Don't Get Mad, Get Even: Psychopaths' Reactions to Interpersonal Provocations

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What is psychopathy?

- Extensive clinical and forensic literature (e.g., Cleckley, 1941)
- Robert Hare (Hare, 1980; 2003)

- Impulsive thrill seeking
- Callous affect

→ Antisocial behavior
What is psychopathy?

- Validated in *subclinical* populations (e.g., Nathanson, 2003; Nathanson et al., 2003, under review; Williams & Paulhus, in press)
‘Psychopathic processes’

- Psychological processes
- Hypothetical, third-person provocation scenarios
- Hostile cognitive bias (HCB)
- HCB: Partial mediator of antisocial behavior

Nathanson, Paulhus, & Williams, 2004
‘Psychopathic processes’

- But...
- Memories of *personally experienced* provocations
- *Provoked* rather than *provokers*
Reactions to social rejection

- Twenge and Campbell (2003)

- Narcissists
  - High anger
  - Low distress
  - Increased aggression
Interpersonal provocations

- What types of incidents provoke psychopaths?
  - Social rejection (?)
  - Physically bullied
  - Publicly insulted
  - Conned or manipulated
Responses

- How do psychopaths respond to interpersonal provocations?

- Affect
  - Anger
  - Distress

- Revenge
Method

- N = 57 UBC undergraduates
- Hare Self Report Psychopathy (SRP; Paulhus, Hemphill, & Hare, in press)
  - 40 items, 5-point Likert scale
  - “I’m not afraid to step on others to get what I want”
  - “It’s amusing to see other people get tricked”
Method – continued

- For *each* of the following, recall an incident in which you were:
  1. Socially rejected
  2. Conned or manipulated
  3. Physically bullied
  4. Publicly insulted

- Write a brief paragraph
Method – continued

- How did you respond to the incident?
- Three categories of items
  - Distress (e.g., upset, frustrated)
  - Anger (e.g., angry, hostile)
  - Revenge (wanted revenge, performed revenge)
    - Highly correlated (average $r = .52$)
A tale of revenge

- “One day I was walking with my younger sister (14) to a nearby store when a couple of boys around 16 years old started throwing snowballs at us.

- “Given the fact that I am very protective of my sister and that I have competed in numerous judo competitions...
A tale of revenge - continued

“... when the boys refused to stop hurting us after about 5 warnings I finally beat them up (lightly of course).”
## Results: Distress

- **average $r = -0.05$**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social rejection</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conned or manipulated</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physically bullied</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publicly insulted</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Results: Anger

- average $r = .08$
- NB: Physically bullied

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social rejection</td>
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<td>Conned or manipulated</td>
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<td>Physically bullied</td>
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<td>Publicly insulted</td>
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## Results: Revenge

- Average $r = .35$

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Social rejection</td>
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<td>Publicly insulted</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Revenge: What about the Big Five?

- McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson (2001)

- Big Five:
  - high Neuroticism
  - low Agreeableness
Revenge: What about the Big Five?

- Negative correlation between psychopathy and Agreeableness (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002)
Total revenge = mean revenge score ($\alpha = .74$)

Big Five: BFI-44 (John & Srivastava, 1999)
## Predicting total revenge: Big Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Five trait</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
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<td>Neuroticism</td>
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<td>Openness</td>
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<td>Predictors</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
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<td>Openness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychopathy</td>
<td>.43</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
General discussion

- In reaction to interpersonal provocation, psychopaths are:
  - No more or less distressed than non-psychopaths
  - No more or less angry than non-psychopaths
  - NB: Physically bullied
Anger after being physically bullied

- Negates image of toughness
- 'Wimpiness'
- Submission, lack of dominance
Don't get mad, get even

- Psychopaths don’t get mad
  - Except for physically bullied
- Psychopaths get even
  - Regardless of the provocation
  - Highly similar effect sizes
Summary

- Psychopaths generally show little emotional reaction to interpersonal provocations
- Psychopaths are easily provoked
- Psychopathy predicts revenge above and beyond the Big Five
What’s so special about psychopathy?

- Callous affect
  - AKA low Agreeableness
  - Do not care about consequences

- Impulsivity
  - Immediate retribution

- Dangerous combination
Revenge

“an attempt to redress an interpersonal offense by voluntarily committing an aggressive action against the perceived offender.”

(McCullough et al., 2001, p. 602)
Types of revenge

A) “spontaneous and impulsive”
   - Reactive

B) “result[s] from ruminative thinking”
   - Instrumental

- Psychopaths displayed more immediate, spontaneous aggression (reactive)
- and protracted, methodical aggression (instrumental)
A challenge

- An apparent paradox!
- Psychopaths’ impulsivity...
- ...with protracted, methodical revenge

- Attempts at resolution
Thank you!

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Psychopathy, Agreeableness, and total revenge

- Agreeableness and total revenge: $r = -.28$

- Psychopathy and Agreeableness: $r = -.46$

- Psychopathy and total revenge: $r = .45$