

Primary and Secondary Psychopathic Traits: Assessing Differences in Interpersonal Relationships through Friendship, Emotional Contagion, and Social Rewards

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Abstract : Psychopathic traits are marked by a lack of empathy and an inability to maintain meaningful relationships. Yet little research has investigated differences in interpersonal relationships between primary and secondary psychopathic traits. Emotional contagion, the tendency to automatically mimic others' facial expressions and movements, is a type of empathy contributing to relationship quality. Additionally, the motivating and pleasurable aspects of social interaction, social reward is integral to understanding relationships. Therefore, the current research investigated interpersonal relationships through relationship status, the quality of friendships, the susceptibility to positive (happiness, love) and negative (sadness, fear, anger) emotional contagion, and social reward. Recruited online, 389 participants between 18 and 76 years old (M = 33.61; of which 241 were female) completed self-report questionnaires assessing primary and secondary psychopathic traits, friendship, emotional contagion, and social rewards. Hierarchical multiple regression showed relationship status as a protective factor and that individuals with secondary psychopathic traits are less likely to be in a relationship. This study is the first to investigate emotional contagion with primary and secondary psychopathic traits. Emotional contagion for sadness predicted secondary psychopathic traits. Negative social potency (enjoying being cruel and antagonistic to others) predicted both primary and secondary traits. However, admiration and prosocial interactions only predicted primary psychopathic traits. Findings infer differences in maintaining relationships, regulating emotions, empathising with others through emotional contagion, and motivation to socially engage, perhaps due to each dimensions' distinct origins and manifestations.

Keywords : primary psychopathic traits, secondary psychopathic traits, interpersonal relationships, friendship, emotional contagion, social reward

Conference Title : ICSPGDTRP 2022 : International Conference on Social Psychology, Group Dynamics, Theory, Research and Practice

Conference Location : Berlin, Germany

Conference Dates : July 21-22, 2022