# "Why So Serious?": Antisocial Trolling Behavior and its Relationship with Everyday Psychopathy and Sadism

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## Introduction

### Trolling

Anonymous, antisocial behavior that disrupts communication online by creating posts or messages that are crass, offensive, and disruptive (Phillips, 2015)

Increasingly popular means of social disruption for entertainment and harassment

### Antisocial Personality Traits

Predictors of socially undesirable behavior. Literature has established link with trolling (Buckels et al., 2018)

- **Psychopathy:** Cold, manipulative, and prone to social deviance, even at subclinical levels (Mullins-Nelson et al., 2006)
- **Sadism:** Taking pleasure in causing others distress (Moor & Anderson, 2019)

## Objectives

### Significance

- Extremely dynamic online behavior and community, particularly as online communication becomes more essential in everyday life
- Provide more detailed understanding of the two most common antisocial personality traits of trolls: psychopathy and sadism

### Hypotheses

- A greater presence of the antisocial personality trait **psychopathy** is associated with increased **engagement in trolling** behaviors.
- A greater presence of the antisocial personality trait **sadism** is associated with increased **engagement in trolling** behaviors.

## Method

### Measures

**Trolling**

- Global Assessment of Internet Trolling (Buckels et al., 2018)
- iTroll Scale (Buckels et al., 2014)

**Psychopathy**

- Short Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2013)

**Sadism**

- Short Sadistic Impulse Scale (O'Mera et al., 2011)
- Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (Buckels & Paulhus, 2013)

### Survey Details

Forty-nine questions, including demographic information and social media engagement

Data collected March 11- March 25, 2022

## Collected Data

### Participants

- 50 UNC Charlotte students
  - 30 males; 16 females; 5 other
  - 18-34 years old (M = 21.5)
- Ethnic Background
  - Caucasian: 74%
  - African-American: 6%
  - Hispanic: 6%
  - Multiracial: 2%
- Collected on Google Form via UNC Charlotte social media

### Analysis

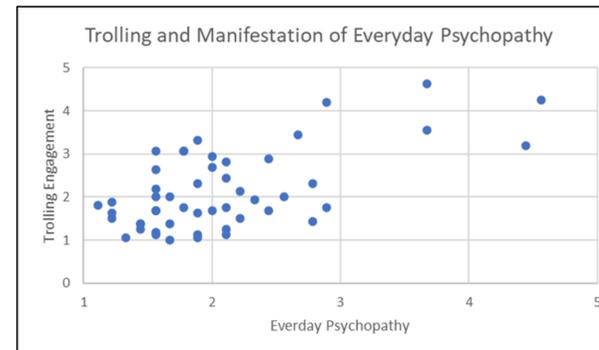- Descriptive and inferential statistics
  - Two correlations

## Results

### Trolling and Everyday Psychopathy

Strong, positive correlation found

- $r(50) = .617, p<.001$

Higher manifestations of everyday psychopathy associated with higher trolling engagement

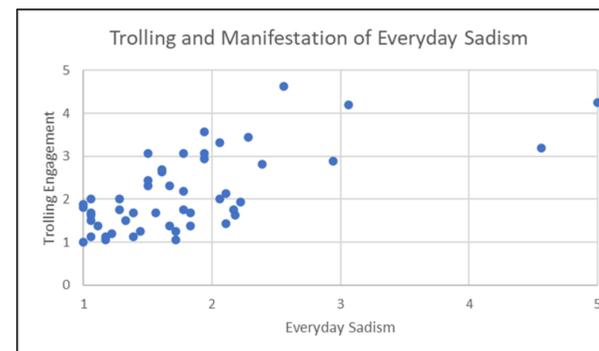

Trolling and Manifestation of Everyday Psychopathy

### Trolling and Everyday Sadism

Strong, positive correlation found

- $r(50) = .656, p<.001$

Higher manifestations of everyday sadism associated with higher trolling engagement



Trolling and Manifestation of Everyday Sadism



*Unmasking trolls (Bansal, 2018)*

## Conclusions

### Discussion and Implications

Findings support literature's connection between antisocial personality traits and online behaviors, even in college students

Increases understanding of negative, novel behavior, which is even more important in digital age

### Strengths and Limitations

**Strengths**

- Use of validated measures
- Sample representative of trolling populations

**Weaknesses**

- Studying inherently dishonest population, making self-report data questionable
- Few respondents ranked highly on measures

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