Similarity, i.e., "*how does Nadia see herself and how does Nadia see David?*". Magnitudes of actual similarity for personality traits in relationships are generally small (e.g., Montoya et al., 2008; Weiss et al., 2018), in other words: most partners are actually not so similar to each other. But there is more convergence for perceptual accuracy and similarity, with generally moderate self-partner agreement between partners on how they see themselves and each other (Decuyper et al., 2018; Schaffhuser et al., 2014; Weiss et al., 2018). In other words: partners perceive each other to be alike, and they can give a reasonably accurate assessment of their partner.

Table 1. Nadia and David: an example of APIM effects and perceptions.

	Actor-effect	Partner-effect
Self-perception	Does Nadia's rating of her psychopathic traits affect her relationship satisfaction?	Does Nadia's rating of her psychopathic traits affect David's relationship satisfaction?
Partner-perception	Does the way David rate Nadia on psychopathic traits influence Nadia's relationship satisfaction?	Does the way David rate Nadia on psychopathic traits influence David's relationship satisfaction?
Actual similarity	Perceptual accuracy	Perceptual similarity
How Nadia sees herself and how David sees himself	How Nadia sees herself and how David sees Nadia	How Nadia sees herself and how Nadia sees David

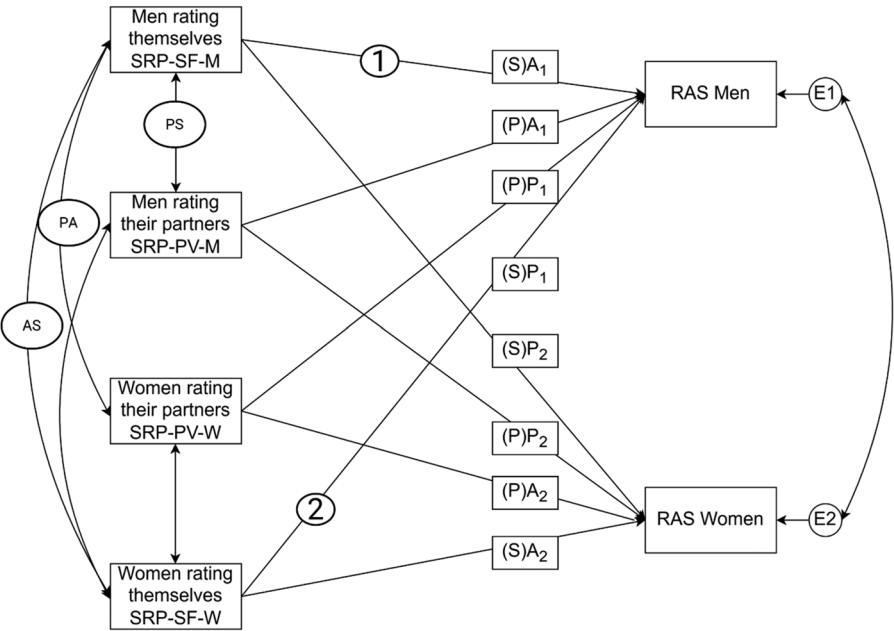


Figure 1. APIM example figure of men and women rating themselves and their partners.
Note. RAS=Relationship Assessment Scale. (S) indicates report about self; (P) indicates report about partner; A indicates actor-effect; P indicates partner-effect: i.e. (S)A₁ indicates the actor effect of men reporting about themselves on the men's RAS. (1) exemplifies the actor-effect of men rating themselves on their RAS scores. (2) exemplifies the partner-effect of women rating their partner on the men's RAS scores. (AS) exemplifies actual similarity. (PA) exemplifies perceptual accuracy. (PS) exemplifies perceptual similarity.

Partner information could thus potentially be valuable in clinical assessment, especially when there might be reason to misrepresent maladaptive traits (Brock et al., 2016; Decuyper et al., 2018), for instance when a psychopathy evaluation is included in a recidivism risk assessment.

Actor-partner interdependence models (APIM)

To point out the obvious, there is (in its most common understanding) more than one person involved in a romantic relationship. This means that when we want to understand relational functioning fully and holistically, we should include the views of both partners of this romantic

dyad. Importantly, the views of these partners are interdependent: the behaviors, cognitions, and emotions of one partner influences the behavior, cognitions, and emotions of the other partner (Cook & Kenny, 2005). A consequence of that interdependence is that the measurement scores of these dyads are non-independent; that is, information about the scores of one member of the dyad will be correlated to the scores of the other person of the dyad, and it is essential to account for this non-independence when examining dyads (Brock et al., 2016). Researchers typically account for this non-independence by modeling the data dyadically and estimating actor- and partner-effects in the form of Actor-Partner Interdependence Modeling (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). To illustrate these relations, see Table 1 for an example with “Nadia” and “David” for the self- and partner-perception of actor- and partner-effects of psychopathic traits, and Figure 1 to exemplify the paths (Schaffhuser et al., 2014). In a dyadic model, there are two actor-effects, and two partner-effects. Actor-effects (indicated with A and (1) in Figure 1) describe the association between the target person’s described traits and *their* outcome variable, i.e., 1) *the relation between Nadia rating herself on psychopathic traits and Nadia’s relationship satisfaction*, and 2) *the relation between Nadia rating David on psychopathic traits and Nadia’s relationship satisfaction*. Partner-effects (indicated with P and (2) in Figure 1) describe the association between the target person’s described traits and *their partner’s* outcome variable, i.e., 1) *the relation between David rating himself on psychopathic traits and Nadia’s relationship satisfaction*, and 2) *the relation between David rating Nadia on psychopathic traits and Nadia’s relationship satisfaction*. For clarity, in a full dyadic sample these effects are doubled, i.e., four actor effects and four partner effects, as we have both the self- and partner-report of both members of the dyad.

Psychopathic traits and relationship outcomes have previously been modeled in APIMs, primarily as part of “Dark Triad” (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) research, with varying outcomes. Some find overall negative, but non-significant actor- and partner-effects of psychopathy on relationship satisfaction (Veronica Smith et al., 2014), other research finds significant partner-effects, but negligible actor-effects of psychopathic traits on marital quality (Yu et al., 2020), yet other research finds no direct relation between psychopathy and couple satisfaction (Savard et al., 2011). So, there are indications that psychopathic traits are related to negative actor- and partner-effects on measures of relationship quality, but these configurations, and the differences between men and women are not yet well understood. Further, there could be notable differences in how Factor 1 (interpersonal and affective deficits) and Factor 2 (lifestyle and antisocial features) relate to relational satisfaction: for instance, in general personality research

negative affect and detachment (more similar to Factor 1) have stronger relations to relational dissatisfaction than disinhibition, psychoticism, and antagonism (more similar to Factor 2; Decuyper et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2021). This research adds to this burgeoning literature with a more fine-grained analysis of the different facets of psychopathic traits and relationship satisfaction in men and women.

Aims and rationale

The current study aims to overcome some limitations in the literature by focusing on the dyadic relationship between men's and women's ratings of their own and their partner's psychopathic traits using an integrated Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). Previous studies either did not have full dyadic self-and partner-reports of psychopathic traits (Uzieblo et al., 2022) or used limited psychopathy measures (e.g., as part of a Dark Triad measure), which do not account for the multi-faceted construct of psychopathy (e.g., Brewer et al., 2018; Weiss et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2020). We aim to expand the knowledge on these interactions by providing a more nuanced understanding of psychopathic traits in intimate partners by exploring profile similarity. We will further explore the dyadic influence of self- and partner reported psychopathic traits on relationship satisfaction by modeling interdependent actor- and partner-effects, including the different facets of psychopathic traits.

We expect that, regardless of gender, participants rating their partner higher on psychopathic traits will be related to lower self-reported relationship satisfaction. We predict both negative actor- and partner- effects when participants rate themselves or their partner higher on psychopathic traits. Additionally, while we expect that all facets of psychopathy (Interpersonal Manipulation, Callous Affect, Erratic Lifestyle, and Antisocial Tendencies) will show negative relations to relationship satisfaction, we expect that the interpersonal-affective facets (Interpersonal Manipulation and Callous Affect) will show a more consistent negative relation to relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Inclusion criteria required participants to be 18 years or older, currently in an intimate relationship that had lasted for a minimum of four weeks, that both members of the romantic dyad participated in the study, and that both partners were sufficiently proficient in the Dutch language. Couples were identified through a "couple code", i.e., a unique identifier both dyad members had to fill in to be included. To illustrate, we asked couples to make a code that consisted of 1) the youngest partner's initials,

2) the youngest partner's birth year, and 3) the oldest partner's initials. So Nadia Marshall, born in 1985, and David Dubois, born in 1982, would make NM1985DD.

The survey link was visited by 389 respondents in total. Of these, 219 (56.3%) participants were excluded: 111 (28.5%) participants quit the survey prematurely, 90 (22.6%) did not have a dyad-respondent with a matching couple code, and 6 (1.5%) respondents were in "throuples", i.e., three respondents had the same couple code¹. We further excluded three dyads (6 respondents; 1.5%) as one or both respondents in the dyad had >25% missing answers on the RAS, the main outcome measure. Finally, as we expected gender differences on the predictor variables (i.e., men scoring higher on the psychopathy measure), we decided only to include cis(gender) man-woman dyad structures. We define cis(gender) as those who "do not identify as trans or who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth" (McDermott et al., 2018, p. 69). While there is a significant need to include LGBTQ+ identifying people in relationship and personality research, we had too few LGBTQ+ dyads to conduct meaningful analyses, and consequently excluded three dyads ($n=6$; 1.5%).

The final sample comprised 85 men and 85 women ($N=170$). The male participants ($M=24.0$, $SD=6.5$) were similar in age to their female counterparts ($M=22.9$, $SD=5.8$), $t(168) = 1.22$, $p = .226$, Cohen's $d = .19$, 95% CI $[-.12, .49]$. All men identified as heterosexual (i.e., straight), as did most women ($n=80$, 94.1%). The average relationship length was 45 months (around 3.7 years), the median relationship length 32 months (2.7 years). Most participants were students ($n_{\text{men}} = 36$, 42.4%; $n_{\text{women}} = 58$, 69.2%) or full-time employed ($n_{\text{men}} = 43$, 50.6%; $n_{\text{women}} = 18$, 21.2%). Most participants identified their socio-economic status as middle class ($n_{\text{men}} = 55$, 64.7%; $n_{\text{women}} = 58$, 68.2%), and most dyads (70%) lived apart (see [Supplemental Materials S1](#) for tabular presentation).

Measures

The survey included demographic characteristics (i.e., age, relationship length, education), self-reported psychopathic traits, partner-reported psychopathic traits, and relationship satisfaction. None of the questions were mandatory, and participants could skip any of them by clicking "I do not want to answer this question". The survey was available in Dutch only.

Self-report psychopathy-short form (SRP-SF): self-report and partner-version

Self-reported psychopathic traits were measured using the SRP-SF (Paulhus et al., 2016); Dutch translation by Uzieblo et al., 2007). The SRP-SF consists of 29 items which are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *I completely disagree* to 5 = *I completely agree*. The SRP-SF consists

of four subscales, Interpersonal Manipulation (IPM; 7 items), e.g., “I like pushing people to their breaking point”; Callous Affect (CA; 7 items), e.g., “I never feel guilty when I hurt people”; Erratic Lifestyle (ELS; 7 items), e.g., “I like having sex with people I barely know”; and Antisocial Tendencies (AT; 8 items), e.g., “I have assaulted a law enforcer or social worker”. The SRP-SF has demonstrated good psychometric properties in English- (Paulhus et al., 2016) and Dutch-speaking participants (Gordts et al., 2017).

The Self-Report Psychopathy-Short Form: Partner-Version (SRP-PV) is a version of the Self-Report version to reflect how participants rated their partners on psychopathic traits (see Uzieblo et al., 2022). For instance, item 16 from the CA scale: “People sometimes say I am cold-hearted”, becomes “People sometimes say my partner is cold-hearted”. The SRP-PV has not been psychometrically assessed, but internal consistencies in Uzieblo et al. (2022) for women rating men were moderate to good (ω_t between .62 and .86).

Relationship assessment scale (RAS)

Relationship satisfaction was measured using the RAS (Hendrick et al., 1998; Dutch translation by Decuyper et al., 2012), a 7-item measure with responses on a 5-point scale. Examples include “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?”, with 1 = *unsatisfied*, 5 = *extremely satisfied*, or “To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?”, with 1 = *hardly at all*, 5 = *completely*. The RAS’s validity and reliability have been demonstrated in several general population samples (Hendrick et al., 1998; Renshaw et al., 2011; Vaughn & Matyastik Baier, 1999).

Procedure

Respondents were recruited by undergraduate students of *Thomas More University* for their thesis project through convenience and snowball sampling. A link and QR code for the Qualtrics survey was distributed through social media on the college’s platforms and personal social media networks (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). The study was advertised as a study about personality characteristics and relationship satisfaction and not as a study of psychopathy and relationships given the negative connotation associated with the term psychopathy and its potential impact on recruitment and participants’ responses. When landing on the survey website, participants were presented with an information briefing and informed consent. After providing informed consent, they completed the measures and received the debriefing, including referrals to mental health resources if distressed, at the end. If they did not consent, they were referred to the debriefing

page. Participants could also end the survey at any time (by clicking “end the survey”), and no questions were mandatory (“I do not want to answer”). The research received Ethical Approval from the Ethical Committee at Thomas More University. There was no compensation for participation. The data were collected between December 29th, 2020, and February 8th, 2021.

Statistical analyses

All analyses were completed in R Studio (version: 4.2.1; R Core Team, 2022). The anonymized data and associated R scripts that support our preliminary and primary analyses are available on the Open Science Framework ([link here](#)). The study was not preregistered. First, we explored and assessed the assumptions of our data. We also examined the need to account for additional covariates. Previous research has indicated that age and relationship duration significantly influenced the relationship between personality traits and relationship outcomes (Stroud et al., 2010; Uzieblo et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2017). However, neither age or relationship duration correlated systematically with the predictor and outcome variables, so these variables were not included as partial controls for the models.

We used the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012) to construct our APIM and constituent models. Given the normality assumption violations (see below), we used a robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLM), which estimates robust standard errors. We used 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals (CI) to assess the significance of each pathway. If a CI crosses zero, it is not significant. We also reported Cohen's *d* effect sizes where appropriate. Interpreting magnitude of effect sizes was based on Cohen (1988, 1992), with $d=0.20/r = .10$, $d=0.50/r = .30$, and $d=0.70/r = .50$, for small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Before conducting the main analyses, we assessed the assumptions of our data. The SRP-PV and RAS showed skewness and kurtosis in excess of ± 2 , violating univariate normality (George & Mallery, 2010; see Table S2 in the [Supplemental Materials](#)). As such, we opted to use a robust estimator to calculate the standard errors outlined above (Baguley, 2012). We also examined multicollinearity by constructing a linear model for each APIM mode specification (SRP total, IPM, CA, and ELS). We then calculated the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). VIF

values varied between 1.3 and 2.3 across the models, suggesting no issue with multicollinearity.

The Antisocial Tendencies (AT) subscale evidenced poor internal consistency for both the SRP-SF, Cronbach's $\alpha = .16$, 95% CI [.01, .31] and the SRP-PV, Cronbach's $\alpha = .15$, 95% CI [.02, .29]. Additionally, most AT subscale items correlated negatively with the SRP-SF and SRP-PV full-scale scores. For this reason, we excluded the AT subscale from both the SRP-SF and SRP-PV from further analyses (i.e., 16 items; see [Table S3](#) in the [Supplemental Materials](#)). The internal consistencies for the SRP-SF and SRP-PV Total scales (after removal of the AT subscale, as described above) and for all SRP-SF and SRP-PV subscales were good to excellent ($\alpha = .67 - .88$; see [Table 2](#)). All SRP-SF and SRP-PV Total scores in the further analyses excluded the AT subscale.

We constructed an APIM model, modeling the association between SRP-SF and SRP-PV and RAS by gender. We constructed four separate APIMs: one using the SRP total scores and three additional models, each examining a single SRP subscale. This was done to maintain parsimony and minimize model complexity, as including all subscales in a single model would have substantially increased the number of estimated parameters and risked overfitting, given the sample size. Our data was organized in a full dyadic structure and contained distinguishable dyads based on gender². In the APIM, we examined the actor- and partner-effects while controlling for the other effect. We modeled the covariation between the SRP-SF and SRP-PV predictors and the error terms for RAS. All coefficients represent standardized betas (β ; Cook & Kenny, 2005).

Based on our final sample size, a post-hoc power analysis was conducted using the APIM power calculator for distinguishable dyads (Ackerman & Kenny, 2016). With 85 dyads, the power to detect small ($\beta = .15$) and small-to-moderate actor- and partner-effects ($\beta = .20$) was estimated at .27 and .43, respectively, indicating limited sensitivity to effects of this size. When assuming medium actor- and partner-effects ($\beta = .30$), power increased to .82. These results suggest that our sample was generally underpowered to detect significant actor- and partner-effects smaller than medium effects. As such, we decided to focus on effect size patterns and magnitudes rather than significance, and we interpret our findings cautiously.

Next, we briefly examined the descriptive statistics and correlations for each (sub)scale. [Table 2](#) shows the descriptive statistics and comparisons by gender for each scale. Men rated themselves significantly higher on the SRP Total, IPM, and CA scale, and rated their female partners significantly lower on the SRP Total and CA scale, than women did and vice versa.

Table 2. Scale descriptives and effect sizes comparing men and women.

Scale	Cronbach's α	Total		Men		Women		t	p	d [95% CI]
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
SRP-SF Total	.85 [.82, .88]	39.34	10.18	42.07	10.42	36.61	9.22	3.62	<.001	0.56 [0.25, 0.86]
IPM	.73 [.67, .79]	12.14	3.92	12.82	3.98	11.45	3.75	2.32	.021	0.36 [0.05, 0.66]
CA	.67 [.59, .74]	12.77	4.04	14.29	4.19	11.24	3.24	5.32	<.001	0.82 [0.50, 1.13]
ELS	.67 [.60, .75]	14.44	3.97	14.95	4.17	13.93	3.71	1.69	.093	0.26 [−0.05, 0.56]
SRP-PV Total	.88 [.86, .91]	35.38	11.05	33.67	9.31	37.09	12.38	−2.04	.043	−0.31 [−0.62, −0.01]
IPM	.82 [.78, .85]	10.92	4.34	10.39	3.41	11.44	5.07	−1.58	.116	−0.24 [−0.55, 0.06]
CA	.68 [.61, .76]	11.73	4.07	10.76	3.64	12.69	4.27	−3.17	.002	−0.49 [−0.79, −0.18]
ELS	.74 [.68, .80]	12.74	4.35	12.52	3.79	12.96	4.86	−0.67	.505	−0.10 [−0.41, 0.20]
RAS	.85 [.82, .88]	31.21	3.59	31.34	3.38	31.08	3.81	0.47	.640	0.07 [−0.23, 0.38]

Notes. Bolded values represent statistically significant effect sizes. SRP-SF = Self-Report Psychopathy Short-Form; SRP-SF PV = Self-Report Psychopathy Short Form – Partner Version; IPM = Interpersonal Manipulation; CA = Callous Affect; ELS = Erratic Lifestyle; RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale; SRP-SF Total = IPM + CA + ELS – SF; SRP-PV Total = IPM + CA + ELS – PV.

Last, we examined the correlations (Pearson's r) between the study variables for men and women (Table 3). Almost all scales correlated significantly and moderately to highly with each other, with r s magnitude ranging from .22 to .88. For men and women, all (except one) SRP-SF and SRP-PV scales were significantly correlated with each other (significant r s between .22 and .88). RAS was significantly negatively correlated with all SRP scales (Self-Report and Partner-Version) for both men and women, with r s between −0.34 and −0.22, except the ELS subscales (both self- and partner-report) for men (see Table 3 for more detail). To contextualize our findings, we compared the scores of the RAS and SRP-SF and -PV results to other similar studies—our RAS scores were mostly non-significantly higher (Decuyper et al., 2012; Dinkel and Balck, 2005; Meeks, 1996), and our SRP-SF and -PV scores were in between (Gordts et al., 2017; Paulhus et al., 2016, 2016); see Supplementary Table S4.

Primary analyses

Actual similarity, perceptual similarity, and perceptual accuracy

Table 4 describes the partners' actual similarity (*how Nadia rates herself and how David rates himself*), perceptual accuracy (*how Nadia rates herself and David rates Nadia*), and perceptual similarity (*how Nadia rates herself and how Nadia rates David*). Both perceptual accuracy and perceptual similarity were moderate to high, with r s between .24 and .66: in other words, how men and women rated themselves on psychopathic traits was similar to how their partners rated them; and, men and women rated themselves similar to how they rated their own partners on psychopathic traits. Actual similarity ratings, however, were smaller and non-significant, with r s between .13 and .21: how a man rated himself on psychopathic traits was not similar to how his female partner rated herself on psychopathic traits (and vice versa for women).

Table 3. Correlation matrix Pearson's R between SRP-SF, SRP-PV, and RAS for men and women .

1. SRP-SF Total	2. SRP-SF IPM	3. SRP-SF CA	4. SRP-SF ELS	5. SRP-PV Total	6. SRP-PV IPM	7. SRP-PV CA	8. SRP-PV ELS	9. RAS
<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]
1. SRP-SF Total	—							
2. SRP-SF IPM	.85 [.78, .90]							
3. SRP-SF CA	.85 [.78, .90]	.87 [.80, .91]						
4. SRP-SF ELS	.83 [.75, .89]	.62 [.46, .73]	.87 [.80, .91]	.66 [.52, .76]				
5. SRP-PV Total	.46 [.27, .61]	.54 [.36, .67]	.43 [.23, .59]	.53 [.36, .67]	.55 [.38, .68]			
6. SRP-PV IPM	.41 [.22, .58]	.42 [.22, .58]	.42 [.22, .58]	.87 [.81, .92]	.56 [.39, .69]	.59 [.44, .72]		
7. SRP-PV CA	.40 [.21, .57]	.42 [.23, .58]	.42 [.23, .58]	.88 [.83, .92]	.39 [.19, .56]	.54 [.36, .67]	.51 [.33, .65]	
8. SRP-PV ELS	.36 [.16, .53]	.27 [.06, .46]	.27 [.06, .46]	.82 [.73, .88]	.88 [.82, .92]	.47 [.28, .62]	.47 [.28, .62]	-.033 [-0.51, -0.13]
9. RAS	-.029 [-0.47, -0.08]	-.033 [-0.51, -0.13]	-.022 [-0.41, -0.01]	-.034 [-0.51, -0.13]	-.034 [-0.52, -0.14]	-.034 [-0.52, -0.14]	-.033 [-0.51, -0.13]	-.033 [-0.51, -0.13]

Note. Values above the diagonal represent men, values below the diagonal represent women. Bolded values represent statistically significant correlations at $p < .05$. Thresholds for interpreting effect sizes: $r = .10$ is small, $r = .30$ is medium, and $r = .50$ is large. SRP-SF = Self-Report Psychopathy Short-Form; SRP-SF PV = Self-Report Psychopathy Short Form - Partner Version; IPM = Interpersonal Manipulation; CA = Callous Affect; ELS = Erratic Lifestyle; RAS = Relationship Assessment Scale; SRP-SF Total = IPM + CA + ELS - SF; SRP-PV Total = IPM + CA + ELS - PV.

Table 4. Self- and partner rated SRP Pearson's correlations by men and women.

	Actual similarity	Perceptual accuracy		Perceptual similarity	
	SRP-SF-M by SRP-SF-W	SRP-SF-M by SRP-PV-W	SRP-PV-M by SRP-SF-W	SRP-SF-M by SRP-PV-M	SRP-SF-W By SRP-PV-W
	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]	<i>r</i> [95% CI]
SRP Total	.20 [−0.02, .39]	.40 [.20, .56]	.42 [.23, .58]	.46 [.27, .61]	.66 [.52, .77]
SRP IPM	.18 [−0.04, .38]	.24 [.03, .43]	.26 [.05, .45]	.44 [.25, .60]	.56 [.39, .69]
SRP CA	.21 [−0.001, .41]	.37 [.17, .54]	.50 [.33, .65]	.42 [.23, .58]	.54 [.37, .67]
SRP ELS	.13 [−0.09, .33]	.56 [.39, .69]	.47 [.29, .62]	.28 [.07, .47]	.54 [.37, .68]

Notes. Bolded values represent statistically significant correlations at $p < .05$ M = Men; W = Women; SRP-SF = Self-Report Psychopathy-Short Form; SRP-PV = Self-Report Psychopathy-Short Form Partner Version; IPM = Interpersonal Manipulation; CA = Callous Affect; ELS = Erratic Lifestyle.

Actor partner interdependence models (APIM) of psychopathic traits and relationship satisfaction

We examined the APIM of SRP Total, IPM, CA, and ELS. Each of our models are just-identified, meaning traditional fit indices (e.g., chi-square, CFI, TLI, RMSEA) are not meaningful in assessing model fit. However, for transparency, we report the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) for our SRP total model ($AIC=1342.39$; $BIC=1408.34$), and the model comprising the IPM ($AIC=1380.80$; $BIC=1445.96$), CA ($AIC=1360.88$; $BIC=1426.83$) and ELS subscales ($AIC=1353.11$; $BIC=1419.06$). These values allow for comparisons with alternative models (especially since our data is open).

Men's and women's RAS were correlated, $r = .54$, 95% CI [.37, .67]. We ran the APIM of the relations between SRP Total, IPM, CA, and ELS on RAS simultaneously while controlling for the error terms, i.e., we regressed men's and women's RAS scores on self- and other-rated psychopathic traits. To illustrate the different APIMs, see Figure 1 for the example model, including all paths, and see Figure 2 for the paths of the SRP Total on RAS. The corresponding pathways of the SRP Total, IPM, CA, and ELS to RAS can be found in Table 5.

The general direction of the standardized coefficients indicated a negative relation between the SRP total and subscales on RAS. However, most actor-and partner-effects for men and women were non-significant. We included four defined parameters in our model to test for gender differences in actor and partner effects. These parameters captured the difference between men's and women's actor- and partner-effects. As estimated by our SEM output, we found no significant differences between men's and women's actor- and partner-effects across any of the models.

Actor effects. We most consistently found a negative relation between rating one's partner high on psychopathic traits and one's own relationship satisfaction (i.e., *David rating Nadia high on psychopathy has a negative relation to David's relationship satisfaction*), with small-to-medium to

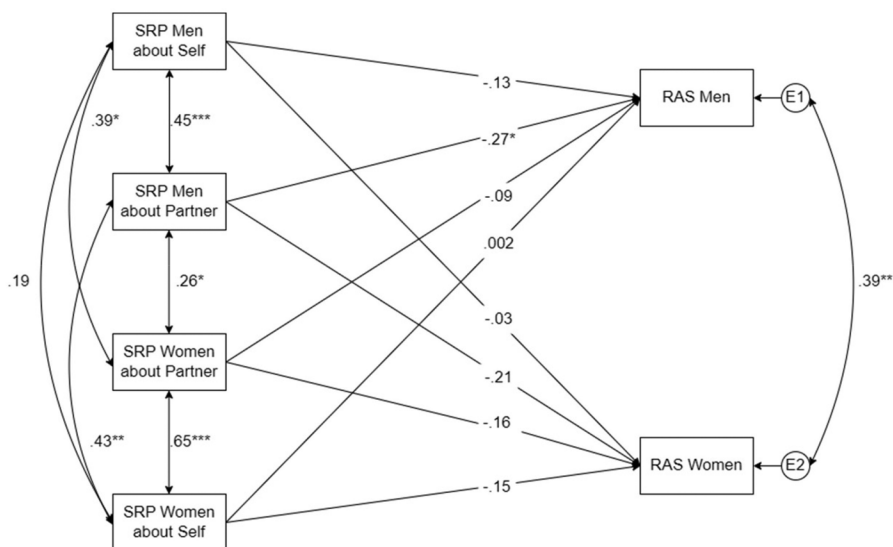


Figure 2. APIM of SRP total and relationship satisfaction for men and women.

medium effect sizes for men (β s between -0.20 and -0.38 ; (P) A_1 in Figure 1) and small effect sizes for women (β s between -0.14 and -0.20 ; (P) A_2). How men and women rated themselves on Interpersonal Manipulation also had small-to-medium (β s -0.21 and -0.18) negative relations to their own relationship satisfaction (i.e., *Nadia rating Nadia high on Interpersonal Manipulation has a negative relation to Nadia's relationship satisfaction*; (S) A_1 and (S) A_2).

Partner effects. We found medium negative partner-effects of partner-rated Callous Affect for both men and women ($\beta -0.28$ and -0.27), and small-to-medium effects for SRP Total and Interpersonal Manipulation for women and relationship satisfaction (i.e., *David rating Nadia high on Callous Affect has a negative relation to Nadia's relationship satisfaction*; (P) P_1 and (P) P_2). Surprisingly, we also found a small-to-medium ($\beta = .21$; (S) P_1) positive relation between women rating themselves higher on Callous Affect and men's relationship satisfaction (i.e., *Nadia rating herself higher on Callous Affect has a positive relation to David's relationship satisfaction*).

Discussion

The aims of the current study were to explore profile similarity in psychopathic traits in intimate partners, and to explore how actor- and partner-effects of self- and partner-reported psychopathic traits are associated with relationship satisfaction in intimate partners. We found that perceptual accuracy and similarity were moderate-to-high, while actual similarity was

Table 5. APIM for SRP-self and SRP-partner on RAS.

Scale	APIM Model	RAS men				RAS women			
		Actor-effect		Partner-effect		Actor-effect		Partner-effect	
		Men rating themselves (S)A ₁	Men rating their partner (P)A ₁	Women rating themselves (S)P ₁	Women rating their partner (P)P ₁	Women rating themselves (S)A ₂	Women rating their partner (P)A ₂	Men rating themselves (S)P ₂	Men rating their partner (P)P ₂
SRP Total	SRP-SF/PV-M/F	β [95% CI] -0.13 [-0.39, .15]	β [95% CI] -0.27 [-0.48, -0.05]	β [95% CI] .05 [-0.36, .45]	β [95% CI] -0.13 [-0.52, .26]	β [95% CI] -0.13 [-0.75, .48]	β [95% CI] -0.17 [-0.79, .46]	β [95% CI] -0.03 [-0.38, .31]	β [95% CI] -0.20 [-0.58, .19]
SRP IPM	Men and women rating	-0.21 [-0.45, .03]	-0.20 [-0.39, -0.01]	-0.20 [-0.56, .17]	-0.001 [-0.36, .35]	-0.18 [-0.75, .40]	-0.15 [-0.71, .41]	-0.06 [-0.27, .15]	-0.22 [-0.49, .06]
SRP CA	themselves and their partner	-0.001 [-0.22, .22]	-0.38 [-0.63, -0.13]	.21 [.004, .43]	-0.28 [-0.51, -0.06]	-0.10 [-0.46, .27]	-0.14 [-0.44, .16]	.02 [-0.29, .34]	-0.27 [-0.74, .21]
SRP ELS	(Figure 1)	-0.09 [-0.37, .19]	-0.20 [-0.47, .08]	.12 [-0.17, .41]	-0.11 [-0.44, .22]	-0.08 [-0.47, .30]	-0.20 [-0.63, .22]	-0.01 [-0.31, .28]	-0.06 [-0.28, .17]

Notes. Bolded values indicate that the actor-or partner-effect significantly predicted Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) scores, $p < .05$. A = Actor-effect; P = Partner-effect; (S) = Self-rating; (P) = Partner-rating; M = Men; W = Women; SRP-SF = Self-Report Psychopathy-Short Form; SRP-PV = Self-Report Psychopathy-Short Form Partner Version; IPM = Interpersonal Manipulation; CA = Callous Affect; ELS = Erratic Lifestyle.

small. Current findings also suggest that rating oneself or one's partner higher on psychopathic traits was related to negative actor- and partner-effects on relationship satisfaction, regardless of gender, with effect sizes that ranged from negligible to medium, with relatively wide confidence intervals. The most consistent association was found for the negative actor effects of rating one's partner high on psychopathic traits to relationship satisfaction, with small-to-medium and medium effects. Additionally, rating oneself higher on Interpersonal Manipulation was related to one's own lower relationship satisfaction scores. And, being perceived by one's partner as higher in Callous Affect had a medium sized association to that partner's relationship satisfaction. Although findings should be interpreted cautiously given a relatively limited sample size, the present study highlights the nuanced and complex ways maladaptive personality constructs influence individuals and couples. We discuss these findings in more depth in the next sections.

Overall profile similarities and differences of psychopathic traits in men and women

Men scored higher on the psychopathy measure than women, with small (Erratic Lifestyle), medium (Interpersonal Manipulation, and Total scores), and large (Callous Affect) effect sizes, consistent with extant literature (Gordts et al., 2017). Intuitively, it seems likely that people underreport their maladaptive traits, so partners reporting higher (or at minimum, equivalent) maladaptive traits seems probable (Decuyper et al., 2018; Kelley et al., 2018). However, both men and women assessed their partners to be lower on psychopathic traits than their respective partners assessed themselves. Uzieblo et al. (2022) also found that women under-reported psychopathic traits in their male partner (or—men over-report their psychopathic traits). Partners may want to uphold a positively biased view of their partner, or subclinical psychopathic traits are not well recognized by partners in the general population. It is also possible that individuals with more psychopathic traits manipulate partners into having a more positive view of them, but when there is a low-to-no stakes situation (such as this survey), they assess themselves at realistic—and thus higher than their partner's—psychopathic trait level (Miller et al., 2011). Additionally, our sample's relationships were of relatively short duration (~ four years), and most did not live together, which may influence the realistic appreciation of their partner's traits (Savard et al., 2011; Zhou et al., 2017). Research with partners of people with clinically assessed high psychopathy traits, or with partners of people in forensic or clinical settings and the assessment of their partner's psychopathic traits has yet to be done.

Regardless, partner-reports can be both positively biased *and* accurate (Luo & Snider, 2009), and perceptual accuracy (self-other agreement) scores were moderately correlated for the Total, Callous Affect, and Erratic Lifestyle Self-Report Psychopathy subscales, in line with other research's magnitudes of self-other agreement on personality measures (Blanchard et al., 2016; Decuyper et al., 2012; South et al., 2011). This means that partners' ratings of someone are generally in line with a person's own assessment, which could provide useful information if there are doubts about self-report sincerity. In general, similarity is related to more relationship satisfaction (Decuyper et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2008), but examining this relation was beyond the scope of this study. Future studies should investigate whether similarity is also related to higher relationship satisfaction when considering maladaptive traits (Derrick et al., 2016): for instance, are partners who both exhibit higher levels of psychopathic traits less satisfied because of the interplay of their maladaptive personality traits, or more satisfied because their personality traits are compatible? The self-other agreement for Interpersonal Manipulation was of smaller magnitude ($r = .24$) than the other scales, which might have to do with *manipulation* being less salient and observable than the other traits (Schaffhuser et al., 2014). Perceptual similarity correlated more strongly, with the largest relations for how women perceive themselves and their partners, in keeping with extensive research that people mate assertively, i.e., they are attracted to people who they perceive to be similar to themselves (see e.g., Luo (2017) for review). People high in psychopathic traits may also seek out other people high in psychopathic traits, which could lead to more volatile relationships. However, as in other research (e.g., Weiss et al., 2018), assessing and perceiving your partner to be similar to you does not necessarily mean this is true: actual similarity correlations between partners were small and non-significant.

Actor-partner interdependence models (APIM) of psychopathic traits

The APIM analysis showed that higher scores on any of the Self Report Psychopathy total or subscales, whether rating oneself or one's partner, were related to lower relationship satisfaction, in line with extant literature evidencing the negative association of psychopathic traits and relationships (i.e., Kardum et al., 2018; Süssenbach & Euteneuer, 2024; Weiss et al., 2018). Important, however, is that participants in this study did not receive a clinical psychopathy assessment, so these results stress the importance of even subclinical psychopathic traits in the study of relationship (dis-)satisfaction. Notably, the associations between the psychopathy subscales and relationship satisfaction were largely unidirectionally negative, even when the mean scores on the (sub)scales of the psychopathy measure were

relatively low compared to two other general population samples (Gordts et al., 2017; Paulhus et al., 2016, community sample; although also higher than one other sample; Paulhus et al., 2016, college sample). As people with more psychopathic traits prefer short-term dating (e.g., Koladich & Atkinson, 2016), lower psychopathy scores might be a hard-to-avoid reality when studying (long-term) intimate and relationship dyads—couples where one or both members of the dyad have more psychopathic traits might dissolve too quickly to be meaningfully included in relationship studies. This also makes sense when we look at the comparison of our sample and other samples on their relationship satisfaction: our sample was not systematically different on their average RAS scores, indicating that this sample was not more or less satisfied in their relationships than other comparable community samples. We would expect noticeable negative differences in relationship satisfaction if this sample had been selected to skew disproportionately high in psychopathic traits.

As expected, the most systematic negative associations to relationship satisfaction were related to Interpersonal Manipulation and Callous Affect. In general personality research, the most detrimental trait for relationships is detachment, which conceptually has some overlap with callous affect (Decuyper et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2021)—at least, on the surface. Detachment and callous affect can look alike (i.e., being perceived as not caring and cold), but the underlying motivations are different: detachment is motivated by emotional anhedonia or depression (Hopwood et al., 2013), while callousness is motivated by a lack of care for others. Traits related to selfish, callous, and manipulative behavior (reflected in the Interpersonal Manipulation and Callous Affect subscales) are likely to affect relationships in an interpersonal and intimate way, and have long-term detrimental impacts on relationships (Golmaryami et al., 2021).

Some previous research (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Unrau & Morry, 2019) has found that antisocial and impulsive traits (i.e., Factor 2 on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R); Hare et al., 2000) are more detrimental to relationship satisfaction than interpersonal and affective deficits (i.e., Factor 1 on the PCL-R). However, in this study, the associations between Erratic Lifestyle and relationship satisfaction were negligible to small. One could argue that initially, an erratic, impulsive, thrill-seeking partner is exciting, but that over time and with increased shared responsibilities these traits would harm the relationship—which given the relatively short duration of some of the relationships in this study might have not come to its full influence. Relationship duration, however, did not correlate systematically with the predictor and outcome variables, and was as such not included as a partial control in our models. Maladaptive traits might require a certain time threshold to become detrimental: in the longitudinal study of Weiss et al. (2018), higher psychopathic traits were

related to lower marital satisfaction, but most notably, to significantly higher divorce rates by year ten. As our participants were in relatively short relationships and mostly lived apart, they might not have experienced the full scope of maladaptive traits over time and age. Additionally, considering we had to exclude the Antisocial Tendencies subscale, we may have also not fully captured Factor 2 psychopathic traits in this study.

The most consistent overall effects in this study were found for the actor-effects of partner-ratings, i.e., the higher someone rates their partner on psychopathic traits, the lower their own relationship satisfaction, with small-to-medium to medium effect sizes. Rating one's partner higher on maladaptive personality traits is negatively related to relationship satisfaction across a variety of maladaptive traits (Kardum et al., 2018; Schaffhuser et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2021; Stroud et al., 2010). We also found that, regardless of gender, being rated by one's partner as being higher in Callous Affect had a medium negative relation to one's own relationship satisfaction (also for SRP Total and Interpersonal Manipulation for women). Other research also finds that a partner's opinion is related to relational wellbeing and satisfaction (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Orth, 2013; Yu et al., 2020). It seems plausible that having a partner who experiences and perceives your personality traits as negative or maladaptive—such as when they see you as callous, shallow, and remorseless—could be linked to a negative perception of your own relationship satisfaction.

Surprisingly, women rating themselves higher on Callous Affect had a small and positive relation to the men's relationship satisfaction. Positive associations between the interpersonal and affective deficits (i.e., Factor 1 of the PCL-R) of psychopathy and relationship satisfaction have also been found in other research (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010), but explanations thereof are not self-evident. Callous affect includes attributes such as being perceived as cold, lacking empathy and guilt, and showing shallow emotions. There may be a gender stereotype effect of these behaviors: callousness might not be seen as stereotypically feminine (Haines et al., 2016), and women high in these traits might be perceived as “tough”, rather than callous. Or, callous behavior in women might be attributed to a lack of insight, rather than a lack of care (Miller et al., 2011), and as such be less important to men's relationship satisfaction—although this does not explain the positive association with relationship satisfaction, either.

Additionally, there was a small-to-medium negative relation for both men and women between higher self-ratings of Interpersonal Manipulation (for women also on all other facets) and their own relationship satisfaction, similar to other studies (Smith et al., 2021; Uzieblo et al., 2022). It is intuitively logical that having a partner with more psychopathic (i.e., maladaptive) traits could have a negative relation to one's own relationship satisfaction. But why men and women who perceive themselves as having

higher levels of Interpersonal Manipulation, and women with higher psychopathic traits in general, *also* rate their own relationship satisfaction as lower is less clear. People with more psychopathic traits may be more sensation and drama seeking, needing more variety in relationships, or end up getting bored (Jonason et al., 2011; Miller & Lynam, 2015). Alternatively, some individuals with psychopathic traits might exhibit problematic attachment styles (anxious and/or avoidant), fearing rejection or loss in relationships, feelings of emptiness and unfulfillment, leading to distrustful behavior and ambivalence toward their relationships and partners (Conradi et al., 2016; Mack et al., 2011). Or, specific to Interpersonal Manipulation, the sense of grandiosity underlying this facet might be related to perceiving one's partner and relationship as inferior and dull. We should therefore also consider that higher levels of psychopathic traits impair insight: insight into one's own behavior, cognition, and emotions, but perhaps more saliently, insight into one's partner and into the functioning of a relationship. Markers of a successful relationship might be different for people high in maladaptive traits, and they might accordingly appraise their partner's experience of their relationship differently. Future studies could consider including measures of meta-perception (Schaffhuser et al., 2014) in relational studies, especially when interpersonal deficits might hinder the actual appraisal of relational functioning.

Limitations and future directions

This study explored psychopathic traits' relation to relationship satisfaction in a full dyadic intimate partner sample. The study used a convenience sample, with a sample that skewed young, in male-female (heterosexual-presenting) relationships, in the studying stages of life, with relatively low scores on psychopathic traits, and with relatively short, non-co-habiting relationships, which might make the results less generalizable to other relationship populations. As our study was underpowered to confidently detect significant small effect sizes, larger and more diverse samples are needed for more definitive conclusions. By making our data available to open access, we encourage its inclusion in future cumulative studies such as meta-analyses. With cross-sectional data, temporal sequence and causality cannot be assumed, although plausible assumptions can be made about the direction of the variables. Longitudinal data with multiple measurements are needed to model changes in relationships over time. We found a pattern of detrimental actor- and partner-effects of psychopathic traits on relationship satisfaction in intimate partners, but the relatively small and selected sample and cross-sectional design limits the confidence of our findings.

Additionally, we had to exclude the Antisocial Tendencies subscale from our analyses due to the significant deviations from normality. The inclusion

of antisocial and criminal behavior in the construct of psychopathy has been the subject of long-running scientific debate, with some research arguing it to be a core component (Hare & Neumann, 2008), and others arguing it to be an outcome symptom of the underlying core components (Patrick et al., 2009). While this general population sample scored too low and skewed on the Antisocial Tendencies subscale to be meaningfully included, the inclusion of this subscale has not been problematic in other—albeit often larger—general population samples (Gordts et al., 2017; van Bommel et al., 2018). It might be that the pro-sociality inherently required to form ongoing romantic relationships skewed this sample less psychopathic than other samples: the most antagonistic people or the people with the most antisocial profiles might not be in longer term relationships (Jonason et al., 2011; Koladich & Atkinson, 2016), let alone be motivated to participate in a relationship study (Decuyper et al., 2018).

The SRP-SF is a validated self-report instrument, and a modified partner version has now been used in this paper and in Uzieblo et al. (2022), showing moderate relations with self-report scores. The SRP has also been used in a modified partner-rating form in several papers of women who had been victims of intimate partner violence (Forth et al., 2022; Humeny et al., 2021), but these studies did not include the male partners, and as such lack information about its self-other accuracy. The validity and reliability of a modified partner-rated SRP have, however, not yet been researched, and the incremental information of partner-ratings for identifying psychopathic traits has yet to be established.

Conclusion

This paper examined psychopathic traits in a general non-clinical population dyadic intimate partner sample to assess their actor- and partner influence on relationship satisfaction. Psychopathic traits had negative actor- and partner-effects on relationship satisfaction, although the magnitude of these patterns differed. As seen in this study, the multi-faceted constructs of psychopathic profiles have both different and overlapping relations to relationship functioning for men and women. The current study indicates that a partner's psychopathic personality traits can have an important influence on relationship satisfaction, particularly for men. The findings indicate that even subclinical levels of psychopathic traits can have detrimental effects on relationship satisfaction. We should not overlook the complex dynamics and interdependencies of individuals and the people they have important relationships with, in relation to personality, maladaptive traits, and functioning. Including larger samples with not only self-reports, but also partner-reports when assessing maladaptive traits could give important incremental information for clinical and research practice.

Notes

1. Subsumed in these exclusions are participants who failed to answer the careless responding question correctly ('please answer "completely agree"') in the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale – Partner Version.
2. Based on previous research on differential gender presentation of psychopathic traits, we determined there was a solid theoretical foundation to treat the man-woman dyads as distinguishable dyads (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010).

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ORCID

Frederica M. Martijn  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0675-6477>

Liam Cahill  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7897-0862>

Mieke Decuyper  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2194-1403>

Katarzyna (Kasia) Uzieblo  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1120-8654>

Data availability statement

The data and R script supporting this study's findings are openly available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at [this link](#)

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