

Exploitative orientation inventory: precursory version

Abstract

The current article presents a synopsis of the precursory development of a measure for assessing interpersonal exploitative orientation across major relationship domains of family, friends, romantic partners, and co-workers, i.e., Exploitative Orientation Inventory (EOI). The EOI was administered to a convenience sample ($N = 345$; 78.1% males) recruited from MTurk. The EOI demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .907) and convergent validity ($r = .434$) with another measure of exploitativeness and discriminant validity ($r = -.741$) with a measure of fairness. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses provided support for a three-factor model. Further study of the EOI is needed with other populations and with various demographic variables.

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Robert A. Semel

Licensed Psychologist in Independent Practice, USA

Correspondence: Robert A. Semel, Licensed Psychologist in Independent Practice, USA, Tel 917-817-1593, Fax 718-444-7347, Email robertsemelpsyd@gmail.com

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Introduction

Interpersonal exploitativeness (IE) is one of the hallmark features of narcissism and has also been associated more broadly with the Dark Triad (DT) traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy.¹ DT traits have been positively associated with maladaptive outcomes such as physical and verbal aggression, exploitative short-term mating, FFM extraversion, and dominance, and negatively associated with FFM agreeableness and nurturance.^{2,3}

Exploitative orientation is defined in the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2023) as "...a character pattern marked by using stealth, deceit, power, or violence to obtain what the individual wants".

Currently, several validated measures of narcissism include exploitativeness subscales. For example, the Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI)⁴ Exploitative subscale is a lower-order trait subsumed within the higher-order dimension of Antagonism.⁵ The Interpersonal Exploitativeness Scale (IES)⁶ is a stand-alone measure that conceptualizes exploitativeness as a distinct unidimensional trait and has demonstrated reliability and validity as a measure of exploitativeness.

A review of the personality and social psychology literature finds no existing measures addressing an interpersonal exploitative orientation across major relationship domains of family, friends, romantic partners, and co-workers. Such a measure might provide a more nuanced method of assessing IE than items addressing general attitudes toward IE. Therefore, the aim of the current study concerns the preliminary development of a reliable and valid measure of IE orientation across multiple relationship domains, titled the Exploitative Orientation Inventory (EOI). No known measure surveys exploitativeness in romantic, family, friends, and co-worker contexts.

Hypotheses

1. The EOI will demonstrate a significant positive correlation with another measure of interpersonal exploitativeness.
2. The EOI will demonstrate a significant negative correlation with a measure of fairness.

Method

A sample of participants ($N = 345$) was recruited from MTurk. Twenty-one participants failed an attention check item, and three

omitted a substantial number of items for a final sample of 321 participants (78.1% males). Less than 10% of data were missing, and missing data were not imputed.

Scale development

The items for the Exploitative Orientation Inventory were designed to be consistent with the definition of exploitative as per the APA Dictionary of Psychology (2023). Most of the items are consistent with the use of deceit, guile, manipulation, or absence of reciprocity. The preliminary scale includes 29 items referencing family, friends, romantic partner, and co-worker relationship domains. Eight items, two from each of the four relationship domains, are reverse-scored items incorporated to mitigate a response bias. Items include fairly benign exploitativeness, e.g., the use of charm, and more aggressive acts, e.g., bullying, threats, and violence. Examples of items include, "I would feel justified in bullying or coercing family members to get what I wanted from them"; "I would feel comfortable with myself pressuring a romantic partner to have sex even if they did not want to"; "I would feel remorseful if I acted deceitfully with a friend to get what I wanted."

Additional measures

The Interpersonal Exploitativeness Scale (IES)⁶ is a six-item scale that measures one's propensity to take advantage of others.

International Personality Item Pool (IPIP)⁷ Fairness scale – The IPIP Fairness scale, consisting of 10 items (five reverse-scored), was designed to be similar to the measure of fairness, a facet-level scale of the HEXACO Honesty-Humility domain.⁸

Data analyses

Psychometric properties of the EOI, including descriptive (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha), and bivariate correlations between the EOI and the IES and IPIP Fairness scale were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.0. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted in R (R Core Team, 2021, "R version 4.2.3") using the psych and lavaan packages.

Results

The internal consistency reliability coefficient (alpha) was .907, with a mean inter-item correlation coefficient of .253. Males obtained

a significantly higher mean score on the EOI than females ($p = .035$) with a small to medium effect size (Cohen's $d = .311$).

A bivariate correlation of $r = .434$ was found between the Exploitative Orientation Inventory and the Interpersonal Exploitative Scale; $r = -.741$ between the Exploitative Orientation Inventory and Fairness; and $r = -.457$ between the Interpersonal Exploitative Scale and Fairness.

Exploratory factor analysis EFA suggested a three- or four-factor solution. Parallel analysis in R suggested a four-factor solution. The first factor included the majority of items, accounting for 38.8% of the variance. This factor was composed of items suggesting menacing, malevolence, deceitfulness, and distinctive intentional lack of reciprocity (e.g., “*I would feel justified bullying or coercing family members to get what I want from them*”; “*I would gladly make a co-worker look deficient in order for me to get ahead at work*”). The second factor, including all but one of the reverse-scored items, accounted for 10.1% of the variance, suggesting possibly a method factor (e.g., “*I would not feel justified threatening a romantic partner to get what I want from them.*”) The third factor accounted for 5.3% of the variance and the items suggested relatively benign, albeit manipulative exploitativeness (e.g., “*I would delight in showering a romantic partner with love, attention, and affection, partly to get what I want from them*”). The fourth factor accounted for 3.3% of the variance. This factor included only two items and both cross-loaded with other factors; one item had a higher loading on another factor (e.g., “*Giving the “silent treatment” to get what I wanted from a romantic partner would seem fair to me*”).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using robust weighted least squares (WLSMV) for non-normal data with categorical variables was conducted on a correlated 3-factor model. The same sample was used for the EFA and the CFA because this project was exploratory. Results were as follows: CFI robust = 0.98; RMSEA robust = 0.056 (0.047, 0.064); SRMR = 0.076. This model had a closer fit than a one-factor model.

Conclusion

Exploitative behavior in interpersonal relationships is a conspicuous feature of narcissism and dark triad traits more broadly. IE traits have been positively associated with maladaptive outcomes such as physical and verbal aggression, exploitative short-term mating, and dominance and negatively associated with FFM agreeableness and nurturance. The current study represents

the first attempt to develop a measure specifically referring to IE in family, friends, romantic partners, and co-worker relationships. The Exploitative Orientation Inventory (EOI) demonstrated excellent internal consistency reliability in a sample of MTurk participants and convergent validity with another measure of IE, which was robustly correlated negatively with a measure of fairness. Confirmatory factor analysis provided initial support for a correlated three-factor model. Males obtained significantly higher mean scores on the EOI than females. Further study of the EOI is needed with different populations and considering various demographic variables.

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Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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