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How to Spot a Careerist Early On: Psychopathy and Exchange Ideology as Predictors of Careerism

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Abstract Careerism refers to an individual's propensity to achieve their personal and career goals through non-performance-based activities (Feldman, The Indus Org Psychol 39–44, 1985). We investigated the role of several dispositional predictors of careerism, including Five-factor model (FFM) personality traits, primary psychopathy, and exchange ideology. Based on data from 131 respondents, as expected, we observed that emotional stability was negatively correlated with careerism. Primary psychopathy and exchange ideology explained additional variance in careerism after accounting for FFM traits. Relative importance analyses indicated that psychopathy (relative weight percentage of explained variance = 42.1 %) and exchange ideology (relative weight percentage = 44.1 %) were equally important in predicting careerism. We highlight the need for future research efforts investigating the combined effects of contextual factors—particularly, human resource practices—and individual differences to understand careerism in the workplace.

Keywords Careerism · Careerist orientation · Five-factor model · Psychopathy · Exchange ideology · Dark side personality · Relative importance analysis

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List of Abbreviations

FFM	Five-factor model
RW	Relative weight

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Employees sometimes misrepresent their capabilities, objectives, and expectations to employers in multiple ways and for various reasons. They can act in social desirable ways by disguising their personalities to gain employment or by taking on "chameleon-like" behaviors to gain promotions and get ahead while also distorting their own true interests (Kilduff et al. 2010; Kilduff and Day 1994). In this study, we examine predictors of *careerism*, defined as "the propensity to pursue career advancement through non-performance-based means" (Feldman and Weitz 1991, p. 237). Because careerists believe in pursuing career success by means other than competence, the spread of a careerist orientation among employees has potentially negative implications for organizations.

To extend research focused on contextual predictors of careerism (e.g., Aryee and Chan 2004; Crawshaw and Brodbeck 2011), in this study, we investigate dispositional and belief-based predictors: five-factor model (FFM) traits, psychopathy, and exchange ideology. We include the FFM traits because they are well established and are theoretically relevant (e.g., less emotionally stable employees may be more inclined toward careerism). Yet we propose that primary psychopathy and exchange ideology may be better predictors of careerism than FFM traits. Psychopaths' disregard for social norms and the rights of others, coupled with their endorsement of deceptive means for achieving

personal success, is consonant with a careerist orientation. What seems to make psychopaths "successful" at work is that they are good at creating an illusion of success at the expense of honest work (Babiak and Hare 2006; Stevens et al. 2012). Thus, we expect psychopathy—more specifically, *primary psychopathy* (Karpman 1948)—to positively predict careerism.

From another direction, we focus on *exchange ideology* defined as "the strength of an employee's belief that work effort should depend on treatment by the organization" (Eisenberger et al. 1986, p. 503) as a predictor. According to Feldman and Weitz (1991), lower job performance among careerists can originate from organizational actions seen as unfair. Exchange ideology reflects an individual's general expectation of reciprocity in social relations (Blau 1964): those with strong (high) exchange ideology will work hard *only if* treated well whereas those with weak (low) exchange ideology will support their organization even if they do not feel their efforts are reciprocated. Extending research where careerism is predicted by contextual factors such as fairness or organizational politics (Aryee and Chen 2004; Hsiung et al. 2012), we focus on respondents' exchange ideology, a belief which is (a) intra-individual and (b) can be readily assessed if necessary. We also note that careerism is not a set of behaviors but rather beliefs and attitudes indicating long-term incongruence between employee and organizational goals (Feldman 1985). Careerists believe they can advance by means other than work performance, including impression management, networking, and other non-task related efforts (Feldman and Weitz 1991).

Careerism: Existing Findings and Organizing Framework for this Research

In line with Feldman and Weitz (1991), who observed that selection systems in organizations should be designed in such ways that they do not fall prey to "padded resumes and creative interviewing" (p. 254), we emphasize a selection standpoint. Specifically, we ask: how can organizations desiring less careeristic people determine which employees have this orientation? The current literature does not offer much guidance on this issue. Thus far, research on careerism has focused on contextual rather than on intra-individual predictors. For example, researchers have examined perceptions of justice, trust in the employer, and career growth opportunities as careerism antecedents (Aryee and Chen 2004; Chay and Aryee 1999; Crawshaw and Brodbeck 2011). While some of these constructs may be related to individual dispositions (e.g., propensity to trust; Mayer et al. 1995), none of these studies explicitly investigated dispositional predictors of careerism.

To redress the balance, we build our framework on intra-individual characteristics as predictors of careerism. Such predictors can be assessed—if so desired—at or during organizational entry. We focus on FFM traits both for completeness and theoretical reasons, provided the ubiquity of the FFM and its relationships with dysfunctional personality and career outcomes (Ross et al. 2004; Widiger and Costa 2012; Wille et al. 2013). We then turn toward the two main predictors of our model: primary psychopathy and exchange ideology. Primary psychopathy is an individual difference which characterizes individuals who are selfish, lack empathy or guilt, and are generally dishonest and manipulative (Karpman 1948). A recent study by Stevens et al. (2012) highlights the relationship between psychopathy and forms of unethical behavior that, in our view, are congruent with careerists' belief system (i.e., using deceitful means to misrepresent ones abilities in order achieve a desired objective). Our second predictor, exchange ideology, is an individual's belief that work effort should be a function of the treatment received from the organization (Eisenberger et al. 1986). The inclusion of exchange ideology is consistent with previous research on the relationship between perceptions of justice and careerist attitudes (Aryee and Chen 2004) which, by extension, suggest a connection between exchange ideology and careerism. We also surmise that exchange ideology questions are conveyed to respondents in more neutral terms than psychopathy-related questions and thus less influenced by socially desirable responding. We present specific hypotheses next.

The Five-Factor Personality Traits as Predictors of Careerism

A number of studies have demonstrated the importance of FFM personality traits (McCrae and Costa 1987) in predicting work outcomes such as job performance (Barrick et al. 2001), contextual performance (Borman et al. 2001), proactive behaviors (Chiaburu et al. 2011), and counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) (Berry et al. 2007). Because the FFM is broadly accepted and because the relationship between these five personality traits and careerism have not been established, we first examine the extent to which careerism is predicted by all these traits—emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. The inclusion of the FFM predictors is also important for another reason. Even though psychopathy and exchange ideology are conceptually distinct from the FFM traits, a key question is whether they have incremental validity over FFM traits. If they do not, then relying on FFM-based predictors is sufficient. If they, however, confer a predictive advantage, it is theoretically justified and practical to add them as predictors of

careerism and its associated behaviors (e.g., in a selection context).

Although it is possible to provide theoretical arguments to connect all FFM traits with careerism, we focus on its relationship with *emotional stability*. Individuals low in emotional stability are more prone to experience negative feelings and may frequently deal with emotional distress by using inappropriate coping responses (such as hostile reactions). Conversely, individuals high in emotional stability have been described as calm, relaxed, patient, and hardy (McCrae and Costa 1987). Meta-analytic results have demonstrated that emotional stability is positively correlated with job satisfaction (Judge and Bono 2001) and negatively with intentions to quit and turnover (Salgado 2002; Zimmerman 2008). Important for this study, research has shown that emotional stability is more predictive of intentions to quit than turnover decisions. According to Zimmerman (2008), these results suggest that low emotionally stable individuals are more influenced by general mood (e.g., negative affectivity) than impulsivity—with the latter more closely related to turnover decisions. The alleged mechanism whereby emotional stability affects intentions to quit (negative affectivity) is consistent with a careerist orientation; whereas intentions to quit the organization in the case of careerists seem to be driven by negative affect, the *decision* to leave would be followed by a carefully orchestrated strategy to warrant continued career success. Thus, due to their similarities in the processes whereby they affect job satisfaction and turnover decisions, and consistent with broader theories where emotional stability has been proposed as one of the personality traits distinguishing prosocial from antisocial tendencies (through empathy/attachment; Ashton and Lee 2001), we hypothesize

H1 Emotional stability is negatively related to careerism.

Although not formally hypothesized, we included the remaining four FFM personality traits as careerism predictors, for completeness. Extroverts are sociable, fun loving, friendly, and talkative (McCrae and Costa 1987); while they may seek social attention, they do not necessarily do so through deceptive means (Ashton and Lee 2001; Chiaburu et al. 2013a). While low agreeable individuals disregard others' feelings or emotions, this should not be a reason for careerism. Lack of conscientiousness could, however, predict careerism, based on careerists' premise that merit alone is not sufficient for career advancement. Finally, while openness to experience prompts people to seek novelty, they will not do so through deceptive means, unless openness takes a dysfunctional form (Piedmont et al. 2009). Overall, even though some FFM personality traits can predict careerism, their dysfunctional variants may be more predictive (Lynam et al. 2011).

Subclinical Psychopathy and Careerism

Although psychopathic tendencies could lead to criminal behavior and psychosocial failure, individuals with psychopathic dispositions may also be able to achieve professional success, while engaging in behaviors that, while not necessarily illegal, violate social norms (Hall and Benning 2006; LeBreton et al. 2006). Those without evidence of criminal behavior have been labeled "successful" psychopaths, with around 0.2 % of the population estimated to belong to this category (Neumann and Hare 2008). Although studies in organizational settings are rare, Babiak et al. (2010) indicated that 3 % of employees would qualify as psychopaths, which is considerably higher than the prevalence of this personality disorder in Neumann and Hare's (2008) community sample study. While it is possible to find individuals with psychopathic tendencies in organizations, nationally representative data show that antisocial individuals (i.e., with antisocial personality disorder) have difficulties entering the workforce (Ettner et al. 2011).

O'Boyle et al. (2012) argue that psychopaths' actions are incompatible with social exchange principles (reciprocity, trust, cooperation). A failure to meet social obligations and to comply with the norm of reciprocity would translate into a general lack of diligence and irresponsibility and create sub-optimal job performance. Psychopaths' lack of concern for others might also result in CWBs directed towards coworkers (bullying) and the organization (theft and sabotage). O'Boyle et al.'s meta-analytic results do indeed show psychopathic traits as negative predictors of job performance ($r_c = -.10$) and positively associated with CWB ($r_c = .07$). Similarly, Ettner et al. (2011) found that individuals diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder were more likely to be fired and laid off, and experienced more problems in their relationships with coworkers and bosses.

To date, a great deal of uncertainty and controversy persist about what psychopathy is and is not (Skeem et al. 2011, for a review). Despite the varied and contentious perspectives on what psychopathy is, Skeem et al.'s triarchic model proposed that existing measures and conceptualizations of psychopathy encompass three common themes—boldness, meanness, and disinhibition. *Boldness* relates to psychopaths' low anxiousness, shallowness, persuasiveness, and venturesomeness. *Meanness* refers to a more aggressive conception of psychopathy—which is more likely to appear in criminal-offender samples (Skeem et al. 2011). Finally, *disinhibition* entails proneness toward impulse-control problems such as lack of planfulness, impaired self-regulation, seeking for immediate gratification, and deficient behavioral restraint. It is important to underline that psychopathic traits can also be found in the

normal population. Psychopathy is a multidimensional continuum and only in some (rare) instances there is enough evidence to establish a clinical disorder. In other words, only those who score at the extremely high end of the continuum should be called psychopaths in a forensic sense (Levenson et al. 1995; Neumann and Hare 2008).

Important for our study, Karpman's (1948) distinction between primary and secondary psychopathy indexes all three components of the triarchic model—boldness, meanness, and disinhibition. *Primary psychopaths* are callous, manipulative, selfish, and routinely untruthful. In contrast, secondary or neurotic psychopaths tend to be impulsive, are quick-tempered, and lack long-term goals. As disinhibition can also be found in many non-psychopaths with impulse-related problems (e.g., substance abusers), it has been suggested that secondary psychopathy is not germane to the definition of psychopathy (Skeem et al. 2011). In fact, Karpman posited that only primary psychopathy should be considered "true" psychopathy. Furthermore, due to their impulsivity-related problems it is unlikely that secondary psychopaths can be successful workers (*if* they enter the work force; Ettner et al. 2011). Thus, for the present study, we use primary psychopathy as a predictor. It describes individuals who are callous, selfish, uncaring, and manipulative toward others (Levenson et al. 1995).

Wu and LeBreton (2011) hypothesized that primary psychopaths would engage in more strategic and premeditated counterproductive behaviors compared to secondary psychopaths. Whereas careerism is not indexed by behaviors, it is however representative of the type of approach primary psychopaths would choose to attain their goals. We thus suggest that one manifestation of primary psychopathy at work is the manipulation of other's perceptions to create an image of oneself as a competent employee, a deceitful strategy that coincides with a careerist approach to work. There is an interpersonal element to psychopathy which suggests that psychopathic individuals can be deceitful by displaying superficial charm to achieve desired outcomes (Stevens et al. 2012). In addition, the self-centered nature of psychopaths is congruent with the selfishness that characterizes careerism (Feldman 1985). Careerists' lack of interest in others at work stems from their perception of their work as a stepping stone to success, which is also related to their view of interpersonal relations as purely instrumental. Overall, we expect primary psychopathy—manifested as selfishness, lack of empathy or guilt, dishonesty, and manipulative behavior (Karpman 1948)—to be positively related to careerism.

H2 Primary psychopathy is positively associated to careerism, and demonstrates incremental validity relative to the FFM personality traits.

Exchange Ideology with the Organization and Careerism

Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are based on a subjective cost–benefit analysis of social exchanges (Blau 1964). The perceived favorability of reciprocal exchanges determines the emergence of associations between individuals and social structures arising from mutually beneficial patterns of exchange. Blau distinguished between two forms of exchange—social and economic. In contrast to economic exchanges, social exchanges involve a general expectation of some future return not stipulated in advance. As a result, social exchange relationships rely on trust and feelings of obligation rather than on economic agreements such as pay for performance. In work settings, the employment relationship can also emphasize either the social or economic aspects of the employee–employer relationship; whereas *social exchange* emphasizes the socioemotional nature of the work relationship (i.e., feelings of obligation or trust), the basis of *economic exchange* are the financial, tangible aspects of the exchange relationship (Shore et al. 2006).

Social exchange theory has been used to understand how perceived organizational support influences employees' effort toward meeting organizational goals (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Specifically, Eisenberger et al. found that the negative relationship between perceived support and absenteeism was stronger for employees with high exchange ideology scores. By implication, a strong exchange ideology may also harm the employment relationship if employees' perceptions of organizational support are negative. The organizational justice literature has shown that employees' perceptions of how fairly they are treated by the organization can be affected by the perceiver's personality traits. Cohen-Charash and Spector's (2001) meta-analysis demonstrated that negative affectivity is associated more with perceptions of organizational justice (more so for procedural and interactional justice [mean *r*s of −.24 and −.25] than distributive justice [mean *r* of −.10]). Closer to our predictions, Feldman and Weitz (1991) argued that careerists may be more sensitive to equity issues and more likely "to perceive themselves as inequitably rewarded" (Feldman and Weitz 1991, p. 240). As Aryee and Chen (2004) have shown, careerism is associated with negative perceptions of justice. In response to the perceived inequity, careerists respond by withdrawing work effort. However, in contrast to non-careerists, the reduction of job effort among careerists would not be apparent as they would keep the illusion of increased contribution while working less hard. We posit that exchange ideology, the strength of an employee's belief that work effort should depend on treatment by the organization (Eisenberger et al. 1986), is a positive predictor of employees' careerism.

H3 Employee exchange ideology is positively related to careerism, and demonstrates incremental validity relative to the FFM personality traits.

Finally, we compare the relative importance of primary psychopathy and exchange ideology in predicting careerism. Comparing the two predictors "head to head" is important if one accepts the argument that there is a social desirability component to psychopathy measures that may reduce their utility in assessment situations. Even primary psychopaths, who believe that "people who are stupid enough to get ripped off usually deserve it" (an item on the primary psychopathy scale; Levenson et al. 1995), may be reluctant to provide a completely accurate report of their belief. Conversely, respondents may see questions about their exchange ideology (e.g., "An employee should work as hard as possible only if the organization appreciates and rewards his/her efforts" Eisenberger et al. 2001) as less threatening or intrusive and be less likely to provide a socially desirable response. While acknowledging the theoretical value of both predictors, we contend that exchange ideology is more useful in terms of avoiding socially desirable responses and compare the predictive validity of primary psychopathy and exchange ideology. Thus, we posited the following research question:

> Research Question 1: To what extent is primary psychopathy more important than employee exchange ideology in predicting careerism?

Methods

Participants

We collected data from 131 undergraduate students (41 % female[1]) from a large Southern university in the United States. Respondents participated in the research in exchange for course credit. The data collection was part of a larger study and, if questions were directed toward work, respondents were asked to report information about their current jobs. The mean age (see foot note 1) for the participants was 19.54 ($SD = 0.88$). For each measure (i.e., FFM traits, careerism, primary psychopathy, and exchange ideology) participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the statement, on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Because we were interested to examine the extent to which psychopathy (a trait) and exchange ideology (a belief) predict careerism regardless of contextual factors that may influence employees' careerism (e.g., fair treatment by the organization; Aryee and Chen 2004), we used a student sample. While our respondents may have developed careerism as a result of interactions with their employers, this possibility is not as prominent as for employees with longer work tenures.

Measures

Careerism

We used Feldman and Weitz's (1991) 23-item measure to operationalize careerism ($\alpha = .92$). Examples of items are "It is hard to get ahead in an organization on sheer merit alone" and "The key to success is who you know, not what you know."

FFM Traits

We used the 20-item Mini-IPIP measure developed by Donnellan et al. (2006) to assess the FFM traits. Unlike Donnellan et al.'s measure, we avoided using reversed items; therefore, some items were rephrased to reflect either the positive or negative end of the specified trait. For instance, all the items for emotional stability were written so as to reflect a high emotional stability—instead of "I get upset easily" we use the item "I don't get upset easily." Estimated reliabilities for extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness were .87, .90, .86, .84, and .91, respectively.

Primary Psychopathy

We measured primary psychopathy with eight items (with loadings higher than .50, and not reverse-coded) from the Levenson et al.'s (1995) scale. Examples of items include "Success is based on survival of the fittest; I am not concerned about the losers" and "People who are stupid enough to get ripped off usually deserve it," $\alpha = .91$).

Exchange Ideology with the Organization

We used Eisenberger et al.'s (2001) eight-item measure to assess exchange ideology ($\alpha = .75$). Illustrative items are "Employees should not care about the organization that employs them unless that organization shows that it cares about its employees" and "An employee should work as hard as possible only if the organization appreciates and rewards his/her efforts." As evident from the items, a high (strong) level of exchange ideology represents a quid-pro-quo orientation in exchanges with one's organization.

Procedure

All data were collected using one source—study respondents who completed a questionnaire. Some scholars have claimed

[1] Sex and age of participants was available only for 72 % ($n = 94$) of the sample.

that observed correlations between variables assessed with the same method may be inflated because of the effect of shared variance that reside in the common method. Common method variance (CMV) effects pose threats to conclusions drawn from organizational and behavioral research (Cote and Buckley 1987; Doty and Glick 1998; Williams et al. 1989). To minimize CMV effects, we utilized several procedural remedies suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003, 2012). Specifically, to decrease the availability, relevance, and salience of previous responses, our predictors and criteria were measured at different times. Data on primary psychopathy and FFM traits were collected approximately 3 weeks before assessing careerism; exchange ideology was measured about 1 week prior to collecting careerism data. Creating a time lag can reduce the availability of previous responses. To test the hypotheses we conducted a series of regression analyses. First, we used the FFM traits as predictors of careerism. Then, using hierarchical regression analysis, we examined the incremental validity of primary psychopathy and exchange ideology relative to the FFM traits in predicting careerism. In addition, we assessed the incremental validity of primary psychopathy relative to exchange ideology, and vice versa—the incremental validity of exchange ideology relative to psychopathy.

Relative Weights Analysis

We conducted a relative weight (RW) analysis (Johnson 2000; Tonidandel and LeBreton 2011) to estimate the unique and combined contribution of each of the identified dispositional predictors— the FFM traits, psychopathy, and exchange ideology. The goal of RW analysis is to understand the extent to which each predictor contributes toward explaining variance in the criterion and should be used as a supplement to multiple regression for theory testing purposes (Tonidandel and LeBreton 2011). The advantage of RW analysis compared to other techniques that rely on multiple regression—including hierarchical regression and structural equation models, as well as multiple regression itself—is that RWs provide more accurate estimates of the contribution of each predictor in a regression model when predictors are *correlated*. In other words, the visual inspection of standardized regression coefficients in multiple regression can be problematic because standardized regression weights do not appropriately partition variance when predictors are correlated. The inspection of bivariate correlation can also be misleading because those estimates do not take into account the relationships (i.e., correlation) between the predictors.

To circumvent the limitations of multiple regression associated with multicollinearity issues, RW analysis uses a variable transformation approach. First, a new set of predictors unrelated to one another is created using least squares orthogonalization. A new set of standardized regression coefficients (β_k) is then calculated by regressing the criterion variable on these new orthogonal predictors. Next, the new standardized regression coefficients are regressed on the original variables to obtain yet another set of standardized coefficients (λ_{jk}). Finally, RWs are obtained by summing the products of the squared standardized regression coefficients β_k and λ_{jk} (see Johnson 2000; Tonidandel and LeBreton 2011). In other words, RWs reflect the indirect effect of a predictor on the criterion through the newly created orthogonal predictors. Relative weights obtained in this manner sum to the model's squared multiple correlation and, thus, may be interpreted as a measure of relative effect size. Relative weights can also be expressed as percentages of the variance explained by the specified predictor by dividing each predictor's RW by R^2 and multiplying by 100. As a cautionary note, it is important to realize that RW percentages reflect the proportion of explained variance accounted by a single predictor; that is, RW percentages should not be interpreted as the proportion of criterion variance *explained by the model*; that is, RWs should not be interpreted as the proportion of criterion variance explained by a given predictor.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among study variables are presented in Table 1. As expected, emotional stability was negatively correlated with careerism ($r = -.18, p < .05$). None of the other FFM traits presented significant correlations with careerism. We found a negative correlation between primary psychopathy and agreeableness, which is not surprising given psychopaths disregard for others' feelings and/or problems (cf. Paulhus and Williams 2002). All FFM traits were negatively correlated with exchange ideology (extroversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability were statistically significant). Extroverted, agreeable, and emotionally stable individuals are shown to prefer a weak form of exchange with their organizations. This is consistent with research positioning emotional stability and agreeableness as related to tendencies to behave prosocially rather than antisocially (Ashton and Lee 2001). Since extroversion can span almost the entire spectrum of the interpersonal circumplex from hostility to friendliness (Wiggins and Broughton 1991), dominant hostile extroverts could favor stronger forms of exchange. Alternatively, they may adjust their preferred form of exchange and report a weak exchange ideology when dealing with the organization, a more powerful entity.

We also note that the mean for careerism is situated slightly lower than the middle point (4) of our 1 to 7 scale

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and study variable intercorrelations

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sex[a]	–	–									
2. Age	19.54	0.88	0.18								
3. Extroversion	4.48	1.25	0.01	0.05							
4 Agreeableness	5.31	1.11	−0.06	−0.06	0.26***						
5. Conscientiousness	4.95	1.28	0.10	−0.09	0.07	0.06					
6. Emotional stability	4.57	1.28	−0.08	0.16	−0.12	−0.12	0.06				
7. Openness	4.79	1.30	−0.04	0.11	0.23**	0.20*	−0.14	0.12			
8. Primary psychopathy	2.65	1.14	−0.01	−0.03	−0.08	−0.30***	0.07	−0.07	−0.08		
9. Exchange ideology	3.14	1.05	0.06	0.12	−0.21*	−0.21*	−0.06	−0.18*	−0.17	0.39***	
10. Careerism	3.51	0.81	−0.02	−0.12	−0.05	−0.13	−0.11	−0.18*	−0.14	0.47***	0.49***

$n = 131$ (except for sex and age where $n = 94$)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (all tests are two-tailed)

[a] Dummy codes for sex are female = 0 ($n = 55$), and male = 1 ($n = 39$)

($M = 3.51$; $SD = .81$). Although the distribution of the careerism scores approximated a normal distribution (skewness = .150, kurtosis = .584, Kolmogorov–Smirnov test = .046, $p > .05$), a more detailed examination of the option distribution of the scale items revealed that, except for one item ("In the final analysis, what's best for me in my career is not going to be consistent with what is in the organization's best interests"), participants chose the options "Somewhat disagree" and "Somewhat agree" more frequently than the option "Neither agree or disagree." Thus, although most responses clustered around the middle point of the scale, the fact that participants were generally able to agree (or disagree) with each statement provides supporting evidence that the careerism scale was psychologically meaningful to them. To determine the extent to which our responses based on student data were different than other reports of careerism reported by undergraduate respondents, we compared the mean and standard deviation of careerism in the present study with the sample-weighted mean of three student samples ($N = 485$) and ten employee samples ($N = 3{,}350$) that used similar measures of careerism[2]. The mean of careerism in this study ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.81$) was lower than the sample weighted mean of student samples ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.71$, $N = 482$, $z = -.10.07$, $p < .05$) and also lower than a sample of employees ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.92$, $N = 3{,}350$, $z = -.11.55$, $p < .05$). Even though the mean careerism for our sample was lower than in other studies — particularly, compared to employee samples—the variability of careerism was very similar across studies as indicated by careerism standard deviations across samples. The studies used for the above-mentioned comparisons are reported in the References section with an asterisk.

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test our hypotheses (Table 2). In Step 1 we entered the FFM traits. Supporting H1, results from Step 1 show that emotional stability negatively predicted careerism ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$) with all the other FFM traits present in the equation (Table 2). In Step 2 we entered exchange ideology and primary psychopathy as predictors. In support of H2, psychopathy was a statistically significant predictor of careerism over and above the FFM factors ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$). H3 was also supported; exchange ideology predicted careerism over and above the influence of the FFM traits ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$).

For Research Question 1, we conducted a RW analysis (Johnson 2000) to estimate the proportionate contribution of each predictor considering both its unique contribution and its contribution when combined with other predictors, particularly when the predictors are correlated (Tonidandel and LeBreton 2011). Relative weights can be interpreted as a measure of relative effect size. Relative weights for primary psychopathy (RW = .15, %RW = 42.1 %) and for exchange ideology (RW = .16, %RW = 44.1 %) were approximately equal (Table 2). Although psychopathy and exchange ideology are correlated ($r = .49$, $p < .05$), each accounted for a significant proportion of variance in careerism after controlling for the other predictor (9.6 % for exchange ideology and 9.2 % for primary psychopathy). Responding to RQ1, primary psychopathy is not more important than exchange ideology in predicting careerism.

Discussion

As outlined by Feldman and Weitz (1991), in pursuing non-performance-based means, careerists perceive their

[2] To compare the present study's mean and standard deviation of careerism with information from other studies, we transformed all the scales to a common scale ranging from 1 to 7.

Table 2 Hierarchical regression analyses predicting careerism by primary psychopathy and exchange ideology after controlling for FFM traits

	DV = careerism					
	Step 1			Step 2		
	β	RW	%RW	β	RW	%RW
Extroversion	.00	.001	1.4	.07	.002	0.6
Agreeableness	−.13	.016	20.9	.03	.006	1.7
Conscientiousness	−.11	.013	17.2	−.10	.015	4.1
Emotional stability	−.18*	.032	42.6	−.06	.016	4.4
Openness	−.10	.013	17.8	−.08	.011	3.0
Primary psychopathy				.30**	.153	42.1
Exchange ideology				.35***	.160	44.1
All FFM traits					.050	13.8
Total R (R^2)	274 (.075)			602 (.363)		
$\Delta R^2_{\text{ES over EX, AG, CO, OP}}$	.030*					
$\Delta R^2_{\text{PP over EI−O}}$				.096***		
$\Delta R^2_{\text{EI−O overPP}}$				.092***		

$N = 131$. Relative weights (J. W. Johnson 2000) add up to R^2 and relative weights in percentage form add up to 100 % of the *explained* variance. Standardized regression coefficients are reported

EX extroversion, *AG* agreeableness, *CO* conscientiousness, *ES* emotional stability, *OP* openness to experience, *PP* primary psychopathy, *EI-O* exchange ideology with the organization, *RW* raw relative weights, *%RW* percentages of relative weights (calculated by dividing individual relative weights by their sum and multiplying by 100); *R* multiple correlations, ΔR^2 incremental change in R^2

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

career advancement as contingent on obtaining advancement on more than merit alone, crafting social relationships instrumentally, giving the impression of a "team player," perceptions of career goals inconsistent with the goals of the organization, a belief that dishonest behaviors are sometimes needed to advance, and the need to construct an illusion of success (Feldman and Klich 1991). In this study, we sought to assess the effectiveness of the FFM personality traits, primary psychopathy, and exchange ideology as predictors of careerism.

Low Emotional Stability Predicts Careerism

Knowing the relationships between the FFM personality traits and careerism contributes to an understanding of its nomological network, including both contextual and individual antecedents (Aryee and Chen 2004; Crawshaw 2011; Crawshaw and Brodbeck 2011; Hsiung et al. 2012), of which the latter have been neglected (see Chiaburu et al. 2013b, for an exception). As predicted, *emotional stability* was negatively related to careerism. Our conjecture was grounded on previous research showing that both constructs are linked to reduced job satisfaction and higher intentions to quit, and on more encompassing propositions connecting low emotional stability with less pro- and more anti-social tendencies (Ashton and Lee 2001). Results are consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating the usefulness of personality traits, in particular emotional stability (Barrick and Mount 2000; Berry et al. 2007), in predicting misbehavior (Griffin et al. 2012). Employees low on emotional stability espouse non-performance beliefs for career advancement and may engage in corresponding behaviors including deception, manipulation, and misrepresentation. We add to research connecting low emotional stability with proximal aspects (obsessive–compulsive tendencies and ineffective coping; Peng et al. 2012) and to distal ones (organizational deviance; Berry et al. 2007). Our results are consistent with research highlighting the relationship between low emotional stability and withdrawal (LeBreton et al. 2006). It is known that low emotional stability is related to low self-emotion appraisal, low regulation of emotion and, to a less extent low use of emotion, but not others' emotion appraisal (Joseph and Newman 2010). This may cast doubt on the ability of low emotional stability individuals to *enact* they careeristic beliefs (Kilduff et al. 2010).

High Primary Psychopathy and Weak Exchange Ideology Predict Careerism

To explore theoretically relevant predictors beyond FFM, based on a more general framework, we tested a model where careerism is predicted by primary psychopathy and exchange ideology. Primary psychopathy was introduced based on arguments focusing on psychopaths' disregard for others and using deceptive means to gain self-interested

objectives. In agreement with O'Boyle et al. (2012), we posited and found that psychopaths' actions are incompatible with the principles of social exchange, which would explain their failure to meet social obligations and comply with the norm of reciprocity. Even though exchange ideology is not part of the "dark triad," we confirmed a link between this construct and careerism, proposed because of the positive relationship between high exchange ideology and equity sensitivity and a tendency to focus on economic rather than social exchanges. Even though our predictors represent intra-individual aspects, they capture important *social* beliefs. From Levenson's perspective (1992; Levenson et al. 1995), psychopathy—based on social learning—is a pattern of *antisocial* behavior indicative of one's distorted evaluation of his or her relative importance vs. the rights and well-being of others. While not necessarily antisocial, a strong exchange ideology (*low social exchange*) represents strong quid-pro-quo beliefs that work effort should reflect how one is treated by the organization (Eisenberger et al. 1986). Our findings uncover that careerism does not necessarily need antisocial propensities (primary psychopathy), even though they are certainly predictive. Individuals' beliefs in quid-pro-quo forms of exchange (strong exchange ideology) are sufficient to predict careerism.

Either Primary Psychopathy or Exchange Ideology Predict Careerism

Having established the importance of primary psychopathy and exchange ideology, we further asked: are these two predictors equally important in the prediction of careerism? Based on our relative importance test, we uncovered that individuals' psychopathy and exchange ideology can predict careerism equally well, despite their complementary theoretical perspective. Provided that social desirability can affect the measurement of psychopathy, particularly in high-stakes forms of assessment (Ray et al. in press), exchange ideology questions may offer a more suitable alternative. Interestingly, we found both a significant correlation between primary psychopathy and exchange ideology *and* a similar strength for both in predicting careerism.

Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, we relied on self-reported data. Yet using additional informants (e.g., coworkers or supervisors) is not inherently superior to self-reports. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that self-report measures tend to converge with other-reports (such as coworkers and supervisors) even when the focal constructs have potentially negative consequences for the employees (e.g., counterproductive work behaviors; Berry et al. 2012). More importantly, the constructs in this research capture traits (FFM), beliefs (exchange ideology), and orientations (careerism) that may be more difficult to estimate by external observers (cf. Boddy et al. 2010; Boddy 2011).

Some researchers have questioned the validity of explicit measures of psychopathy, such as the ones used for the present study (e.g., Ray et al. in press). LeBreton et al. (2006) argued that psychopathy researchers have not yet recognized the role of implicit cognitions and the potential benefits of implicit measures of personality (i.e., conditional reasoning tests) to study psychopathy. Conditional reasoning tests allow researchers to assess people's cognitive biases when observing, interpreting, and reacting to people, situations, and events. Personality dispositions (e.g., subclinical psychopathy) have unique sets of cognitive biases (Beck et al. 2003) or justification mechanism (LeBreton et al. 2006). These (e.g., hostile attribution bias) could be assessed indirectly through conditional reasoning tests. Although research on the use of conditional reasoning tests to assess psychopathic traits is still in its infancy, this is a promising area. Rather than calling our results into question, the inclusion of implicit measures of psychopathy would likely increase our ability to predict aversive workplace behaviors. As suggested by Wu and LeBreton (2011) "from a practical perspective, *combining* self-reports of explicit personality with indirect assessments of implicit personality… offers HR practitioners several advantages over using either assessment tool in isolation from the other" (p. 619).

Further, even though we had a time lag between collecting the predictor and criterion data, the time period was relatively short (one to several weeks). Yet it is more plausible that traits (FFM personality traits and psychopathy) and individuals' beliefs (exchange ideology) predict, rather than are outcomes of, careerism. Finally, our data originated from undergraduate students. While this source is perhaps advantageous in that it limits the influence of respondents' organizational experience, it does not capture the dynamic aspect of exchange ideology, which can change as a function of respondents' organizational experiences. It is advisable to replicate our results on a representative sample of working adults to determine their generalizability.

Future Research

Construct Clarification

In future work, researchers need to distinguish careerism from constructs that may be seen as conceptually similar, including impression management, engaging in organizational politics, and organizational Machiavelianism (Kessler

et al. 2010). This would avoid construct proliferation and empirical redundancy (Harter and Schmidt 2008; Le et al. 2010). From a conceptual standpoint, careerism captures (a) tendencies (rather than behaviors) (b) specific to career advancement. It can thus be contrasted both with general "dark side" *traits* (e.g., Machiavellianism) and *behaviors* (impression management; as distinguished from careerism by Feldman and Klich 1991). Its focus on career aspects also increases its specificity. For instance, Kessler et al.'s (2010) three-dimensional model of Machiavellianism—maintaining power, harsh management tactics, and manipulative behaviors—does not explicitly address the issue of career advancement, which is the focus of careerism. Instead, Machiavelli's philosophy revolves around effectively ruling subjects and using manipulative strategies to achieve this purpose rather than a belief in career advancement through non-performance means. Despite such distinctions at a *conceptual* level, future research can illuminate to a greater extent whether our prediction holds for a more general tendency, such as to manage impressions or engage in political behaviors (Kacmar and Carlson 1997).

Looking across disciplines, careerism can be connected to other tendencies pointed out by social psychologists and sociologists decades ago. In social psychology, Erich Fromm noted the emergence of a "marketing character" brought to fore by a need to transact not only labor but also one's personality (Fromm 1947). In sociology, Goffman (1961) proposed secondary adjustments "any habitual arrangement by which a member of an organization employs unauthorized means, or obtains unauthorized ends, or both, thus getting around the organization's assumptions about what he should do and get and hence what he should be (Goffman 1961, p. 189; see also Chiaburu et al. 2012). Other examples are readily available (Gergen 1991). Overall, it would be advantageous to draw connections across constructs, disciplines, and literatures.

Integration with Existing Context-Focused Research

Researchers have investigated the relationship between organizational actions and employees' careerist orientation (Aryee and Chen 2004; Crawshaw and Brodbeck 2011; Crawshaw et al. 2012). This line of research views careerism as an individual's response to organizational actions that undermine employee loyalty (Crawshaw et al. 2012). It is proposed, for example, that when employers develop fair procedures for allocating career development opportunities, employees are less likely to develop careerism because their trust in management is maintained (Crawshaw and Brodbeck 2011). It has also been suggested that organizational efforts to counter the effects of a careerist orientation should rely on fostering a relational psychological contract (Chay and Aryee 1999). Even though relational contracts contain both monetary and socio-emotional elements, they emphasize trust and good faith (Rousseau 1989). One way to build trust among employees is by providing employment security (Pfeffer 1994). Although early career models viewed employment security as the establishment of long-term work relationships—long-term employee commitment and loyalty in exchange for lifetime employment—more recent perspectives advise against this paternalistic approach to career management (Crawshaw 2011). Crawshaw argued that, in the context of today's flexible employment arrangements, effective career management practices should focus on promoting individual's employability through career counseling and more access to relevant training and education opportunities. At the same time, Crawshaw recognizes that the research in this domain is limited and empirical results are mixed (cf. Aryee and Chen 2004; Chay and Aryee 1999).

Whereas careerism may be in part the result of organizational practices that foster trust in management, our findings highlight the role of relatively fixed dispositional factors and beliefs. It is generally accepted that job attitudes such as job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment are negatively correlated with careerism (Bratton and Kacmar 2004; Feldman and Weitz 1991; Orpen 1998). In addition, scholars contend that individual differences indicative of a propensity for political orientation (such as Machiavelianism, internal locus of control, and self-monitoring) and career ambition (desire for advancement and short-term orientation) are positively related to careerist orientations (Bratton and Kacmar 2004). However, further research is needed to understand the interplay between individual differences and contextual factors. Even if career development opportunities are made available for employees—which according to Crawshaw et al. (2012) would prevent the development of careerism—some employees might strive for new openings by engaging in the same type of unethical behavior that characterizes a psychopathic personality.

Organizational career management strategies that promote trust may have little bearing among early career employees (Crawshaw 2011). For employees who just start their careers, the first appointments are often purely *instrumental*. Because during this early stage jobs are seen mostly as opportunities to gain work experience, efforts directed towards increasing trust in the employment relationship are less likely to be effective. Crawshaw (2011) found support for this idea by showing that trust is less strongly associated with careerism when employees are not yet emotionally attached to their organizations—that is, when organizational commitment is low. The examination of both individual aspects (including personality traits, beliefs, and attitudes) and contextual factors (such as how

employees see the organization) in the prediction of careerism may be advantageous. With more primary studies, careerism can be integrated in a broader nomological network and connected to CWBs (Berry et al. 2007) and unethical decision-making (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010).

From another direction, Bratton and Kacmar (2004) identified ambiguity and uncertainty, accountability, and the nature of outcomes as three aspects that could explain the spread of careerism. When evaluation criteria are unclear, greater reliance in factors unrelated to work behaviors are likely to influence job performance evaluations; workers can avoid being held accountable, and blame others for negative outcomes (or take credit for positive ones). Previous studies have demonstrated low correlations between the three components of the Dark Triad—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—and job performance (mean corrected correlations of −.07, −.03, and −.10, respectively). One reason for these small observed effects is the subjective nature of performance evaluations which are vulnerable to unwanted influences. Efforts directed toward increasing (i.e., inflating) performance ratings—rather than boosting job performance—could explain the low psychopathy-job performance relationship. Thus, the importance of conducting quality performance evaluations cannot be overstated and in fact "may be the only way to deal with a psychopathic personality" (Babiak and Hare 2006, p. 317). By the same token, the spread of careerism in organizations can be forestalled by implementing quality performance evaluations in conjunction with other human resource systems that reward actual skills and abilities rather than politicking. Research to understand how human resource practices and the broader social environment (for an extensive discussion, see Feldman and Klich 1991) surrounding employees and job applicants and influencing their careerism is needed.

Pre-Employment Aspects

Our conceptual model does not capture contextual factors that may facilitate the emergence of careerism. These factors cannot be ignored. It is notable that even individuals with limited work experience, such as our respondents, report at least some (almost moderate) careeristic beliefs. Future models need to capture how careeristic attitudes emerge, by outlining either earlier connections with individual predictors, including primary psychopathy or other forms of dysfunctional personality (e.g., antisocial; Decuyper et al. 2009; Millon 2011) measured at an earlier point in life. Alienated (Chiaburu et al. 2013b) or cynical (Brandes et al. 2006) individuals may be more likely to espouse careerism. Another fruitful direction of investigation is how individuals come to have levels of high (strong) exchange ideology. Longitudinal studies can be effective in partitioning careerism into pre- and post-employment components. This would require study designs where careerism is measured multiple times (e.g., prior, at, and after organizational entry).

Process Models

Understanding processes whereby those high in exchange ideology engage in careerism is another interesting area for future research. We suggest that equity sensitivity could play a mediating role in this relationship. Huseman et al. (1987) coined the term equity sensitivity to describe individual differences in people's preferences for equity. According to Huseman et al., three distinctive classes of individuals can be placed along a continuum. At the lower end, individuals prefer their outcome/input ratio to be less than the outcome/input ratio of others (benevolents). At the high end, individuals prefer their outcome/input ratio to be greater than the outcome/input ratio of others (entitleds). Finally, equity sensitives lay in the middle of this continuum. Thus, drawing from equity sensitivity theory, it is not unreasonable to expect individuals' exchange ideologies to be congruent with an entitled preference for equity. Because exchange ideology was correlated with psychopathy, it is possible for individuals high in primary psychopathy to consider themselves entitled. Simply put, both primary psychopaths and individuals with high exchange ideology may expect more, but give less. Careerist orientations would share this feature with psychopathy, which echoes Feldman and Weitz's (1991) assertion that careerist managers are more sensitive to equity issues. This and other mediators should be considered for future research in understanding careerism.

A Bright Side of Careerism?

Researchers need also to entertain the idea of a "bright side" of careerism and contrast it with the existing construct, ostensibly focused on the "dark side." Feldman (1985) listed a number of positive features including an increased awareness of career goals and expectations, and more critical self-analysis. These are undoubtedly positive assets for someone genuinely interested in being recognized by others as a competent employee. Integrity issues aside, even careerists' self-serving behaviors may result in helping and initiative. Hsiung et al. (2012) propose that organizational politics have a nourishing effect on citizenship through careerism. Even though careerists may not be intrinsically motivated to help and take initiative (cf. zero-order positive significant correlations; Hsiung et al. 2012), they may feel obliged to perform these behaviors because the organization's political environment dictates

that such actions as necessary for career advancement. Bratton and Kacmar (2004) introduced the term "extreme careerism" and asserted that, in contrast to Feldman's "new careerism," extreme careerism draws primarily upon negative impression management techniques, such as taking credit for someone else's work, and discrediting or blaming coworkers. For now, there are no measures to assess "new careerism" in contrast with "extreme careerism" to determine if they are indeed independent constructs. It is nevertheless possible for primary psychopathy (rather than exchange ideology) to predict "extreme" careerism, and this can be tested in the future.

Conclusion

Feldman and co-authors provide convincing arguments for the negative organizational consequences of employees' careeristic orientations (Feldman 1985; Feldman and Klich 1991; Feldman and Weitz 1991). Surprisingly, researchers have not proposed ways to identify employees (or applicants) who espouse such beliefs. We do so in the current study, by providing evidence of positive relationships between two predictors—primary psychopathy and exchange ideology—and careerism. Further, we build on Babiak's (1996) suggestions that psychopaths may be able to join organizations with relative ease because of deficiencies in selection systems combined with psychopaths' ability to wear a "mask of sanity" (Cleckley 1941). Because psychopaths may skillfully distort their responses thereby concealing their callousness, selfishness, and manipulativeness (Levenson et al. 1995; Mullins-Sweatt et al. 2010), we propose exchange ideology as an alternative predictor. As our results show, self-reported exchange ideology predicts careerism to the same extent as primary psychopathy. While our findings are promising for identifying careerists, they could be unsettling. Careerist orientation is a function of individuals' primary psychopathy (an extreme and less-frequent occurrence) and of their exchange ideology (a more "neutral," often-encountered, and more accepted position). This finding can stimulate future research examining specific aspects of a strong exchange ideology (e.g., focus on monitoring the *quid-pro-quo* balance, self-serving bias, importance of immediate transactions, or a preference for tangible outcomes) predicting careerism.

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