

# Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science

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Volume 5

Article 2

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5-11-2017

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### Recommended Citation

Moran, Paloma (2017) "Narcissistic Traits of Police Officers in America," *Themis: Research Journal of Justice Studies and Forensic Science*: Vol. 5 , Article 2.  
<https://doi.org/10.31979/THEMIS.2017.0502> <https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/themis/vol5/iss1/2>

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## Narcissistic Traits of Police Officers in America

### Abstract

The narcissistic traits of police officers aged 17 to 78 in the United States affect American citizens in various degrees. Improvements made to pre-employment psychological evaluations, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2), the L (Lie) Scale, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), may detect and screen out police officer candidates with underlying Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). It is important that candidates with NPD be screened out as, if they become officers, they may commit acts of police misconduct, which greatly affect the safety and trust of the American people.

### Keywords

narcissistic personality disorder, police officers, police misconduct, MMPI-2, L scale, NPI

Narcissistic Traits of Police Officers in America

*Paloma Moran*

**Abstract**

The narcissistic traits of police officers aged 17 to 78 in the United States affect American citizens in various degrees. Improvements made to pre-employment psychological evaluations, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2), the L (Lie) Scale, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), may detect and screen out police officer candidates with underlying Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). It is important that candidates with NPD be screened out as, if they become officers, they may commit acts of police misconduct, which greatly affect the safety and trust of the American people.

### **Narcissistic Traits of Police Officers in America**

Potential police officers in the United States must undergo psychological evaluation to ensure they are mentally fit to uphold the law and protect the public. People with stronger narcissistic personality traits tend to be more attracted to occupations with authority due to the level of power and freedom given to the individual (O'Boyle, Forsyth, & McDaniel, 2012). Working in an independent setting with a considerable amount of freedom to do as one chooses with little oversight from their superiors, a career as a police officer may be highly desirable for those with narcissistic traits. Some individuals with narcissistic personality traits often struggle with producing adequate work performance levels when compared to their colleagues without narcissism (O'Boyle et al, 2012). According to the Diagnostic Statistic Manual-5 (DSM-5), Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is defined as "a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy..." (DSM-5, 2013 p. 669). Today, police officers with traits of NPD are more likely to engage in police misconduct (Weiss, Vivian, Weiss, Davis, & Rostow, 2013). Improving the psychological evaluations police officers in the United States undergo may prevent future incidences of police misconduct.

The most widely used psychological assessment conducted on police officers during the pre-employment process is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2, (MMPI-2) (Sellbom, Fischler, & Yossef, 2007). The MMPI-2 is used to test for any levels of psychopathology in the individual that could potentially discredit the law enforcement's integrity in upholding the law by predicting their work performance. According to studies done in 2007 and 2013, crimes commonly committed by police officers include: excessive use of force, substance abuse,

theft, acceptance of bribes, and overall insubordination of superiors (Sellbom et al., 2007; Weiss et al., 2013).

Additional validity scales can be used to better detect how a police officer will perform on duty in the future. One such validity scale commonly used is the L (Lie) scale. The L scale, measuring the “more subtle variable” of deception, is used in concurrence with the MMIP-2 to better predict a police officer’s performance (Weiss et al., 2013). When higher levels of deception are measured, the integrity of the officer’s MMPI-2 results may become questionable.

The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) was specifically developed to measure levels of narcissistic traits, but in the general population, rather than for narcissistic pathologies (Stafford, 2014). The NPI was developed in 1979 based off the DSM-III criteria for NPD. Despite the NPI being specifically developed to measure narcissism, it is not as widely used as the MMPI-2 when evaluating potential police officers. Within the NPI are subscales such as the Entitlement Scale (ENT) and the Exploitativeness Scale which are the most frequently used subscales within in the NPI (Brown, Budzek, & Taborski 2009; Pryor, Miller, & Gaughan, 2008).

The safety of the American people depends greatly upon the men and women consisting of our law enforcement, and police officers who abuse their power can put Americans at greater risk for harm. A police officer with traits of NPD can cast a very large, negative shadow on the trust American citizens put into law enforcement. Through the use of psychological evaluations such as the MMPI-2, MMPI-2 L scale, and the NPI, the number of police candidates who may have performance issues in the future can be reduced. However, the tests currently

used to measure narcissism in police officers may need to be adjusted.

### **Why Psychological Evaluations Are Necessary**

Psychological evaluations performed on potential police officers occur for many reasons when screening through candidates. One reason being that it is very costly for law enforcement to have to constantly hire and train new police officers (Stafford, 2014). Another reason is many police departments promote personnel from within (Sanders, 2008). If an officer is insubordinate towards their superiors early in their career, then they may not be suitable leaders later to set an example for future officers in their department. Being a police officer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is also an extremely stressful occupation (Stafford, 2014). The constant threat of potentially having to sacrifice their life is easy cause for mental unrest for anyone. Ensuring that police officers are mentally equipped to make justifiable decisions during high-stress situations is beneficial for not only the officer themselves, but also the law enforcement organization and the public. With psychological evaluations, future police misconduct in potential applicants can be detected. This can only be made truly effective if proper adjustments are made to the cut off scores established today to better screen out candidates with narcissistic traits who tend to abuse their power.

### **The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2)**

The most commonly used test to measure a police officer's psyche is the MMPI-2. Specifically, the MMPI-2 is a self-reported survey given to future police officers as the last step in their psychological evaluation. Ten clinical scales are used in the MMPI-2, with 567 questions (Greene, 1991).

Participants mark either “true” or “false” for statements provided by the MMPI-2, and their answers are scored in accordance to a normal psychology, as in someone with no pathological personality traits or psychopathologies.

Scale 1 assesses levels of Hypochondriasis (Hs) in the candidate--neuroticism, or extreme feelings of anxiety, surrounding the individuals’ bodily functions (Greene, 1991). Scale 2: Depression (D) measures the candidate’s depressive symptoms. The level of awareness the individual has towards their sociability is measured in Scale 3: Hysteria (Hy) (Greene, 1991). Scale 4: Psychopathic Deviate (Pd) measures the inability to properly adjust to situations, and “the absence of strongly pleasant experiences” (Greene, 1991, p. 151). Scale 5: Masculinity-Femininity (Mf) is an assessment of heteronormative interests and hobbies the individual has. Scale 6: Paranoia (Pa) measures the individual’s personal conflicts in morals, and their distrust towards others. Anxieties and obsessions of the individual are measured in Scale 7: Psychasthenia (Pt). Scale 8: Schizophrenia (Sc) measures self-esteem levels, familial relationships, unique and odd thought processes, tendencies to alienate self, and impulse control. Scale 9: Hypomania (Ma) is used to measure levels of excitement, and unbalanced elated moods. Lastly, Scale 0: Social Introversion (Si) measures where along the introversion-extroversion spectrum the individual lies (Greene, 1991).

Throughout the pre-employment process, candidates must go through rigorous physical testing, background checks, polygraphs, and multiple interviews conducted by superior officers (Stafford 2014). By the time police candidates reach the point of psychological evaluations, many others have already been ruled out as unfit to become officers through these

observations made during the physical and group-work exercises (Sellbom et al., 2007). In doing so, the application pool can become more suitable for serious consideration before on to the next phase of the pre-employment process.

As previously stated, the MMPI-2 is a self-evaluated survey. It can be argued that any candidate can simply lie by either exaggerating or understating their views and feelings with each question. One possible cause for the candidate to underreport or exaggerate their answers on the MMPI-2 is they believe they will create a better portrayal of themselves to the hiring police department (Greene, 1991). It is possible that the stress of the application process and the necessity, or desire, to be hired as a police officer can cause a significant amount of emotional distress and pressure on the candidate. Therefore, the applicant may embellish their answers in hopes of acquiring a better score to seem like a better candidate for hire (Sellbom et al., 2007). Another possible cause is that the candidate truly does not believe that they have any sort of psychopathologies which, according to Greene (1991), “is encountered frequently in...Narcissistic Personality Disorder...” (p. 99).

### **Research Implications**

To ensure the MMPI-2 is a reliable test to evaluate future police performance, many studies are conducted to further solidify and question its validity. One study to test the cutoff T-score of the MMPI-2 was done by Sellbom and colleagues (2007). The initial sample consisted of 426 male police candidates ranging in age from 18 to 48. Most these candidates had at least an associate’s degree level of education. Of the 426 candidates, 135 were not hired for various reasons concerning other aspects of the pre-employment process that took place



before the psychological evaluations; the MMPI-2 was then administered to the remaining candidates (Sellbom et al., 2007).

An Employment Survey (ES) was specifically designed for the study (Sellbom et al., 2007). Supervisors of the employed officers filled out the 26 item ES after an unidentified length of time. The ES inquired about whether an officer had any behavioral problems such as rude language and behavior, excessive use of force, abuse of power, possible alcohol or gambling addictions, abuse of sick leave, uncooperativeness, and whether the supervisor would hire the individual again based on the current knowledge of the officer's work performance. A correlation was found between T-scores of the MMPI-2 and results of the ES. T-scores ranging from 55 and above tended to have more negative ES results. Specifically, T-scores from 55 to 60, while not indicative of any psychopathologies, suggest higher levels of characteristics considered to be undesirable within law enforcement, even though the current cutoff T-score for the MMPI-2 is 65 (Sellbom et al., 2007).

The results of the study may be due to the researchers considering the range restriction that occurs through preselection and selection factors (Sellbom et al., 2007). Preselection factors are the dismissal of police candidates based on other aspects of the pre-employment process that occur before the psychological evaluation such as background check or inability to pass the physical fitness requirements. Selection factors are made during the psychological evaluation phase, and may be dismissed based on a T-score higher than 65 on the MMPI-2. The range of T-scores rarely ever exceed 65 which may suggest that the individuals who would have had elevated T-scores were already screened out before reaching the psychological evaluation stage through preselection factors (Sellbom et al., 2007).

### **The Lie (L) Scale**

When assessing future police officers, the Lie (L) Validity Scale in the MMPI-2 is highly depended upon. The L Scale is used to measure any levels of deception the participant may conduct while filling out the MMPI-2. The L Scale consists of 15 items specifically searching for any minor dishonesties in character or behavior, reluctance to admit occasional aggression, vulnerabilities of character, and negative thoughts (Greene, 1991). If questions like “At times I feel like swearing,” or “Sometimes when I am not feeling well I am irritable” (Greene, 1991, p. 106) are answered ‘false’ by the candidate, then it can be concluded that they are purposefully trying to create an image of themselves that is false (Greene, 1991). For someone with an average emotional intelligence, it is normal to feel a range of emotions when it is appropriate. Rather than depending on the candidate to reveal their psychopathologies, this validity scale measures the test-taker’s likelihood of deception on the entire MMPI-2 itself.

When assessing the L Scale, unrelated factors not measured in the MMPI-2 must be considered. For example, education level and socioeconomic status must also be considered when interpreting the L Scale scores. Those who are college-educated with higher socioeconomic statuses average much lower scores when compared to those not as educated with lower socioeconomic statuses who score much higher (Greene, 1991). As stated before, the stress of the test itself may prompt the candidate to present unrealistic expectations of themselves in a more positive manner (Sellbom et al., 2007). With high scores on the L Scale, and lower score throughout the clinical scales in the MMPI-2, it can be concluded that the candidate is purposefully being deceptive of their character.

### **Research Implications**

Research conducted by Weiss and colleagues (2013) tested the validity of the L Scale. The procedure they followed consisted of 4,348 candidates given conditional offers for future police officer employment. The population in this sample ranged in age from 17 to 78 with 3,701 men and 647 women, and all candidates were educated through at least the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. All candidates were eventually administered the MMPI-2 to begin conducting the psychological evaluation portion of the pre-employment process. Once completed, the scores from the MMPI-2 divided the candidates into two groups based on their L Scale scores. One group, high-L, comprised of 712 candidates with L scores ranging 8 and higher, and the other group, low-L, made up of the remaining 3,636 candidates with scores of 7 and less. After an average length of time of 1.5 years, the men and women given jobs after the psychological evaluations were reevaluated by a supervisor. These supervisors had no prior knowledge of the officers' MMPI-2 score to influence the 32 yes or no questions regarding the individuals' work performance and/or problems (Weiss et al., 2013).

The hypothesis was to test different L scale cutoff scores of 7, 8, and 9 to better predict how police candidates will perform as police officers (Weiss et al., 2013). The 712 candidates scoring between 8 and 10 were found to be more likely to experience work performance problems than the remaining officers scoring between 0 and 7. The work performance problems experienced by the 712 candidates with higher L scores were more likely to receive complaints from citizens regarding their work behavior, improper use of their weapon, and more likely to be terminated for undesirable work behaviors. This study confirms a cutoff score of 8 as being the

most appropriate because it is “low enough that problem individuals will not be easily missed” (Weiss et al., 2013, p. 127).

### **The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI)**

The NPI was developed in 1979 by Robert N. Raskin and Calvin S. Hall using the criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder from the DMN-III. Since the establishment of the NPI there have been three additional DSM publications, each with updated diagnostic criteria for what is considered abnormal by the American Psychological Association (APA). The diagnostic criteria the NPI is based on is over 45 years old, and should be updated to reflect the current DSM-5 diagnostic standards of NPD. Using an updated form of the NPI as a separate test in concurrence with the MMPI-2 may be beneficial when conducting psychological evaluations on future police officers. The many personality traits considered undesirable by law enforcement agencies are entitlement, impulsiveness, excessive grandiosity, exhibitionism, and dominant behavior (O’Boyle et al., 2012; Pryor et al., 2008; & Stafford, 2014). Since these traits are diagnostic features of NPD, the NPI can be used in addition to the MMPI-2. The NPI consists of 40 items, all of which must be answered. The candidates are asked statements such as, “‘I really like to be the center of attention’ vs. ‘It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention’” and must choose between the choices (Ackerman, Witt, Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, & Kashy, 2011).

Within the NPI are subscales used to measure abnormal narcissistic traits (Stafford 2014). One subscale is called the Entitlement Scale (ENT), which specifically calculates levels of entitlement found to correlate to problems with forgiveness, the desire for power, impulsivity, hostility, and aggression (Pryor et

al., 2008). All of these traits of entitlement can be considered undesirable characteristic of police officers, especially when directly interacting with the American public. Another subscale used is the Exploitativeness Subscale, which is described “as having the ability to measure the most maladaptive and problematic aspects of trait narcissism...” (Stafford, 2014, pp. 19-20).

### **Research Implications**

To study whether the NPI would be a sufficient addition to the psychological evaluation process of police officers, Stafford (2014) conducted a study to test whether a correlation existed between the NPI and the MMPI-2. Stafford (2014) explored the possibility of whether the amount of experience on duty influenced a police officer’s higher levels of narcissistic personality traits. A total of 26 police officers participated in the study ranging in age from 25 to 51 years old. There were 21 males and 5 females with on duty experience ranging from 8 months to 22 years, and levels of education from a high school diploma to a graduate degree. Stafford (2014) provided the participants with the NPI along with a selection of questions from the MMPI-2 pertaining to Scale 9: Hypomania.

Stafford (2014) found there was a significant positive correlation between the NPI and Scale 9: Hypomania of the MMPI-2. The traits of narcissism that were found were insubordination, abuse of power, hostility, and high ego. These levels of narcissistic traits were not found to increase or decrease with the number of years on duty the officer had (Stafford, 2014).

### **Treatment Model**

Punishment of police officers with narcissistic traits who are more likely to partake in forms of police misconduct varies widely. It may depend on the individual police officer, the geographic location of the police department, and the severity of misconduct or crime committed by the police officer. If a police officer uses excessive force on a member of the public, that person or their family may file a formal complaint with the police department where an internal investigation may occur if deemed appropriate, however this may not always be the case. A combination of undesirable narcissistic traits along with a number of various citizen complaints of misconduct may constitute for an officer to be terminated. When substantial evidence is found against a police officer who committed some form of sexual assault or drug related crime, the officer may be charged and convicted of prison time in court.

### **Case Studies**

Police officers with narcissistic traits portray their police misconducts through various means. The most common examples are excessive use of force, abuse of power, substance abuse, theft, deception, and insubordination towards superiors (Sellbom et al., 2007; Weiss et al., 2013). Police officers with traits of NPD is evident from decades' past, and all across the United States from large cities to small towns. These narcissistic traits of police officers directly affect the safety of the public by turning them into victims of the crimes law enforcement are sworn to protect against.

#### **Mike Dowd**

An example of a police officer who was prosecuted for the crimes committed as a police officer, both on and off duty, is Mike Dowd—subject of the documentary film *The Seven Five*

(Saidman & Russell, 2014). At 20 years old, Dowd, a Caucasian male, began his work as a patrol officer for the New York Police Department in the 1980s at the 75<sup>th</sup> precinct in Brooklyn, New York. Over the course of 10 years, Dowd exhibited behaviors which could be linked to narcissism such as taking bribes from drug dealers, robbing drug dealers at gunpoint, extortion, narcotics trafficking, and eventually becoming an informant for the drug cartel giving information regarding the NYPD's movements.

Dowd grew up in Suffolk County, New York, and by the time he was 20 he was married with one son and another on the way. He joined the police force because he was unsure of how to provide for his growing family. When Dowd pledged his oath to honor and protect the law he was barely able to afford his family's living expenses making around \$600 a week. Dowd describes he began to feel underappreciated for the work that he was doing, and started taking "a few grand here and there" whenever he and his colleagues were arresting drug dealers with large sums of money.

Dowd's misconduct soon escalated to working exclusively with a Dominican Republic drug boss named Adam Diaz by aiding in dealing crack cocaine. After the first meeting with Dowd and his partner to shake on their arrangement, Diaz stated, "Mike didn't have that cop look. Mike was like me...a gangster" (Saidman & Russell, 2014). The arrangement was for Diaz to pay Dowd and his partner an initial \$24,000 down payment and \$8,000 each weekly for the services Dowd and his partner would provide. These services ranged from "taking out the competition" Diaz had, escorting Diaz's men when they were transporting narcotics or money, and informing Diaz of any heists that were being planned by the 75<sup>th</sup> precinct's narcotics

department. Dowd describes he “felt like God” and had a “real feeling of being in control” (Saidman & Russell, 2014). These feelings of grandiosity are consistent with the diagnostic features of NPD.

During his time at the 75<sup>th</sup> precinct, Dowd was known throughout the station as “out of control,” and a “once in a generation corrupt cop.” Throughout the documentary, Dowd is laughing and shows no empathy when detailing the hundreds of acts of police misconduct he committed during his ten years as a police officer. This may be interpreted as a lack of empathy, a significant diagnostic feature of NPD, for the crimes he committed. The number of lives affected, both directly and indirectly, are unmeasurable by Dowd protecting the distribution of over \$500 million worth of crack cocaine for Diaz (Saidman & Russell, 2014).

### **John Doe**

In early 2001 John Doe, a Caucasian male aged 46, was living in Thousand Oaks, California. John was born and raised in Atlantic City, New Jersey until getting involved with an illegal methamphetamine organization in California in 1999. For nearly two years John was manufacturing, consuming, and dealing methamphetamine throughout the Thousand Oaks, Ventura, and northern Los Angeles areas. In late August 2001, John was pulled over by a Thousand Oaks police officer for driving erratically due to being under the influence of drugs and alcohol. The officer was a Caucasian female in her 40s who used excessive force by pulling him out of his vehicle, pushed him onto the ground, and handcuffed him while she stepped on his face. The officer had ordered John to open the trunk of his vehicle, but John refused. The police officer said, “I know what’s in there.” Reluctantly, John opened the trunk with just



over 8 ounces of methamphetamine valued at over \$20,000. John was taken to jail and charged for possession of methamphetamine, yet was charged for possession of only 3 ounces of methamphetamine. The remaining 5 ounces of meth was unaccounted for, therefore John assumed that the officer took it (Doe, personal communication, April 9, 2016).

### **Daniel Holtzclaw**

Daniel Holtzclaw became a police officer for the Oklahoma City Police Department starting in September 2010 (Redden, 2015). Holtzclaw was born on December 10, 1986 to parents Eric and Kumiko Holtzclaw, resulting in his half-Japanese and half-Caucasian ethnicity. He played football throughout high school and college, and graduated from Eastern Michigan University in 2010 with a degree in Criminal Justice. Holtzclaw had hopes of being drafted into the NFL, but when he was not picked, he chose a career in law enforcement to follow in his father's footsteps (Redden, 2015).

Holtzclaw would stalk and sexually assault African American women with criminal records living in substandard socioeconomic neighborhoods (Redden, 2015). He was interpersonally exploitive, a defining feature of NPD, by threatening to take them to jail and taking advantage of their criminal history if they did not comply with his sexual demands. Some victims also stated that Holtzclaw would claim to have their charges dropped if they performed sexual acts on him. Holtzclaw sexually assaulted women from December 2013 to his arrest in January 2014, with victims ranging in age from 17 to 57. On December 10, 2015, Holtzclaw was found guilty and convicted of 5 accounts of rape and 13 accounts of sexual assault, and was sentenced to 263 years in prison (Redden, 2015).

### **Limitations**

Some limitations occurred in obtaining research concerning narcissistic traits found in police officers and its effect on the American people. There are very few studies conducting research on the use of the NPI being administered during a police candidates' psychological evaluation to measure their future work performance. Stafford (2014) provided some insight to the possible use of the NPI in addition to the MMPI-2, however, the sample size of 26 participants was extremely small, therefore not a promising representation of all police officers in law enforcement. In the studies conducted by Sellbom and colleagues (2007), Stafford (2014), and Weiss and colleagues (2013), a very large majority of all participants were Caucasian males. Longitudinal studies were also nearly nonexistent in measuring the work behavior of officers scoring higher in levels of narcissism.

### **Future Research**

For future research, long-term qualitative studies should be conducted on police officers to compare their scores obtained from the MMPI-2 with their documented work behavior beyond five years of on duty experience. This may be beneficial in forming adjustment to the MMPI-2 cutoff scores. An updated NPI with the most recent DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for NPD may also be used in concurrence with the MMPI-2 to better analyze and predict work performance of police candidates. Studies with more significant representation of female police officers should also be conducted because there may be a need for establishing gender-oriented differences in predicting work performance.

### Conclusion

Since police officers with traits of NPD are more likely to engage in police misconduct (Weiss et al., 2013), the safety of the American people is greatly dependent on the mental health of police officers. The 17-year-old rape victim of Daniel Holtzclaw testified in court, “What am I going to do? Call the cops? He was a cop,” when confronted about why she did not tell the authorities she had been assaulted by Holtzclaw sooner (Redden, 2015). Her feelings may also resonate with others who have been, and will be, victims of police misconduct by police officers with narcissistic traits. With future research, clearer observations may be made to make positive changes to the psychological evaluations of police officer candidates. Improvements to the MMPI-2, L scale, and NPI during psychological evaluations may greatly help to prevent the employment of police officers with traits of NPD, and ensure safer officers and safer communities.

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