The Joys of Hurting Others: Everyday Sadism and the Dark Tetrad of Personality

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Introduction

The Dark Triad of personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) consists of three noxious traits: subclinical psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism.

A Dark Tetrad?
• Chabrol et al. (2009) proposed to add sadism to the cast of villains.

“Everyday” Sadism : Callous tendency to enjoy the suffering of others.

1) Direct sadism (enjoy personally inflicting suffering)
2) Vicarious sadism (e.g., through movies, video games)

The Varieties of Sadistic Tendencies Scale (VAST; Paulhus et al., in prep):

Study 1: Desire to Kill Bugs

Choose from the following:
1. Kill bugs yourself
2. Help experimenter kill bugs
3. Clean toilets
4. Ice water pain tolerance

Sadism low
Sadism high

Study 2: Hurting Innocent Victims

- White-noise aggression task. Ostensible opponent: innocent same-sex student who NEVER blasted participant.
- Randomly assigned to:
  1. No Work Condition
  2. Work Condition: Must complete a boring counting task to punish opponent.

When aggression was EASY (no work required):

When aggression was HARD (work required):

Direct Sadism
r = .40*

Perspective Taking
r = -.39

Study 3: Vicarious Pleasure from Gore

Used the Affective Mislatributio Procedure (AMP) to assess implicit positive affect to gore.
- Afterwards, given the opportunity to view the gore photos discreetly at own leisure.

Vicarious sadism was the strongest (and only sig.) predictor: Remained sig. when controlling for the Dark Triad, r = .28, p = .046; r = .24, p = .009.

Discussion

- Everyday sadism is a useful personality construct with unique antisocial outcomes.
- Direct sadists went out of their way to hurt other people and animals. They were even willing to expend time and effort (personal cost) to do so. Likely due to intrinsic pleasure.
- Vicarious sadists displayed implicit associations between gore and positive emotions.
- Direct sadists did not.
- Apparently direct sadists do not necessarily enjoy graphic sadistic imagery. They enjoy the experience of hurting.

Independence from the Dark Triad supports the incorporation of sadism into the new “Dark Tetrad” of personality.

References


