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Résumé de l'article

The importance of parenting in shaping child development has been widely supported, with many researchers considering parenting to be one of the factors most predictive of child outcomes. Despite the importance of parenting behaviors, not enough is known about their antecedents. In this study, we examine the extent to which psychopathic personality traits relate to parenting behaviors by determining which aspects of parental competence mediate these associations in a community sample. Our analyses support the mediating role of one aspect of parental competence — parental satisfaction — in the relationship between several domains of psychopathic personality traits and parenting behaviors. The results suggest that the relationship between parental personality traits and parenting behaviors is nuanced and involves underlying mechanisms related to parental competence.

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Abstract: The importance of parenting in shaping child development has been widely supported, with many researchers considering parenting to be one of the factors most predictive of child outcomes. Despite the importance of parenting behaviors, not enough is known about their antecedents. In this study, we examine the extent to which psychopathic personality traits relate to parenting behaviors by determining which aspects of parental competence mediate these associations in a community sample. Our analyses support the mediating role of one aspect of parental competence — parental satisfaction — in the relationship between several domains of psychopathic personality traits and parenting behaviors. The results suggest that the relationship between parental personality traits and parenting behaviors is nuanced and involves underlying mechanisms related to parental competence.

Keywords: parenting, personality, psychopathy, parental competence

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Researchers have widely studied associations between parenting and foundational child developmental outcomes, and their work has demonstrated that negative parenting can have harmful effects. For example, adults who experienced suboptimal parenting — characterized by harshness, inconsistent disciplinary practices, or inadequate parental monitoring — are more prone to developing maladaptive behavior and psychopathic traits (Gao et al., 2010; Kimbrel et al., 2007). Conversely, positive parenting, characterized by high levels of warmth and involvement, may be protective against subsequent development of detrimental psychopathology (e.g., Perra et al., 2021). In contrast to the plethora of research supporting the link between parenting and child development, less is known about distinct antecedents of parenting behaviors (Belsky & Barends, 2002). The current study aimed to increase the relatively limited knowledge base on the antecedents of parenting by examining the extent to which personality traits of parents, and specifically their psychopathic personality traits, relate to parenting behaviors. To achieve this, we determined the extent to which the two components of parental competence —efficacy and satisfaction — mediate these associations.

Parent Personality Traits and Parenting Behaviors

Research has shown a strong relationship between parenting behaviors and parenting personality traits, both of which are central to the parent–child dynamic. Baumrind (1968) illustrated that the use of parental controls parallels what parents view as important for integrating their child into society. The three dimensions of parental control can be described as (a) acceptance versus rejection, or the extent to which a parent expresses that they appreciate and value their child; (b) psychological control versus autonomy, the degree to which a parent promotes child independence; and (c) firm control versus lax control, which relates to the use of appropriate discipline (Baumrind, 1968). Other conceptualizations of parental control in the literature have built upon these dimensions, including aspects of parental control related to strictness versus supervision (Lamborn et al., 1991), and have expanded parental control definitions to include the overall extent to which parents are involved in making decisions for their child (Fletcher et al., 2004).

Belsky (1984) suggested that parent personality was the most influential factor in the parent–child relationship, and should be regarded as a crucial aspect when studying outcomes of parenting behaviors. Research has demonstrated links between the Big Five personality characteristics and parenting behaviors. Lower levels of conscientiousness relate to lower levels of supportive parenting and more negative control, while agreeableness positively relates to supportive parenting and negatively relates to controlling parenting behaviors (Losoya et al., 1997). Neuroticism has received the majority of the focus in this literature; it relates to lower levels of parental warmth and less effective parenting (Kendler et al., 1997; Kochanska et al., 1997). Additionally, Prinzie and colleagues (2004) found that a higher level of emotional instability in parents is associated with greater strict control. An additional study conducted by Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2003) also

found that higher levels of openness and extraversion were related to parental nurturing behaviors, and found that authoritarian parents were rated as low in extraversion and openness.

There has also been research on the overlap between traditional models of personality, such as the Big Five personality characteristics, and psychopathic traits. For example, Poy et al. (2014) found that boldness was associated with low neuroticism, high openness, and high extraversion — generally positive attributes. In contrast, meanness and disinhibition were associated with negatively viewed attributes such as low agreeableness and low conscientiousness. However, there are ways of conceptualizing personality that do not depend on the Big Five or other well-known broad conceptualization models. Research has less frequently examined how other aspects of personality relate to parenting behaviors. In the current investigation, we specifically consider the effects of psychopathic personality traits. Although the links between psychopathic personality traits and parenting behaviors have received less attention in the literature, the aforementioned findings in the broader personality literature invite further examination of these constructs.

The Mediating Role of Perceived Parental Competence

Researchers have expansively studied associations between parenting practices and a wide variety of child behavioral and developmental outcomes (e.g., Gao et al., 2010; Perra et al., 2021). However, less is known about what constellation of individual parental characteristics might predict parenting behaviors and what underlying relationships may exist between parental characteristics, including personality characteristics, and parenting practices. When considering the associations between parental personality and parenting behaviors, Belsky and Barends (2002) stated the importance of understanding the mechanisms underlying this relationship. In several of their foundational studies (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Belsky & Barends, 2002), they asserted that the importance of personality traits cannot be understated: even though parenting behaviors are multiply determined, personality affects parents' mood, cognition, and actions. It is likely that this relationship operates through multiple underlying pathways. A possible mediator that has not been widely considered is parental sense of competence.

Broadly, parental competence refers to a parent's belief in their ability to perform their role as a parent in raising children (e.g., Jones & Prinz, 2005). This concept is multifaceted, as it involves both the strength of the individual's belief that they are a competent parent (parental efficacy), and a subsequent interpretation of their level of comfort with their abilities as a parent (parental satisfaction; de Montigny & Lacharité, 2005). These beliefs are often closely tied to behaviors that support the fulfillment of parenting responsibilities, and are a combination of the above-mentioned interpretation factors and behavioral aspects (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). Broad reviews of parental competence indicate higher levels of parental competence are strongly associated with an enriching and supportive child-rearing environment (Jones & Prinz, 2005). In addition to positively contributing to the child's well-being, higher levels of parental competence are associated with beneficial parental outcomes, such as positive psychological functioning and marital satisfaction (Wittkowski et al., 2017).

Within the construct of parental competence, parental efficacy and parental satisfaction are distinct components (Johnston & Mash, 1989). Parental efficacy is the degree to which parents feel confident in managing any problems their child may encounter. Some previous research has found that parental efficacy may play a role in the interactions between parents and children. For example, Gali Cinamon and colleagues (2007) found that parental efficacy can function as a moderator in quality of parent–child relationships, and that low levels of parental efficacy are associated with ineffective coping with problematic child behavior. In their study, participants' higher levels of perceived efficacy in their role as parents acted as a buffer against overreactivity to child behavior problems, suggesting parental efficacy is a crucial aspect of the parent–child relationship. Parental satisfaction refers to a parent's level of comfort and happiness with their parenting skills. Medora and colleagues (2001) found parental satisfaction to be associated with both the choice of parenting strategies and the degree to which parental behaviors are adaptive or maladaptive. Until now, however, very few studies have looked at the distinctions between these subcomponents of parental competence.

The relationship between personality traits and parental competence has not been widely researched. In one of the few studies of cross-sectional associations between personality traits, Bornstein et al. (2003) examined Big Five personality traits and found that emotional stability is positively related to maternal sense of competence. However, this investigation looked only at maternal perceptions of parenting, and only included parents of younger children, less than 2 years old. The current study aims to expand this work to include fathers' perceptions of parenting, and to look at these relationships in parents of adolescent youth. We also hope to broaden the literature's conceptualization of personality facets to include parental psychopathic traits, as we know of no studies to date that have looked at this relationship in the context of personality traits beyond the Big Five.

Coleman and Karraker (1998) asserted that parental sense of competence is motivated by, and influences, behaviors and thus may be essential to understanding parenting behaviors. The link may be particularly apparent for mothers. For example, Locke and Prinz (2002) found that higher levels of parental competence are associated with parenting behaviors that shape a nurturing and supportive child-rearing environment. In contrast, lower levels of parental perceived efficacy are associated with more punitive disciplinary practices and more frequent displays of parental negative affect (Bugental et al., 1989). When considering the underlying conceptual framework for this relationship, it is likely that parents who feel that they do not have influence over their children's behaviors may develop a sense of hopelessness. This hopelessness may lead parents to derive less enjoyment from interactions with their children, which may then result in the parents expressing lower levels of warmth (Gondoli & Silverberg, 1997).

One longitudinal study has considered all three variables of interest (parental personality, parental competence, and parenting practices). De Haan and colleagues (2009) found that sense of competence fully mediated the relationship between parental personality and overreactivity and partially mediated the relationship between personality and parental warmth. The associations

were similar for both fathers and mothers in their community sample. Overall, sense of competence may be an important underlying mechanism that can explain the link between personality and parenting. However, their study examined personality only through the lens of the Big Five dimensions, and did not consider different subdimensions of parental competence, such as parental satisfaction and parental efficacy. The current study aims to expand de Haan et al.'s 2009 study by considering parental psychopathic traits as another key dimension of parental personality characteristics that may influence parenting behaviors.

Triarchic Model of Psychopathy

Although researchers have considered the impact of various personality traits on parenting behaviors (e.g., Poy et al., 2014; Prinzie et al., 2004), relatively less research has examined psychopathy and parenting behaviors. Modern conceptualizations of psychopathy generally stem from Hervey Cleckley's (1955) seminal book, *The Mask of Sanity,* which was first published in 1941. There is general consensus that psychopathy comprises affective deficits like lack of empathy, interpersonal deficits like callousness and superficial charm, and behavioral deficits like impulsivity, although there is considerable debate as to the precise conceptualization of the construct (see Cooke & Michie, 2001; Hare & Neumann, 2010; Patrick et al., 2019; Skeem & Cooke, 2010). There is considerable overlap between competing theories and researchers continue to architect an operational definition (Gatner et al., 2016; Glenn & Sellbom, 2015; Miller et al., 2011).

To resolve issues related to conceptual overlap in various psychopathy theories, Patrick and colleagues (2009) developed the Triarchic Model. This model integrated several existing theories; it characterizes psychopathy as having three distinguishable phenotypic-dispositional components. *Boldness* refers to the adaptive component of psychopathy, including traits of social dominance, emotional stability, and adventurousness. *Meanness* refers to "callous-aggression" (Krueger et al., 2007), or the aggressive acquisition of resources without regard to others. Meanness is related to traits such as lack of empathy, cruelty, and tendency towards manipulation. Finally, *disinhibition* is a propensity toward having problems with impulse control and is generally associated with impulsivity, irresponsibility, and hostility (Krueger et al., 2007). Patrick and Drislane (2014) emphasized that endorsement of only one of these constructs would not constitute a psychopathy diagnosis and different configurations of the phenotypes likely result in varied interpersonal, behavioral, and emotional presentations.

The role of boldness within the psychopathy nomological network remains a matter of much debate (Lilienfeld et al., 2016; Miller & Lyman, 2012). Skeptics note that boldness is generally associated with adaptive traits, an apparent inconsistency with traditional theories of psychopathy. Further, Gatner and colleagues (2016) highlighted that boldness is generally unrelated, or only weakly related, to criminal behavior. However, other scholars have pointed to persuasive meta-analytic data indicating boldness is represented in popular, and well-validated, measures of psychopathy (Lilienfeld et al., 2016). Research also supports the potentially maladaptive elements

of boldness (e.g., Rulseh et al., 2017) and the importance of boldness traits in differentiating psychopathy from antisocial personality disorders (Venables et al., 2014).

The Triarchic Model extends the conceptual framework of psychopathy and allows researchers to study and understand these traits in different manifestations. By parsing out specific, basic personal constructs and focusing on the various expressions of these constructs, the Triarchic Model is consistent with broader dimensional models of normal personality and psychopathology (Patrick & Drislane, 2015). Importantly, because this model removes emphasis on criminality and antisocial behaviors, it serves as an appropriate framework for examining psychopathic traits in community samples. Indeed, since its initial dissemination, numerous studies have considered the validity of the model in multiple community samples (Coffey et al., 2018; Neo et al., 2018; Pechorro et al., 2019). Further, researchers have statistically derived the model from different well-validated measures of psychopathy and personality within a community sample context (Brislin et al, 2015; Kutchen et al., 2017; Sellbom et al., 2015).

Parental Personality Traits and Parenting Behaviors: The Role of Psychopathic Traits

Given the traits associated with psychopathy (i.e., antisocial components, deviant behavior), a large proportion of research related to the construct of psychopathy has focused on criminal populations (e.g., individuals currently incarcerated). However, personality traits, including traits associated with psychopathy, are dimensional and exist, to some degree, in all people (Marcus et al., 2004).To increase understanding of how these traits manifest in the general population, more recent research has expanded to include community samples (e.g., Coffey et al., 2018; Costello et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2007).

Until recently, psychopathy researchers have largely ignored the parenting population. Furthermore, with few exceptions, the extent to which parent psychopathic traits are associated with the parent–child relationship and the development of child antisocial traits is largely unexplored. Yet the scant published research indicates this is an important area for further investigation. For example, Cox et al. (2018) examined the association between specific domains of parent psychopathic traits and parenting styles, which are often related to, but are not conceptually the same, as parenting behaviors. They reported that permissive parenting is positively related to parental lack of empathy and disregard for social norms, as measured by the Psychopathic Personality Inventory (Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996). Additionally, specific psychopathic traits predicted authoritarian parenting behaviors, indicating a relation between a narcissistic, ruthless interpersonal style and behavior patterns characterized by low warmth and high levels of control in the parent–child relationship.

Paisley and colleagues (under review) expanded on the Cox et al. (2018) study to include a measure of antisocial characteristics in children. Each scale (boldness, meanness, and disinhibition) in the Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick et al., 2009) and all three parenting styles, related to at least one scale of antisocial traits in children. Further, each type of antisocial behavior (callous-unemotional traits, narcissism, impulsivity) related to at least one

parenting style. Mediational analyses also revealed that the authoritarian parenting style partially mediated the association between parental meanness and child callous-unemotional traits, while the permissive parenting style mediated the relationship between parental meanness and child impulsivity. In sum, these two studies suggest a connection between psychopathic traits and parenting styles, as well as a nuanced relationship between parent psychopathic traits, parenting styles, and child antisocial behaviors that warrants further exploration.

The Current Study

Previous studies have examined the relationships between adults' psychopathic traits and parenting styles (e.g., Cox et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2016). Additional research has explored the associations between personality and parental competence, and the relationship between parental competence and parenting behaviors separately (e.g., Prinzie et al., 2004). However, to our knowledge, no published research has considered how parental psychopathic traits may relate to parenting behaviors specifically while also considering parental competence. Additionally, previous published research has not considered how different aspects of parental competence, such as parental satisfaction or parental efficacy, may influence this relationship. Thus, the purpose of the current study was to examine the relationship between parental levels of psychopathic traits (as conceptualized through the Triarchic Model) and parenting behaviors of psychological control, acceptance, and firm control. Further, we examined how adults' sense of parental efficacy and satisfaction may mediate this relationship. Based on empirical and theoretical relations between the variables under study, we predicted the following:

1. Parental boldness will predict psychological control and firm control, such that higher levels of boldness will be associated with higher levels of control.

2. The relationship between boldness and firm control will be mediated by parental satisfaction and parental sense of efficacy, with a strong positive relationship between boldness and competence accompanying a positive relationship between competence and firm control. Similarly, the relationship between boldness and psychological control will be mediated by parental satisfaction and parental sense of efficacy, with a positive relationship between boldness and competence accompanying a positive relationship between competence and psychological control.

We did not make any specific hypotheses regarding the association between boldness and parental acceptance. However, to further elucidate the relationship between parental psychopathic traits and parental behaviors, we included these models as exploratory analyses:

3. Parental meanness will predict parental firm control, psychological control, and acceptance. Specifically, meanness will be associated with higher levels of control and lower levels of acceptance.

4. The relationship between meanness and firm control will be mediated by parental satisfaction and parental sense of efficacy such that a negative relationship between parental meanness and perceived competence will accompany a negative relationship between perceived competence and firm control. Similarly, the relationship between meanness and psychological control will be mediated by parental satisfaction and parental sense of efficacy such that a negative relationship between parental meanness and perceived competence will accompany a negative relationship between perceived control and psychological control.

We did not make specific hypotheses regarding the relationship between parental disinhibition and dependent variables (firm control, psychological control, and acceptance) given the scant published data considering parental impulsivity and child attachment. However, we conducted exploratory analyses to provide preliminary data regarding any (potential) relationship between these variables.

Method

Participants

Our initial study sample included 400 parents of children between the ages of 6 and 13. Participants were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online platform that provides individuals the opportunity to complete surveys for monetary compensation. We removed 94 participants due to an inconsistency score greater than 10 on the Triarchic Assessment Procedure for Inconsistent Responding (TAPIR; Mowle et al., 2017) a scale that assesses careless or inconsistent responding on the TriPM. We screened the remaining participant data by examining time of completion in minutes. Our sample median time to completion was 19 minutes, and 95% of the sample completed study procedures in 10 minutes or greater. Thus, we removed 3 additional participants because their time to completion was less than 10 minutes and each obtained a marginal TAPIR score of 9 or 10. A total of 303 individuals were included in the final analyses.

Participants reported an average age of 37.41 (*SD* = 18.15); all were U.S. residents. We had slightly more females (64%) than males in our sample, with 79% of participants reporting that they were married. Compared to the U.S. population, our sample reported a slightly higher than average number of children (2.20) and higher levels of education. See Table 1 for additional parent sample characteristics. Participants selected only one child to consider when completing study questions and provided demographic information for that child. The mean age of the children was 9.44 years (*SD* = 2.47). The majority of the children were White (66%), with 18.2% identified as Asian American, 7.6% identified as biracial or multiracial, and 5.6% identified as African American. The majority of rated children had one sibling (38.9%), 21.1% had two, 9.9% had three, 2.6% had four or more, and 24.8% were identified as the family's only child. In terms of birth order, most children were first born (77.6%), 12.9% were second born, 5.3% were third born, and 4.3% were fourth born. Only a small portion of the rated children (10.6%) were identified as having any type of

mental health diagnosis (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, conduct disorder). A significant majority of parents (74.6%) indicated that their child lived with them full-time.

Table 1. *Sample Parent Characteristics (N = 303)*

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	108	35.6
Female	195	64.4
Relationship to child		
Mother	189	62.4
Father	104	34.3
Aunt/uncle	1	.3
Stepparent	9	3.0
Sexual orientation		
Straight	278	91.7
Gay/lesbian	4	1.3
Bisexual	20	6.6
Other	1	.3
Marital status		
Married	232	76.6
Separated	3	1.0
Divorced	18	5.9
In a relationship	41	13.5
Single, never married	9	3.0
Education level		
< High school diploma	1	.3
High school diploma	33	10.9
Some college	70	23.1
Trade school	18	5.9
Bachelor's degree	122	40.3
Master's degree	55	1.3
Doctoral degree	4	1.3
Family income		
< $20,000	34	11.2
$20,000–$40,000	50	16.5
$40,001–$60,000	74	24.4
$60,001–$80,000	63	20.8
$80,001–$100,000	37	12.2
$100,001–$120,000	24	27.3
$120,001–$140,000	14	15.9
$140,001–$160,000	13	4.3
$160,001–$180,000	1	0.3
$180,001–$200,000	1	0.3
$200,001+	3	1.0

Characteristic	*n*	%
Race		
Asian/Asian American	53	17.5
Black or African American	17	5.6
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.3
White	220	72.6
Biracial	6	2.0
Other	6	2.0
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	23	7.6
Not Hispanic	279	92.4
Employment		
Employed full-time	199	65.7
Employed part-time	30	9.9
Self-employed	33	10.9
Student	4	1.3
Unemployed	36	11.9
Number of children		
1	84	27.7
2	124	40.9
3	61	20.1
4	23	7.6
5	4	1.3
6+	7	2.3

Measures

Psychopathic Traits

Patrick and colleagues (2009) designed the TriPM to operationalize the constructs that encompass the triarchic model. The TriPM is a 58-item scale that assesses Boldness (18 items; "I am a born leader"), Meanness (19 items; "I don't mind if someone I dislike gets hurt"), and Disinhibition (19 items; "I often act on immediate needs"). Participants rate their agreement with each item on a 4-point scale (false, somewhat false, somewhat true, true). The Cronbach's alphas for the TriPM scales are as follows: Boldness (α = .73.), Meanness (α = .82), and Disinhibition (α = .90). Means and standard deviations for the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Parental Competence: Parental Satisfaction and Parental Efficacy

The Parenting Sense of Competence scale (Johnston & Mash, 1989) is a 17-item measure that examines Parental Satisfaction (9 items; "Being a parent makes me tense and anxious") and perceived Parental Efficacy (7 items; "Being a parent is manageable, and any problems are easily solved"). Parents rate their agreement on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alphas for the present sample were .77 (Parental Satisfaction) and .79 (Parental Efficacy).

Table 2. *Descriptives and Correlations*

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Bold	26.52	3.99	1.00							
2. Mean	36.64	6.25	.27*	1.00						
3. Disinhibition	41.34	8.43	.32*	.67*	1.00					
4. Parental efficacy	31.23	5.08	.04	.06	.24*	1.00				
5. Satisfaction	38.19	7.38	.16**	.37*	.47*	.43*	1.00			
6. Firm control	11.64	3.11	-.01	.16*	.15*	.04	.21*	1.00		
7. Psych. control	5.41	4.37	-.04	-.46*	-.33*	-.09	-.47*	-.15*	1.00	
8. Acceptance	17.79	2.81	-.09	.24*	.30*	.41*	.42*	.16*	-.28*	1.00

* $p < .05$.

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Parenting Behaviors

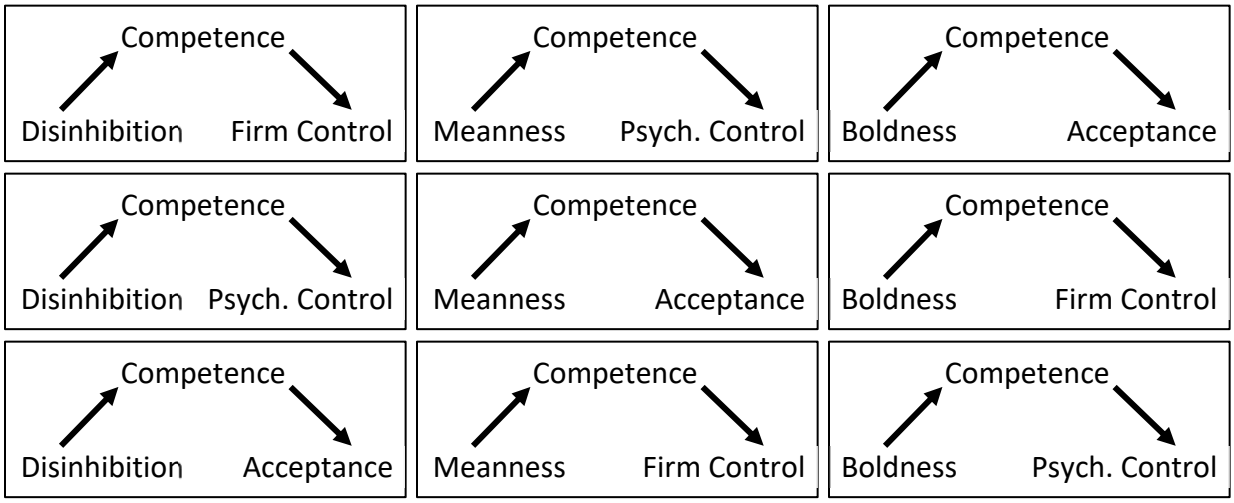
The Parent Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (PRPBI; Morton, 1991) is an adaptation of the 30-item Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory (CRPBI-30; Schludermann & Schludermann, 1988). We modified the wording of each question to reflect the perspective of a parent's behavior toward their child. The scale measures three dimensions of parenting behavior: Acceptance vs. Rejection (10 items; "I smile at my child very often"), Psychological Control vs. Autonomy (10 items; "I want to control whatever my child does"), and Firm Control vs. Lax Control (10 items; "I give my child as much freedom as he/she wants"). Parents respond to items based on how they usually interact with their child. They rate each statement according to how accurately it describes them: 0 (*not like you*), 1 (*somewhat like you*), and 2 (*a lot like you*). Cronbach's alphas for the current sample were .84 for Acceptance, .86 for Psychological Control, and .68 for Firm Control.

Procedure

We obtained institutional review board approval prior to participant recruitment and data collection. To recruit participants with higher levels of psychopathic traits, the researchers developed an advertisement modeled after the recruitment advertisement employed by DeMatteo et al. (2006) which has been successfully used in studies examining psychopathy in community samples (e.g., Coffey et al., 2018; Cox et al., 2018). Specifically, the study advertisement included

a brief description of the study along with the following questions: "Have you been told that you are charming and intelligent? Do you find that you get bored easily and like to live life on the edge? Are you the biological parent of a child between the ages of 6-16?" Interested participants accessed the link on MTurk and were directed to the Qualtrics online platform. Participants who provided their informed consent were directed to the online survey where they completed the study measures. Participants were not initially provided with the full purpose of the study to protect against impression management. Upon completion, participants were debriefed about the study's purpose and given the option to remove their data. All participants who completed the study were compensated with 1 USD for their time.

Figure 1. *Analytic Plan and Models*



A mediation model was specified to test all hypotheses with parental TriPM variables serving as exogenous variables, parenting behavior variables serving as endogenous variables, and parental competence subscales (efficacy and satisfaction) serving as a mediating variable. Data can be made accessible by contacting the authors of this paper.

Results

Analyses were conducted using the SPSS statistical software and the associated PROCESS package for mediation analysis. Table 2 includes the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations of the study variables. All three subscales of the TriPM were correlated with one another, with Disinhibition and Meanness sharing the strongest relationship (r = .67), followed by Disinhibition and Boldness (r = .32). These analyses are presented in Table 2.

Next, we tested mediation hypotheses. Bootstrapping was used to control for the possible effects of outliers or any departures from normality assumptions. Mediational models, as depicted in Figure 1, assessed the mediating effects of parental satisfaction on the relationship between parental psychopathic traits and parenting behaviors.

Hypothesis 1: Regression analyses tested the hypothesis that parental boldness predicts psychological control and firm control. Regression analyses indicated parental boldness did not predict psychological control or firm control. However, exploratory analyses indicated parental boldness did negatively predict acceptance ($B = -.15$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 2: Next, the mediating effects of both components of parental competence were analyzed. Parental satisfaction mediated the relationship between parental boldness and psychological control (indirect effect $B = -.08$, Boot $SE = 0.04$, CI 95% = −0.16 to −0.02). Parental satisfaction also mediated the relationship between parental boldness and firm control (indirect effect $B = .03$, Boot $SE = 0.02$, CI 95% = 0.004 to 0.066). For parental efficacy, there was not a significant mediation effect on either psychological control or firm control.

Hypothesis 3: Regression analyses tested the hypotheses that parental meanness would predict psychological control, firm control, and acceptance. Parental meanness significantly predicted psychological control ($B = -.31$, $p < .001$). However, parental meanness was not a significant predictor of firm control or acceptance.

Hypothesis 4: Regarding the psychopathic trait of meanness, parental satisfaction mediated the relationship between parental meanness and parental acceptance (indirect effect $B = .06$, Boot $SE = 0.01$, CI 95% = 0.04 to 0.09). In addition, there was support for parental satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between meanness and psychological control (indirect effect $B = -.09$, Boot $SE = 0.02$, CI 95% = −0.13 to −0.06). Finally, parental satisfaction mediated the relationship between meanness and firm control (indirect effect $B = .03$, Boot $SE = 0.01$, CI 95% = 0.01 to 0.06). For parental efficacy, there was not a significant mediation effect on either psychological control or firm control.

Exploratory Analyses: Finally, we examined the relationship between parental disinhibition and parental acceptance. Analyses indicated a main effect of parental disinhibition on parental acceptance ($B = .11$, $p < .001$). Analyses also indicated support for parental satisfaction as a mediator of the relationship between disinhibition and parental acceptance (indirect effect $B = .06$, Boot $SE = 0.01$, CI 95% = 0.04 to 0.08). In addition, parental satisfaction mediated the association between disinhibition and psychological control (indirect effect $B = -.10$, Boot $SE = 0.02$, CI 95% = −0.14 to −0.06) and disinhibition and firm control (indirect effect $B = .03$, Boot $SE = 0.01$, CI 95% = 0.01 to 0.06).

Next, we examined the potential mediating role of parental efficacy. There was statistical support for mediation of the relationship between disinhibition and parental acceptance by parental efficacy (indirect effect $B = .03$, Boot $SE = 0.01$, CI 95% = 0.02 to 0.05). Parental efficacy did not mediate the relationship between parental disinhibition and firm control (CI 95% = −0.01 to 0.01), or the relationship between parental disinhibition and psychological control (CI 95% = −0.02 to 0.02).

Discussion

Research generally suggests a strong relationship between parent personality traits and parenting behaviors (Baumrind, 1968; Belsky, 1984), although, with few exceptions (e.g., Cox et al., 2018), there is scant published research regarding the relationship between parental psychopathic traits and parenting behaviors. The current study aimed to elucidate the relationship between parental triarchic psychopathic traits (boldness, meanness, and disinhibition) and parenting behaviors. Further, considering the potential role of parental competence as a mechanism through which to understand the relationship between personality traits and behaviors, we also aimed to understand the potentially mediating role of parental competence, and the subcomponents of this construct (parental efficacy and parental satisfaction).

Overall, the results were mixed, with TriPM Meanness and Disinhibition emerging as significantly associated with the parental behaviors of acceptance, psychological control, and firm control, although TriPM Boldness was not significantly correlated with any of the outcome variables. The lack of any clear relationship between parental boldness and behaviors is perplexing, considering previous data suggesting boldness may be a central component of interpersonal behaviors (Lilienfeld et al., 2016). However, Craig and colleagues (2013) measured psychopathic traits and reviewed retrospective reports of parental care, and determined that attachment anxiety was a mediating factor in explaining the relationship between parental care and subsequent psychopathic traits. Although the current study design is markedly different than that used by Craig et al., as it focuses on parental psychopathic traits rather than adult child psychopathic traits and retrospective attachment recall, both studies highlight the nuanced interplay between parent personality traits, parent behaviors, and outcomes for the child.

Mediation hypotheses (H2 and H4) were generally supported, with parental satisfaction mediating the relationship between predictor and outcome variables. This suggests parental satisfaction may play an important role in offsetting the potentially negative consequences of problematic parental personality traits. However, mediation models including the other subcomponent of parental competence, parental efficacy, were not supported, suggesting that satisfaction is more influential than efficacy when considering the contribution of self-reflective parenting factors.

Most studies thus far have examined parental competence more holistically. This study is one of the first to delve deeper into a more nuanced examination of the differential role of subtypes of parental competence in the relation between parental personality and behavior. It is possible that parental satisfaction — a parent's comfort and happiness with their parenting skills (Medora et al., 2001) — acts as a protective factor mitigating the potentially negative outcomes of meanness and boldness on parenting practices. Although research is limited, it is likely that satisfaction is related to more positive mental health (e.g., lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress). Previous studies have shown that parents who are more depressed or more anxious feel less confident and are more inconsistent in their parenting practices (Kavanaugh et al., 2006). Given the relationship

between parenting mental health and parenting behaviors, it is possible that satisfaction, like positive psychological functioning, acts a protective factor.

With regard to the two constructs of parental competence, it is important to consider that some parents may feel efficacious, but unsatisfied, whereas other parents may not feel efficacious, but still feel satisfied in their role as parent. The lack of significant results for efficacy as a mediator may mean that efficacy — the degree to which parents feel they can effectively manage problems their children encounter — is less relevant in the relationship between personality and behavior than is the overall sense of satisfaction that parents feel with their parenting skills. The results suggest that, when levels of psychopathic traits are higher, parental satisfaction may be the factor driving parent's use of more appropriate parenting behaviors that display more warmth and allow for greater autonomy.

Additionally, regarding the specific role of psychopathic traits within this model, it may be that those who exhibit higher levels of psychopathic traits are less likely to care or be sad about their level of competence (Latzman et al., 2019). Individuals with lower levels of psychopathic traits may be more self-critical of their parenting abilities, which may lead to lower levels of satisfaction, whereas individuals with higher levels of psychopathic traits may feel more satisfied as a result of their indifference or their lack of self-examination.

Implications

Generally, these data highlight the importance of parental satisfaction and the need to provide caregivers with appropriate resources and support. Clinical practitioners may consider including a brief assessment of parental satisfaction as a part of their routine protocol when working with families in distress. It is important to include parental satisfaction in routine assessments because parental satisfaction is not a static construct and the extent to which a parent feels competent will vary over time and within relationships. Interventions targeting parental satisfaction may be more effective at improving family system functioning and reducing conflict, compared to treatments focused on personality development and change.

These data also highlight the nuanced relationship between personality and parenting behaviors, and suggest that researchers should consider parental satisfaction, or other possible subsets of parental competence, when examining parenting behaviors. Through investigating a more nuanced idea of parental competence, our study was able to show that parental satisfaction helps to explain the relationship between innate personality factors and their influence on parenting behaviors. Additionally, our data underscore the relationship between personality traits and behaviors; more specifically, they lend additional support to the growing research base concerning psychopathic traits in community members. The importance of considering personality traits beyond the foundational Big Five is becoming increasingly popular. Although, historically, researchers have typically examined psychopathic traits in forensic and correctional settings, a robust research base supports psychopathy as a continuous trait that is also present in community samples (e.g., Edens et al., 2006; Ullrich et al., 2008).

Limitations

These data must be considered within the context of the methodological limitations. A notable limitation concerns the self-report method of data collection and the potential for this approach to impact the validity of the constructs of interest. Research typically suggests self-report is a valid and reliable approach to measuring psychopathic traits (Sellbom et al., 2018); however, the extent to which parental behaviors, self-efficacy, and satisfaction can be measured validly through this method is unknown. Relatedly, there are also limitations to the MTurk platform, as it is a self-selected panel and not always representative of the larger population in terms of some qualities, such as racial and ethnic diversity (see Jensen-Doss et al., 2022) for a review of using MTurk samples to study parents and children). Finally, we intentionally solicited individuals with higher levels of psychopathic traits with the goal of obtaining variability sufficient for statistical analyses. However, this may have resulted in an overrepresentation of these traits in our sample when compared to the general population. Unfortunately, we are unaware of published TriPM community norms and are unable to compare participant scores to established norms. A cursory comparison of reported scores in two community samples (Paiva et al., 2020; van Dongen et al., 2017) suggests participants in our study reported comparable levels of boldness but higher levels of meanness and disinhibition. Therefore, future research may wish to consider if and how a different sampling approach may impact these findings. Further, the collective field would benefit from well-established and robust TriPM norms to facilitate comparisons between samples.

It is also worth noting that the Cronbach's alpha values for the measure of parenting used in the current study were slightly low, indicating that the items comprising the subscales may not be representative of entirely cohesive constructs in our sample. This could be due to a number of factors, such as high variability in respondent parenting behaviors or the number of items in each subscale. Future research could aim to replicate these patterns with other robust measures of parenting behaviors.

Given the preliminary nature of the current exploration, we chose to focus on the personality traits of a single parent. However, the parent–child relationship typically exists within a larger family system, potentially including additional offspring and one, or more, additional caregivers. Thus, the dyad cannot exist in isolation and a more comprehensive understanding of parental psychopathic traits and parental behaviors likely requires consideration of each unity within this system. It is also worth acknowledging that there is a bidirectional relationship between parenting behaviors and children's behaviors over the course of development. While we were not able to account for this in the current investigation, as we did not ask about the individual differences and development of the child, these factors could potentially impact parenting behaviors and should be considered in future research.

Lastly, while participants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds were included in the sample, the sample was predominantly white. This limits the generalizability of our results to other

demographics, and future studies should investigate these relationships with more racially diverse samples.

Conclusion

The results from this study highlight the important relationship between parental satisfaction and positive parenting behaviors. Although parental psychopathic traits are related to behaviors such as psychological control and acceptance, these relationships are nuanced. Specifically, mediation analyses revealed parental satisfaction as an important mechanism through which to understand parental behaviors, suggesting this construct may be an important target for intervention. Future research should consider the parent–child dyad within the family system, particularly as parenting behaviors may vary from child to child, and across time.

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