Examining the Effect of Psychopathic Boldness on Helping Behaviours

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Examining the Effect of Psychopathic Boldness on Helping Behaviours

Psychopathy is a personality disorder characterized by pervasive guiltlessness, callousness, superficial charm, poor impulse control, grandiosity, and risk taking (Lilienfeld et al., 2012, p. 489). Much of the research that has been conducted on the disorder has focused on its associations with unsuccessful or criminal behaviours, and “some studies have found significant relationships between psychopathy and sexual recidivism” (e.g. Olver & Wong, 2006, p. 66). However, in recent years, researchers have begun to explore the possibility that some of the personality traits associated with psychopathy may not be inherently detrimental, and may instead help psychopathic individuals lead successful lives in the general public (Lilienfeld et al., 2018, p. 166). For instance, an individual that displays high levels of interpersonal potency, charisma, venturesomeness, and calmness in the face of danger (i.e., boldness) in the absence of other psychopathic personality traits may be relatively successful, and may be more likely to risk personal safety to help others (Lilienfeld et al., 2018, p. 173). Boldness is associated with adaptive leadership styles and heroism in presidential samples (Lilienfeld et al., 2012, p. 490), and research has also indicated that even in undergraduate samples, higher levels of boldness may contribute an individual’s choosing to help others (Smith et al., 2013, p. 644).

A study by White (2014) provided some further insight into the motivations of high boldness individuals in engaging in helping behaviours (p. 117). These researchers recruited 539 undergraduate students for this study in an attempt to uncover correlations between psychopathic traits and specific types of altruism. They found that primary psychopaths appear to recognize that they are more likely to help when there is some benefit to doing so (i.e. witnesses hailing them as a hero). These results suggest that individuals high in primary psychopathy may be
motivated to help not because of an empathic response, but rather because of the recognition they will receive as a result (White, 2014, p. 119).

Methods Section

Participants for this study will include undergraduate students from MacEwan University. This sample will likely be comprised of individuals between the ages of 18-45, and will likely display a gender split of about 60% females and 40% males. The study will be advertised on MacEwan’s SONA system, where students are provided with an overview of the study before choosing to provide consent.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

A brief demographic questionnaire has been developed for the purpose of this study as a means of collecting basic information about participants, including gender, age, ethnicity, academic major, breadth of psychology courses taken (see Appendix).

The Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM)

The Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick et al., 2009, para. 2-3) is a 58 item self-report measure of psychopathic personality designed to assess the phenotypic constructs of boldness, meanness, and disinhibition. Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 3 (True) to 0 (False), and include 20 questions indexing disinhibition, 19 questions indexing boldness, and 19 questions indexing meanness (Patrick et al., 2009, para. 2-3). The TriPM has been used in studies of undergraduate samples and has displayed strong test-retest reliability and validity (Blagov et al., 2016, p. 72).

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References


Smith, S. F., Lilienfeld, S. O., Coffey, K., & Dabbs, J. M. (2013). Are psychopaths and heroes twigs off the same branch?: Evidence from college, community, and presidential samples.
Journal of Research in Personality, 47, 634-646.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2013.05.006


https://10.1016/j.paid.2013.08.033
Appendix

Demographic Questionnaire

Questions for Participants

Gender:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Academic major:

Breadth of psychology courses taken: