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Spiteful and Contemptuous: A New Look at the Emotional Experiences Related to Psychopathy

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Psychopathy has long been conceptualized in terms of an absence of emotion. Yet, recent studies have suggested that the experience of other-directed negative emotions may be more intimately linked to psychopathy than previously acknowledged, although there is limited knowledge concerning the experience of such emotions. The present study examined the disposition to experience two other-directed emotions, spitefulness and contempt, that are conceptually linked with psychopathy but currently are limited in empirical support. Across 2 studies with 3 nonclinical samples ($N_s = 1,237, 239, 521$), we found evidence that psychopathic traits—as assessed via the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP; Paulhus, Neumann, & Hare, 2016; Study 1 and Study 2) and the Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick, 2010; Study 2)—were positively associated with spitefulness (Study 1) and contempt (Study 2). These associations were consistent across psychopathy instruments (SRP and TriPM) and dimensions (i.e., the SRP Interpersonal, Affective, Lifestyle, and Antisocial facets, and the TriPM Meanness and Disinhibition dimensions), were stronger for the interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy, and held when accounting for several theoretically relevant covariates. The only exception concerned the TriPM Boldness scale, which had less consistent associations with contempt. The present findings further our understanding of the emotional experiences related to psychopathy, highlighting the relevance of focusing on other-directed negative emotions, especially those that are interpersonal in nature and share an antagonistic component.

Keywords: psychopathic personality, spitefulness, contempt, negative affect, antagonism

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Psychopathy was one of the first forms of personality pathology to be identified and one that has attracted an abundance of empirical research (Crego & Widiger, 2015; Hare & Neumann, 2008; Patrick, Fowles, & Krueger, 2009). Psychopathy is a multidimensional construct, but contemporary conceptualizations differ in the emphasis placed on certain components. There is general consensus that psychopathic traits span across interpersonal (i.e., grandiosity and manipulation), affective (i.e., callousness and lack of empathy), and behavioral (impulsivity along with early, persistent, and versatile antisocial tendencies; Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann,

2008) domains. Yet, recent debates have concerned the relevance of antisocial tendencies (e.g., overt aggression and criminal versatility) and potentially adaptive features (e.g., boldness/fearless dominance) as stand-alone components within the psychopathy construct (Crego & Widiger, 2015; Lilienfeld et al., 2012; Lynam & Miller, 2012; Miller & Lynam, 2012).

Gross emotional disturbances have long been thought to underlie the development and manifestation of psychopathy (Cleckley, 1976; Hare & Neumann, 2008; Hoppenbrouwers, Bulten, & Brazil, 2016; Meloy, 1988; Patrick et al., 2009). This has led investigators to study emotional experiences involved in psychopathy because affective disturbances may also be involved in resistance to treatment and prevention efforts (Kosson, Vitacco, Swogger, & Steuerwald, 2016). Initially, research focused on the early two-factor conceptualization of psychopathy (as assessed with the Psychopathy Checklist—Revised [PCL-R] and its derivatives; Hare, 2003)—which groups together Interpersonal–Affective (Factor 1) and Lifestyle–Antisocial (Factor 2) traits—and a broad-band operationalization of emotion that simply focused on positive and negative emotionality. Some studies found that negative emotionality was positively associated with the behavioral features of psychopathy but negatively associated with the interpersonal–

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affective traits (Hicks & Patrick, 2006). Based on these findings, several authors have argued that a genetically influenced inability to experience (some) negative emotions lies at the core of psychopathy and is consequential for the development of its affective features (Cooke, Michie, Hart, & Clark, 2004; Fowles & Dindo, 2009). This conceptualization has fueled the popular, but incorrect, belief that psychopathic individuals are fundamentally devoid of emotions (Baskin-Sommers, 2017).

However, historical and contemporary descriptions of psychopathy posit disturbances in the experience of certain emotions (i.e., long-circuited, mature, and social emotions), rather than negative emotions *tout court* (for a review, see Hoppenbrouwers et al., 2016). Accordingly, some investigators have proffered more nuanced views regarding emotional experience in psychopathy, by untangling the broader construct of negative emotionality into narrow-band emotion families. It has been suggested that psychopathy might be related to lower levels of self-directed negative emotions but greater levels of other-directed negative emotions (Benning, 2013; Lynam & Widiger, 2007; Meloy, 1988). Of note, these associations theoretically should not be limited to the behavioral traits but extend to affective features of psychopathy (Benning, 2013; Ross, Benning, Patrick, Thompson, & Thurston, 2009). This perspective has since accumulated empirical support, though most previous studies have focused on the experience and expression of anger—which is considered to be intimately connected to the aggression shown by psychopathic individuals—and have reported robust links between core psychopathic traits and greater levels of anger (Hoppenbrouwers et al., 2016; Jackson, Neumann, & Vitacco, 2007; Kosson et al., 2016).

Other historical perspectives, mostly from a psychodynamic framework, have proposed that psychopathic individuals evidence pathological levels of intense other-directed negative emotions, such as contempt (Meloy, 1988), that is, a feeling defined by the tendency to look down on, feel cold toward, distance oneself from, and derogate others (Schriber, Chung, Sorensen, & Robins, 2017). More specifically, Meloy (1988) argued that not only would psychopaths feel contempt, but they would also derive pleasure and gratification from this feeling (i.e., contemptuous delight). Such an affective predisposition may also involve sadistic tendencies, whereby pleasure is derived through demeaning and hurtful interactions with others (Foulkes, Seara-Cardoso, Neumann, Rogers, & Viding, 2014; Robertson & Knight, 2014). This perspective suggests that the harmful behaviors displayed by psychopathic individuals, including those that are more instrumental and premeditated in nature, can be linked to a concordant affective experience involving disdain or contempt for others. A more far-reaching implication of this perspective is that the experience of other-directed negative emotions involved in psychopathy may extend beyond the experience of short-circuited feelings of anger and frustration (Cleckley, 1976), to include certain emotions, such as contempt, that involve a more long-standing affective propensity (Schriber et al., 2017) and are inherently social and interpersonal in nature (Kosson et al., 2016; Matsumoto, Frank, & Hwang, 2015).

Contempt has been conceptualized as a basic emotion (Izard, 1977), like anger, fear, sadness, and happiness, and is universally expressed and recognized across cultures (Ekman & Heider, 1988). Other research suggests contempt is a cognitively complex emotion (Tracy & Robins, 2008), such as embarrassment, pride,

and shame, and is related to but empirically distinct from other constructs such as disagreeableness (antagonism or low agreeableness), dispositional anger, and social dominance orientation (Schriber et al., 2017). In addition, it appears that complex emotions like contempt entail specific neurobiological substrates that are partly separate from neural systems associated with other basic emotions (Zeki & Romaya, 2008). A functional role of contempt may be to internally or overtly render others as worthless or unacceptable and may also involve a desire to take action through violence (Mindell, 1994; Tausch et al., 2011, as discussed in Schriber et al., 2017). Finally, contempt is not as easily recognized as are other emotion expressions (Tracy & Robins, 2008), and thus may be relatively easy to disguise.

Critically, contempt is fundamentally different from the more basic, self-directed types of emotions that are typically studied in relation to psychopathy (e.g., fear and sadness), due to its interpersonal nature. The possibility that psychopathic individuals may experience more complex (social) emotions is supported by recent studies showing that psychopathic traits are positively related to the experience of malicious envy (Lange, Paulhus, & Crusius, 2018) and pride (Costello, Unterberger, Watts, & Lilienfeld, 2018). This view fits with research suggesting a core component of psychopathy involves low communion, defined by not only lack of affiliation but also overt dis-sociality and antagonism (Lynam & Miller, 2015; Neumann, Hare, & Newman, 2007; Sherman & Lynam, 2017). Thus, rather than being flat or shallow, the emotional experiences of psychopathic individuals may involve emotions that are functionally linked to their antagonistic tendencies (Foulkes et al., 2014; Glenn, Efferson, Iyer, & Graham, 2017; Meloy, 2012).

To date, although a reference to contempt is made in the description of the “Callousness/Lack of Empathy” item of the PCL-R (Hare, 2003), the role of contempt in psychopathy, and in personality more generally (Schriber et al., 2017), has been largely unexplored via empirical research. One reason is that a psychometrically sound measure of contempt was not available until recently. In recent years, two measures were developed to assess dispositional contempt and spite, also a other-directed emotion that is closely linked to contempt (Marcus, Zeigler-Hill, Mercer, & Norris, 2014; Schriber et al., 2017). Whereas contempt involves viewing others with disdain, spite is characterized by the willingness to incur a cost to oneself to inflict greater harm on another individual (Marcus & Norris, 2016; Zeigler-Hill, Noser, Roof, Vonk, & Marcus, 2015). Although contempt and spite are related constructs, there are meaningful distinctions between them, such that contempt is related to an action tendency to distance oneself from others, whereas spite is related to an action tendency to approach others to inflict harm on them.

Although early theories concerning the relevance of contempt for psychopathy did not include an explicit reference to spitefulness, Cleckley (1976) noted that psychopaths may experience other-directed emotions, such as “spite” (p. 380), but did not believe they were deep or sustained (Kosson et al., 2016). Thus, an empirical question is whether spite has similar associations with psychopathic propensities as does contempt, and there are reasons to expect that this is the case. First, contempt and spitefulness represent covert and overt dispositions, respectively, to despise others (Marcus et al., 2014; Schriber et al., 2017). Second, both contempt and spitefulness have moderate-to-strong positive asso-

ciations with antagonism (i.e., low agreeableness) and low-to-moderate associations with disinhibition (i.e., low conscientiousness; Marcus et al., 2014; Schriber et al., 2017; Zeigler-Hill & Noser, 2016), which are robust correlates of psychopathy (Lynam & Widiger, 2007; Miller & Lynam, 2015). In the validation study of the Dispositional Contempt Scale (DCS; Schriber et al., 2017), a strong positive association was found between contempt and psychopathy, as assessed with a measure of the Dark Triad of personality traits (i.e., psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism). In addition, spitefulness has been positively linked with psychopathic traits, with relatively stronger effect sizes for interpersonal and affective features (Marcus, Preszler, & Zeigler-Hill, 2018; Marcus et al., 2014). Taken together, these results are consistent with the characterization of spite and contempt as (complex) emotions that have a significant interpersonal component.

However, it remains unclear whether dispositional contempt and spite are uniquely related to theoretically central affective and interpersonal psychopathic traits. As discussed, contempt is a complex (other-directed) emotion that has a social/moral interpersonal nature and also entails a coldness toward others. Based on previous theory and recent research, we expected that contempt and spite would both have significant unique associations with the interpersonal-affective features of psychopathy. Given the dissociative nature of contempt and spite, an open question is whether they are also associated with overt antisocial features of psychopathy. It has been argued that the associations that interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy have with negative emotions are due to the variance they share with the antisocial and lifestyle traits of psychopathy (Fowles & Dindo, 2009; Patrick et al., 2009). As such, a related concern is whether the experience of negative emotions, including contempt, in individuals with psychopathic traits is simply due to general externalizing symptoms related to psychopathy, including propensities for disinhibition, emotion dysregulation, and negative affect (for a new perspective on emotion regulation in psychopathy, cf. Garofalo & Neumann, in press). Therefore, it is important to examine whether unique associations remain between psychopathic traits and contempt and spite when relevant correlates are accounted for (e.g., antagonism, disinhibition, emotion dysregulation, anger, and negative emotionality).

Identifying the relevance of complex social emotions such as contempt and spite for psychopathy may have important implications. From a conceptual point of view, evidence of the tendency to experience contempt and spite may provide further insight into the emotional lives of individuals with psychopathic traits and provide a counter to the long-held view that these individuals simply have a general emotional deficit (Kosson et al., 2016). Another conceptual advantage would be to potentially offer a novel explanation for some of the behavioral manifestations of psychopathy, such as the tendency for individuals with psychopathic traits to engage in inadequately motivated or counterproductive antisocial behavior (Cleckley, 1976; Neumann et al., 2007). The capacity of individuals with psychopathic traits to experience complex emotions like contempt and spite may also spur further research on the development of the affective features that characterize psychopathy (Foulkes, Neumann, Roberts, McCrory, & Viding, 2017).

Elaborating on the conceptual and empirical work reviewed earlier, the present studies examined the relevance of spite and contempt for psychopathy across three independent nonclinical

samples that used two measures of psychopathy. We expected psychopathic traits to be positively associated with spitefulness and contempt, with these associations being stronger for affective and interpersonal psychopathic traits. We also tested the robustness of these associations by controlling for the covariates identified earlier, namely, negative emotionality, anger, emotion dysregulation, and basic personality traits that are conceptually and empirically linked with psychopathy, spitefulness, and contempt (e.g., agreeableness and conscientiousness). Some of these covariates were planned for the purpose of the present study, whereas others were chosen among variables that were available in an archival data set (see Method section for details). Controlling for these covariates allowed us to examine whether spitefulness and contempt had unique relevance for psychopathy or if their hypothesized relations with psychopathy could be accounted for by known correlates of psychopathy that share some overlap with and may subsume spitefulness and contempt. Based on previous research (Schriber et al., 2017), we expected that contempt and spite would continue to show significant associations with interpersonal-affective psychopathic traits when these correlates were controlled for.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedures. Participants were drawn from archival data collected for other purposes. This sample consisted of 1,237 psychology undergraduate students (943 female; 76.2%) at a North American university, who received course credits to participate in research. The mean age of the participants was 19.96 years ($SD = 3.03$, range = 18–55). The majority of participants identified as White ($N = 938$, 75.8%), followed by Black ($N = 121$, 9.8%), Asian ($N = 67$, 5.4%), Hispanic ($N = 28$, 2.3%), American Indian ($N = 7$, 0.6%), and Pacific Islander ($N = 3$, 0.2%); 73 participants (5.9%) identified as “Other.” Additional demographic information are reported in the online supplemental materials. The study was approved by Oakland University ethics review board.

Measures.¹

Self-Report Psychopathy Scale. The Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP; Paulhus et al., 2016) was used to assess psychopathic traits in Study 1. The SRP is a self-report questionnaire modeled after the PCL-R (Hare, 2003), which yields total psychopathy scores along with scores on four facets: Interpersonal, Affective, Lifestyle, and Antisocial. The version used in this study was based on the factor analysis of the items of the SRP-II reported by Mahmut, Menictas, Stevenson, and Homewood (2011), because the most recent version of the scale (see Study 2) was not yet available at the time of data collection. This version contained 34 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Previous studies have provided extensive support for the four-factor structure of the SRP, as well as good reliability and construct validity across different populations (Lester, Salekin, & Sellbom, 2013; Neumann, Hare, & Pardini, 2015). Items were averaged to produce total and facet scores, with greater scores indicating higher levels of psychopathic traits.

¹ Internal consistency (alpha) coefficients for all study variables are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Internal Consistency Coefficient (α), Mean (M), and Standard Deviation (SD) for All Study Variables

Measures	Study 1 ($N = 1237$)			Study 2, Sample 1 ($N = 239$)			Study 2, Sample 2 ($N = 521$)		
	α	M	SD	α	M	SD	α	M	SD
SRP^a									
Psychopathy total	.90	1.97	.52	.88	1.77	0.47	.89	1.66	0.47
Interpersonal	.68	2.15	.65	.78	1.91	0.69	.80	1.81	0.66
Affective	.77	1.76	.60	.67	1.86	0.60	.67	1.76	0.57
Lifestyle	.77	2.44	.73	.70	2.17	0.65	.76	1.95	0.67
Antisocial	.83	1.61	.64	.68	1.22	0.39	.69	1.19	0.39
TriPM									
Psychopathy total				.87	54.33	17.51	.87	52.97	16.53
Boldness				.84	27.70	8.91	.83	30.42	8.40
Meanness				.84	11.95	7.72	.86	10.40	7.91
Disinhibition				.84	14.68	7.88	.83	12.16	7.23
SPITE									
Spitefulness	.91	1.83	.69						
DCS									
Dispositional contempt				.86	2.09	0.67	.84	2.03	0.67
DERS^a									
Emotion dysregulation	.94	2.57	.64	.92	2.44	0.78	.93	2.09	0.72
HEXACO									
Honesty–Humility	.69	3.45	.61						
Emotionality	.78	3.50	.67						
Agreeableness	.74	3.19	.62						
Conscientiousness	.77	3.65	.62						
State emotions									
Anger				.75	0.64	0.99	.77	0.61	1.10
Negative emotionality				.90	0.82	0.98	.89	0.75	0.93
Trait emotions									
Anger				.82	1.52	1.26	.77	1.42	1.10
Negative emotionality				.88	1.86	1.09	.91	1.54	1.06
ATE									
Attitudes toward anger				.75	1.88	0.70	.65	1.81	0.63

Note. SRP = Self-Report Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; SPITE = Spitefulness Scale; DCS = Dispositional Contempt Scale; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale; ATE = Attitude Toward Emotions Scale.

^a Two different versions of the SRP and the DERS were used in Study 1 (i.e., SRP-II and DERS) and Study 2 (i.e., Self-Report Psychopathy—Short Form and Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-16). See Measures sections for more details.

Spitefulness Scale. The Spitefulness Scale (Marcus et al., 2016) was used to assess spitefulness in Sample 1. The Spitefulness Scale is a 17-item self-report questionnaire, with items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. This scale assesses individual differences in the willingness to engage in behaviors aimed at harming another person but that would also involve potential harm to oneself (e.g., “Part of me enjoys seeing the people I do not like fail even if their failure hurts me in some way”). The Spitefulness Scale produces a total score, with greater scores indicating higher levels of spite. Previous studies have documented the adequate psychometric properties of the Spitefulness Scale (Marcus et al., 2014).

HEXACO-60. Some of the scales of the HEXACO-60 (Honesty–humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness; Ashton & Lee, 2009) were used as covariates in this sample. The HEXACO-60 is a 60-item self-report questionnaire that measures six basic personality dimensions: Honesty–Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience. Participants were asked to rate to what extent they agreed with each item using scales that ranged from 1 to 5. The HEXACO-60 has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Ashton & Lee, 2009). For the purpose of the present study, we used four of the six HEXACO scales: Honesty–Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Con-

scientiousness. These scales were chosen because of their associations with psychopathy and/or spitefulness in past studies.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) was used to control for levels of emotion dysregulation, in light of its overlap with negative affect. The DERS is a self-report questionnaire of emotion dysregulation that includes 36 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The DERS captures difficulties in different aspects of emotion regulation, namely, emotional awareness, understanding, and acceptance; ability to engage in goal-directed behavior and refrain from impulsive behavior when distressed; and access to effective emotion-regulation strategies. The DERS total score represents a reliable and valid index of overall emotion dysregulation (John & Eng, 2014).

Data analytic plan. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency α coefficients were computed for all study variables. Pearson zero-order correlations were used to examine the bivariate associations between SRP scores and spitefulness. Next, (semi)partial correlations were computed to test the robustness of the zero-order correlations controlling for each of the covariates (Emotionality, Agreeableness, Honesty–Humility, Conscientiousness, emotion dysregulation, age, and sex). Further, to examine the independent contribution of the unique variance in each psychopathy facet, we

conducted multiple regression analyses, regressing the spitefulness total score on the four SRP facets, entered simultaneously. Finally, we repeated these analyses, entering in the first step of each (hierarchical) multiple regression analysis, the same covariates used in correlation analysis, and the SRP facets in Step 2.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are displayed in Table 1. All variables were reasonably normally distributed, as skewness and kurtosis values did not exceed |1.41|. All variables were correlated in the expected direction (see Table 2 for a full correlation matrix). A uniform pattern of significant positive associations between spitefulness and psychopathy scores was evident. Notably, none of these associations was meaningfully altered when partial and semi-partial correlation analyses were conducted to control for several covariates (see online supplemental materials). Results of multiple regression analyses examining the independent contribution of the unique variance in each SRP facet on spitefulness scores are reported in Table 3. Variance inflation factor values did not exceed 1.98, indicating that multicollinearity did not bias regression results. Psychopathy scores explained a substantial portion of the variance (roughly 38%) in spitefulness scores, and the affective, interpersonal, and antisocial facets of the SRP emerged as significant predictors. These analyses were repeated controlling for the same covariates used in correlation analyses and the results were unaltered.

Supplementary item-level confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were run to formally test the empirical link between HEXACO Agreeableness and spite, and also HEXACO Honesty–Humility and spite, given some investigators might consider spite to simply be a component of agreeableness and/or honesty–humility. Thus, we ran a one-factor model where the respective HEXACO and spite items loaded onto a single factor versus specifying the HEXACO and spite items to load on their own respective factors (i.e., a two-factor model). As it turned out, for both CFAs, the two-factor model produced far superior fit (one-factor results: comparative fit index = .86–.87, root mean square error of approximation = .11–.10 vs. two-factor results: comparative fit index = .93–.96, root mean square error of approximation =

.06–.05). The correlations between the latent HEXACO Agreeableness and Honesty–Humility factors and the Spite factor were, respectively, $r = -.35$ and $r = -.54$ ($ps < .001$). As such, these results provide evidence for overlapping yet distinct HEXACO and spite constructs.

Interim Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided evidence that psychopathic traits are positively related to individual differences in spitefulness: As the degree of psychopathic traits increases, so does the disposition to feel spiteful toward others more frequently and intensely. Of note, these associations could not be explained by any of the covariates considered, all of which have conceptual and empirical overlap with psychopathy and/or spitefulness. Consistent with previous research on contempt (Schriber et al., 2017), the current associations were not explained by low agreeableness, indicating that there is something unique in the feeling of spite—as opposed to general antagonism—that is related to psychopathy. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the unique variance in the affective psychopathy facet emerged as the stronger predictor of spitefulness, followed by the antisocial and interpersonal facets. The association between psychopathic traits and spite may explain why psychopathic individuals can be driven by the goal of inflicting pain or harm to others, even if this implies personal setbacks, in line with the possibility that psychopathic individuals nurture and derive pleasure from feelings of contempt for others (Meloy, 1988). Although Study 1 provided indirect evidence for links between psychopathy and contempt, it relied on archival data and on a single measure of psychopathy. Study 2 was designed to extend these findings testing relations between two measures of psychopathy and contempt.

Study 2

Method

Participants and procedures. Study 2 involved an undergraduate (Sample 1) and a community (Sample 2) sample. More detailed demographic information is reported in the online supple-

Table 2
Full Correlation Matrix Among Variables in Study 1 ($N = 1,237$)

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. SRP Interpersonal	—									
2. SRP Affective	.58***	—								
3. SRP Lifestyle	.48***	.39***	—							
4. SRP Antisocial	.51***	.62***	.55***	—						
5. SRP total	.79***	.79***	.77***	.85***	—					
6. SPITE	.46***	.56***	.34***	.53***	.59***	—				
7. Honesty–Humility	-.42***	-.41***	-.32***	-.40***	-.48***	-.41***	—			
8. Emotionality	-.38***	-.30***	-.31***	-.19***	-.36***	-.16***	.10***	—		
9. Agreeableness	-.18***	-.35***	-.12***	-.14***	-.24***	-.25***	.30***	-.10***	—	
10. Conscientiousness	-.29***	-.41***	-.33***	-.42***	-.45***	-.36***	.30***	.10***	.12***	—
11. DERS	.13***	.24***	.14***	.26***	.24***	.30***	-.21***	.23***	-.25***	-.33***

Note. SRP = Self-Report Psychopathy Scale; SPITE = Spitefulness Scale; DERS = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. All significant associations involving psychopathy and spite survived alpha-adjustment following the Bonferroni procedure.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Multiple Regression Analysis Results Examining the Unique Associations Between SRP and TriPM Subscales, Spitefulness, and Dispositional Contempt

Models/Measures	Study 1 (<i>N</i> = 1,237)	Study 2 (Sample 1; <i>N</i> = 239)	Study 2 (Sample 2; <i>N</i> = 521)
	Spitefulness β	Contempt β	Contempt β
Model 1			
SRP			
Affective	.30***	.07	.32***
Interpersonal	.15***	.38***	.25***
Lifestyle	.01	.15*	.01
Antisocial	.27***	.05	.00
R^2_{adj}	.38***	.31***	.28***
Model 2			
TriPM			
Boldness		.07	-.02
Meanness		.39***	.46***
Disinhibition		.20**	.16**
R^2_{adj}		.29***	.31***

Note. SRP = Self-Report Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

mental materials. The study was approved by Tilburg University ethics review board.

Sample 1. Participants were 239 first-year undergraduate psychology students at a Dutch university (182 women, 77.1%), who participated in exchange for course credits. Initially, 261 participants provided consent to take part in the investigation, but 22 of them (8%) did not complete the survey. Participants' mean age was 20.36 years ($SD = 2.82$, range = 18–45). Three participants (1.5%) did not complete demographic information but completed all of the questionnaires and were thus included in the analyses. Most participants were Dutch ($N = 162$, 62.1%) or native Dutch speakers with other nationality, including Turkish ($N = 4$, 1.5%), Moroccan ($N = 2$, 0.8%), Dutch Antilles ($N = 2$, 0.8%), and Surinamese ($N = 1$, 0.4%). The remaining 58 participants were international students following the international (English-taught) psychology program at the same university and thus completed the survey in English (a certificate of English fluency was a prerequisite for their admission to the program).

Sample 2. Participants were a convenience sample of 521 individuals from the general community (209 men, 40.1%) with an average age of 35.27 years ($SD = 15.99$, range 18–87). A total of 20 bachelor's- or master's-level psychology students approached potential participants, each recruiting approximately 25 participants. As the only inclusion criteria, all participants had to be at least 18 years old and have sufficient knowledge of the Dutch language. Participants provided informed consent and participated voluntarily, and they could decide to complete the questionnaires either in paper-and-pencil format or online. To ensure anonymity, after completion, paper questionnaires were returned to the principal investigator in a sealed envelope. To the extent possible, students were instructed to follow a quota sampling procedure, trying to balance across key demographic characteristics (age, sex, and occupation). Most participants were Dutch ($N = 259$, 93.8%

of valid responses), with other nationalities represented by Dutch Antilles ($N = 3$, 1.1%), Moroccan ($N = 1$, 0.4%), and Surinamese ($N = 1$, 0.4%).

Measures.²

Self-Report Psychopathy—Short Form. The short form of the most recent version of the SRP (Paulhus et al., 2016) was used to assess psychopathic traits (see Study 1). The Self-Report Psychopathy—Short Form consists of 29 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Previous studies have provided support for the four-factor (Interpersonal, Affective, Lifestyle, and Antisocial) structure of the Self-Report Psychopathy—Short Form, as well as good reliability and construct validity across different populations, both for the original version and its Dutch translation (Gordts, Uzieblo, Neumann, Van den Bussche, & Rossi, 2017; Neumann et al., 2015).

Triarchic Psychopathy Measure. Psychopathic traits were also assessed with the validated Dutch version (van Dongen, Drislane, Nijman, Soe-Agnie, & van Marle, 2017) of the Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick, 2010). It consists of 58 items rated on a 4-point Likert-scale, and produces a psychopathy total score, and scores on three distinct dimensions: Boldness, Meanness, and Disinhibition. The Boldness scale assesses fearlessness, interpersonal dominance and grandiosity, and endurance in the face of risk or uncertainty. The Meanness scale measures individual differences in empathy, callousness, and aggressive tendencies. Disinhibition taps into impulsivity, lack of goal-directed behavior, and reckless or antisocial acts.

Dispositional Contempt Scale. Dispositional contempt was assessed using the DCS (Schriber et al., 2017), a 10-item unidimensional self-report questionnaire designed to measure individual differences in contempt. The DCS items tap the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of contempt (e.g., “Feeling disdain for others comes naturally to me”). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The DCS has strong psychometric properties (Schriber et al., 2017).

State and trait emotions. To measure state and trait emotions, we followed a paradigm frequently used in emotion research (Tamir & Millgram, 2017). Specifically, we presented participants with a list of emotion terms and asked them to rate to what extent they experience each of those emotions in their daily life or to what extent they experience each of those emotions right now (for trait and state emotions, respectively). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. For anger, we averaged scores on the items “anger” and “hostility.” For negative emotionality, we averaged scores on anger, hostility, fear, anxiety, shame, embarrassment, depression, and sadness.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-16. A short version of the DERS (Bjureberg et al., 2016) was used to assess emotion dysregulation, consisting of a subset of 16 items of the original DERS (used in Study 1). Previous studies have shown that the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-16 retained the good psychometric properties of the DERS original version (Bjureberg et al., 2016).

Attitude Toward Emotions Scale. The Anger subscale of the Attitude Toward Emotions Scale (ATE; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, Amodio, & Gable, 2011) was used to measure positive

² Participants in Samples 1 and 2 were administered the same measures.

Table 4
Full Correlation Matrix Among Variables in Study 2, Sample 1 (N = 239; Below the Diagonal), and Sample 2 (N = 521; Above the Diagonal)

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. SRP Interpersonal	—	.68***	.67***	.47***	.87***	.19***	.63***	.51***	.62***	.48***	.20***	.14**	.23***	.13**	.35***	.21***
2. SRP Affective	.66***	—	.64***	.45***	.85***	.12***	.69***	.47***	.60***	.50***	.23***	.20***	.29***	.19***	.40***	.27***
3. SRP Lifestyle	.57***	.61***	—	.47***	.87***	.24***	.63***	.63***	.70***	.39***	.29***	.23***	.28***	.18***	.37***	.11*
4. SRP Antisocial	.51***	.44***	.47***	—	.68***	.06***	.38***	.42***	.39***	.27***	.29***	.23***	.19***	.12***	.34***	.25***
5. SRP Total	.86***	.84***	.83***	.67***	—	.20***	.72***	.63***	.72***	.51***	.30***	.24***	.30***	.19***	.44***	-.45***
6. Boldness	.18***	.21***	.30***	.20***	.28***	—	.18***	-.04***	.58***	.06***	-.08***	-.29***	-.23***	-.05***	.06***	.18***
7. Meanness	.59***	.65***	.54***	.37***	.67***	.26***	—	.60***	.84***	.55***	.19***	.08***	.21***	.05***	.47***	.43***
8. Disinhibition	.44***	.40***	.59***	.42***	.57***	.05***	.53***	—	.70***	.43***	.26***	.28***	.31***	.28***	.35***	.05***
9. TriPM total	.55***	.57***	.66***	.45***	.69***	.64***	.81***	.71***	—	.48***	.17***	.01***	.12***	-.08***	.41***	.36***
10. Dispositional contempt	.54***	.43***	.43***	.34***	.54***	.18***	.52***	.41***	.51***	—	.26***	.22***	.31***	.22***	.37***	.27***
11. State anger	.20***	.28***	.11***	.21***	.24***	-.04***	.25***	.18***	.17***	.19***	—	.77***	.39***	.32***	.23***	.49***
12. State negative emotionality	.19***	.22***	.14***	.19***	.22***	-.22***	.16***	.21***	.05***	.17***	.78***	—	.41***	.54***	.18***	.43***
13. Trait anger	.40***	.43***	.37***	.17***	.44***	-.10***	.39***	.29***	.25***	.39***	.26***	.32***	—	.80***	.28***	.58***
14. Trait negative emotionality	.26***	.23***	.17***	.11***	.25***	-.47***	.07***	.20***	-.12***	.18***	.28***	.52***	.69***	—	.14***	.22***
15. Attitudes toward anger	.41***	.43***	.31***	.20***	.43***	.16***	.42***	.22***	.37***	.31***	.25***	.17***	.41***	.16***	—	.21***
16. DERS-16	.17***	.16***	.18***	.03***	.17***	-.40***	.05***	.33***	-.03***	.10***	.26***	.45***	.28***	.57***	.11***	—

Note. SRP = Self-Report Psychopathy Scale; TriPM = Triarchic Psychopathy Measure; DERS-16 = Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-16. All significant associations involving psychopathy and contempt survived alpha-adjustment following the Bonferroni procedure, with the exception of the positive correlation between Boldness and contempt in Sample 1.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

attitudes toward anger. The ATE is a 28-item self-report questionnaire that measures individual differences in the evaluation of emotional experiences, such that greater scores indicate a positive evaluation of the corresponding emotional experience. In this study, attitudes toward anger were assessed to control for the pleasure and desirability for feeling anger, due to its overlap with contempt. The Attitude Toward Anger subscale comprised five items rated on a 5-point Likert subscale. The ATE, and its Anger subscale, has shown adequate psychometric properties in previous studies (Harmon-Jones et al., 2011) and was translated into Dutch for the purpose of the present study.

Results

The same data analytic plan described for Study 1 was followed in Study 2. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency coefficients for all study variables across samples are displayed in Table 1, and full correlation matrices are reported in Table 4³. A uniform pattern of positive and significant associations emerged in both samples. Partial correlations revealed that these relations were not altered controlling for any of the covariates (see online supplemental materials). The TriPM Meanness, Disinhibition, and total scale scores had significant positive associations with dispositional contempt, both at the zero-order level (Table 4) and when controlling for the influence of the covariates (online supplemental materials). A less consistent pattern of results concerned the TriPM Boldness scale. At the zero-order level, Boldness was significantly and positively (albeit weakly) related to dispositional contempt only in the undergraduate sample (Sample 1), and this association was not substantially altered when controlling for the covariates. In contrast, in the community sample (Sample 2), the association between Boldness and dispositional contempt was not significant at the zero-order level but was significant and positive when controlling for state and trait negative emotionality, trait anger, and emotion dysregulation (individually or together).

Multiple regression analyses results are reported in Table 3. Variance inflation factor values did not exceed 2.72, indicating that multicollinearity did not bias regression results. Psychopathy scores explained a substantial portion of the variance in dispositional contempt (ranging between 28% and 35%). SRP Interpersonal and TriPM Meanness and Disinhibition emerged as significant predictors in both samples. SRP Lifestyle and Affective were significant predictors in Samples 1 and 2, respectively. Reanalyses controlling for the same covariates used in correlation analyses did not substantially alter the main results.⁴

³ In both samples, the SRP Antisocial facet had a leptokurtic distribution. Thus, we repeated all analyses involving this scale using nonparametric tests (i.e., Spearman's correlation) and bootstrapping (for multiple regression analyses), and results were virtually unchanged.

⁴ The only partial exception occurred for some of the models in which trait negative emotionality and emotion dysregulation were controlled for in Sample 2. Respectively, Boldness showed a significant positive association with dispositional contempt ($r = .12, p < .01$), whereas the association between Disinhibition and dispositional contempt dropped to non-significance.

Interim Discussion

The results of Study 2 provided evidence of positive associations between psychopathic traits and dispositional contempt across different samples and measures of psychopathy. In line with Study 1, these associations were robust when controlling for conceptually related covariates, indicating that there is something specific in dispositional contempt that is related to psychopathic traits. Also, the associations between psychopathic traits and contempt were stronger for the interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy in Study 2. However, a less consistent pattern of associations emerged between boldness and contempt, such that positive associations mostly emerged when controlling for covariates that may have suppressed some of the adaptive features embedded in the TriPM Boldness scale (e.g., emotional resiliency and positive emotionality). Notably, these associations had small effect sizes and were weaker than relations between contempt and all of the other psychopathy scales.

General Discussion

The present studies were the first to comprehensively examine associations between psychopathic traits, spitefulness, and contempt. Overall, we found evidence of a consistent pattern of associations between psychopathic traits and self-reported dispositions toward feeling spiteful and contemptuous. These associations were relatively stronger for the interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy, although the associations also extended to the behavioral traits of psychopathy (especially when the shared variance among psychopathy dimensions was not controlled for). Overall, it appears that the experience of spite and contempt may be more closely linked to the interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy, while also bearing some relation to behavioral psychopathic features. Notably, interpreting findings concerning the residual variance in moderately correlated variables has its perils (Lynam, Hoyle, & Newman, 2006), as one cannot be sure about the conceptual meaning of such residual variance. Therefore, what stands out from the current findings is a pattern of relatively widespread associations that spitefulness and contempt have with psychopathic traits, with relatively larger effect sizes for associations with the interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy, and with the exception of boldness, which was largely unrelated to contempt. Notably, the associations between psychopathy and contempt could not be explained by an array of covariates. Taken together, these findings suggest that, far from being devoid of emotions, individuals with high levels of psychopathy may experience other-directed negative emotions such as spitefulness and contempt more often and more intensely than other individuals (Benning, 2013; Lynam & Widiger, 2007).

Besides the novelty of these findings, the present study offers substantive new insights into the emotional functioning that characterizes psychopathy. The relevance of spitefulness and dispositional contempt for psychopathy contrasts with traditional views of psychopathy as being underlain by a general emotional deficit (supposedly mainly due to biological predispositions) and highlights the importance of focusing on discrete, other-directed, emotions to understand the emotional life of individuals with psychopathic traits. Further, the associations between psychopathic traits and both spitefulness and contempt are consistent with historical (Arieti, 1963; Cleckley, 1976; McCord & McCord, 1964) and

contemporary (Foulkes et al., 2014; Glenn et al., 2017; Neumann et al., 2007; Sherman & Lynam, 2017; Vize, Lynam, Lamkin, Miller, & Pardini, 2016) conceptualizations that stress the centrality of an antagonistic, dissocial disposition for psychopathic personality. At the same time, the fact that the relations between spite and psychopathy could not be fully accounted for by levels of antagonism (i.e., low, see also Schriber et al., 2017), and the fact that spitefulness correlated more strongly with psychopathy than it did with agreeableness suggest that spite (and, by extension, contempt) may represent complex emotional correlates of psychopathy that extend beyond their link with antagonism. This suggestion by no means discounts the important connection between psychopathy and antagonism. However, the pattern of findings from previous research and the current findings suggest that the contempt and spite constructs offer new avenues for understanding the emotional world of psychopathic individuals.⁵ Given the consistency of findings involving both spitefulness and contempt, it is likely that psychopathic individuals experience a range of other-directed negative emotions that involve a devaluation and derogation of others. In turn, the role of spite and contempt may help explain some of the behavioral manifestations of psychopathy, including involvement in antisocial behavior that has negative consequences for psychopathic individuals themselves. Indeed, if the daily lives of individuals with psychopathic traits are filled with feelings of contempt and spite, then the overt expression of antisocial behavior may be better understood in terms of an underlying motivation to antagonize or cause harm to others, whatever the cost (Meloy, 1988).

The relation between dispositional contempt and psychopathy may also have relevance for further understanding the violence that is often enacted by individuals with psychopathic traits. First, the experience of contempt has been related to rejection, derogation, and social exclusion of others, and described as the judgment of another as an inferior human being (Matsumoto et al., 2015; Mindell, 1994). This is consistent with Meloy's (1988) description that the primary relational paradigm of the psychopath is one of dominance and submission, rather than affectional relatedness. Further, the current findings support the role of narcissistic entitlement and sense of superiority over others that are involved in psychopathy. Feeling contempt means that others are devalued, derogated, and considered inferior, and individuals with psychopathic features appear to be relatively more contemptuous than individuals without such traits. This is consistent with a functional view of contempt according to which feelings of contempt are "aimed at leaving the other humiliated and ourselves relieved" (Mindell, 1994, p. 41). As such, contemptuousness may involve, to some extent, an emotion-regulation strategy. Second, a contemptuous psychopathic framework may help account for the findings of predatory (instrumental) violence among psychopaths, implying an intentional dominance of the target of aggression and its submission (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Third, the current findings provide added value in accounting for the relationship between

⁵ Interested readers may refer to the validation study of the DCS (Schriber et al., 2017) for additional tests of the unique contribution of contempt for external correlates (e.g., other negative emotions and aggression) while accounting for its overlap with agreeableness.

sadism (i.e., pleasure through dominance) and psychopathy (Holt, Meloy, & Strack, 1999).

More generally, our findings are consistent with those of recent studies that have linked psychopathic traits to greater levels of certain negative emotions (Hoppenbrouwers et al., 2016; Salekin, Leistico, Neumann, DiCicco, & Duros, 2004). These findings appear to challenge those perspectives that posit the primacy of a general emotional deficit at the core of psychopathy (for a more detailed discussion on this topic, see Garofalo & Neumann, 2018). Rather, accumulating evidence that psychopathic traits are related to other-directed negative emotions might be consistent with a motivational account of psychopathy, according to which assumed “deficits” in emotional experience can be at least partly explained by variations in individual motivations (Foulkes et al., 2014; Glenn et al., 2017; Sherman & Lynam, 2017). For instance, if antagonistic motives are what drive individuals with psychopathic traits, this may contribute to a greater experience of emotions that are functional to the pursuit of antagonistic goals (i.e., other-directed negative emotions; Tamir & Millgram, 2017), and minimize the experience of self-directed negative emotions (Benning, 2013). Notably, spitefulness also has motivational relevance, as it has been theoretically and empirically defined as serving a preventive self-regulatory function that is driven by the motivation to anticipate potential threats by attacking in the first place (Rodgers & Dahling, 2018). Of note, the defensive motivational system is deemed to be dysfunctional in psychopathy (Patrick et al., 2009), and psychopathy has been linked to impaired threat detection (Hoppenbrouwers et al., 2016). Thus, it may be that the experience and expression of spite is functional in psychopathy as an interpersonal mechanism to avoid potential threats that would otherwise not be detected.

If one conceptualizes certain features of psychopathy as “adaptive” (at least in terms of short-term interpersonal functioning; Lilienfeld et al., 2016), our findings may be viewed as evidence of emotional states that would facilitate the predation of psychopathic individuals in all walks of life by demeaning their victims (Meloy, 2012; Meloy, Book, Hosker-Field, Methot, & Roters, 2018; Wilson, Demetrioff, & Porter, 2008). In this sense, these features may be adaptive for predation, but nevertheless ultimately pathological to the extent that they interfere with interpersonal functioning in the long run and impair any viable means of civility within our social species (Neumann et al., 2007). Therefore, as Meloy (2012) put it, psychopathy might be a tactical (i.e., short-term) success but often a strategic (i.e., long-term) failure.

The relevance of spitefulness and contempt for psychopathy can also help shed light on other aspects of the inner emotional experience of individuals with psychopathic traits, and in particular on potentially vulnerable sides. Along with overt antagonistic tendencies, research has shown that the *contemptuous person* is likely to experience feelings of low self-esteem, inadequacy, and shame (Schriber et al., 2017). In qualifying his definition of contempt, Mindell (1994) speculated that contempt may be conceived as a blend of shame and rage and proposed that when we feel contempt, we do so “in an attempt, internally or overtly to reduce the other or others to feeling like nothing, nobody, someone worthless and unacceptable, *as we experience ourselves to be*” (emphasis added, p. 41). The devaluation of others may also enhance positive feelings about the self. Thus, future research is

needed to investigate if these vulnerabilities can be identified in psychopathic individuals.

The present findings also have important conceptual implications for the larger construct of psychopathy. In recent years, a heated debate has concerned the relevance of boldness (or fearless dominance) for the construct of psychopathy, partly because boldness often shows null associations or associations in opposite direction with external correlates in the nomological network surrounding psychopathy (Lilienfeld et al., 2012, 2016; Miller, Maples-Keller, & Lynam, 2016; Vize et al., 2016). In the present study, boldness traits had less consistent and robust associations with contempt, such that these relations were generally weaker and largely dependent on the covariates. In particular, it appeared that boldness had positive links with dispositional contempt only when the variance related to negative emotionality and emotion dysregulation (both inversely related to boldness) was removed. In other words, adaptive traits related to positive emotionality and better emotion regulation are “built in” the construct of boldness, resulting in weak or null associations with contempt, associations that are otherwise consistent across different psychopathy components and seem especially relevant for its interpersonal and affective feature, to which boldness is proposed to conceptually belong. The present study was not designed to examine the relevance of boldness for psychopathy. However, if dispositional contempt (and, by extension, antagonism) is an important component of the nomological network of psychopathy, the operationalization of boldness in psychopathy measures may need to be refined to account for the possibility that—even if negatively related to certain negative emotions (e.g., fear)—boldness should be related to other-directed, low-arousal, negative emotions such as contempt, which could explain the social dominance and narcissistic traits that boldness aims to capture.

The present study had some limitations. First, we only relied on self-report measures for both psychopathy and emotional experience. In future studies, a multimethod assessment would be of great value, for example, including daily measures of emotional experience. Second, our samples were not representative of the general population and had a greater proportion of women. Although our results were fairly consistent across sex, and psychopathy has similar correlates across community and forensic populations (Hare & Neumann, 2008), replications in different populations are necessary to test the generalizability of these findings. Third, although we speculated on possible implications of our findings for the manifestation of psychopathy, the correlation design of this study prevents us from advancing any conclusion on the causal links between psychopathic traits and emotional experience. An additional caveat that should be considered concerns the potential risk of predictor–criterion overlap, although neither of the psychopathy measures used in the present study contains explicit reference to contempt or spite. Moreover, the supplementary CFAs provide evidence of the distinct nature of spite from relevant HEXACO domains.

These limitations notwithstanding, the present study addressed a topic that has historical relevance for psychopathy, providing novel insights on the emotional experiences related to psychopathic traits. Overall, we found robust evidence for the importance of a disposition toward experiencing spite and contempt in relation to psychopathy, and especially its interpersonal and affective components. As such, these findings add incrementally to a burgeoning

body of research supporting the importance of focusing on discrete though likely complex social emotions when examining the emotional functioning involved in psychopathic propensities. Indeed, the current results challenge the notion that psychopathy is characterized by an absence of negative emotions and actually provide sound evidence that psychopathic features are related to substantially higher levels of other-directed negative emotions such as spite and contempt. Importantly, in contrast with most of the emotions typically studied in psychopathy research, spite and contempt are social emotions with an inherent interpersonal component and likely linked with individual differences in motive dispositions. Therefore, the present study sets the grounds for additional research at the intersection of the emotional, interpersonal, and motivational aspects that can explain the development of psychopathic traits and their socially aversive behavioral manifestations.

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