



Serial Social Media Psychopathy-Identifying a Novel Social Media Phenomena



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Abstract

This paper illustrates the authors bold yet humble informal account of a three year observation of several individuals all of whom had a visible presence on social media platforms and exhibited profound observable traits of psychopathy expressed in a distinct systematic pattern as yet undescribed in the literature.

Serial killers come to law enforcement notice because of a body trail, prompting investigations and tracking them down to prevent further deaths. Vast police resources are employed as a serial killer on the loose is probably one of the most intense police operations ever investigated. Serial killers are always psychopaths, but not all psychopaths are violent nor kill their victims. Just as some violent psychopaths are serial killers, other non-violent psychopaths are engaged in serial social media psychopathy (SSMP)-a novel form of social and professional destruction of the victim while an audience watch, as yet undescribed in the literature. Observation of psychopathy on a sub clinical level has been fraught with difficulty until now. Not least of which question the motives for engaging with research while the only available subjects are in the prison system. However, the development of social media may be changing all of that as psychopaths reveal themselves online and more concerning reveal their destructive activities. While witch hunting and public shaming are elements of SSMP the manifestation of the condition in its entirety appears to be novel.

Online platforms such as Google, Facebook and Twitter need to engage measures to sanction perpetrators and combat this phenomena which are explored. Additionally, future recommendations are given for further research going forward to address pathology, manifestation and remedy.

Keywords: Social media psychopathy; Serial killer; Psychopathy; Robert Hare; John Ronson; Caroline Goldsmith; Public shaming; Novel social media phenomena

Introduction – SSMP's are not in jail

Serial social media psychopathy (SSMP) is a type of bullying of catastrophic proportions characterised by a modus operandi of a systematic off and online campaign to target and destroy the victim, while reporting updates back to an online audience. The audience cooperation and justification for treatment of the victim is garnered by presenting the act in the guise of some 'noble crusade'. The victim is polarised as evil personified and marked for destruction. As such the victim may be known or unknown to the serial social media psychopath (SSMP) and share common traits, which mark them out as targets for sustained attack. Contrary to popular belief the majority of psychopaths are not in jail. However, most research and study has been confined to this tiny slice of the psychopathic population as a captive group [1]. Therefore, studying psychopathy in any quantifiable way 'in the wild' so to speak is fraught with limitations not least of which is the fact that psychopaths rarely present spontaneously for diagnosis [2].

Fortunately (from a research perspective) social media has given a new platform to psychopaths who prance through cyber-

world leaving a particular brand of destruction in their wake, some being more dangerous than others. Professor Robert Hare psychopathy expert and author of the psychopathy checklist PCL-R [1] is also author of Snakes in Suits – when psychopaths go to work. In this ground-breaking work, Dr Hare estimates only 5% of the world's psychopaths are in jail [3]. Begging the question; if 95% of the world's psychopaths are out and about in the real world, where do they go, what are they doing and who are they doing it to?

Psychopaths whom escape the attention of law enforcement, a subclinical subset [1] live among us going about their business while leaving a trail of financially, emotionally and psychologically ruined victims [4].

Victims who may have no frame of reference to redress the injustices suffered. Although having one's life turned upside down by a psychopath will undoubtedly feel like a crime, unfortunately, the chances are it will be difficult to get the police to act. More likely the encounter is chalked up to a bad relationship experience and the victim tries to move on.

Serial social media psychopathy - SSMP

As bad as it is to have a relationship with someone whom is later discovered to be a psychopath, far more daunting is to encounter a serial social media psychopath (SSMP) The term is coined for the first time in this paper and derived from serial killer a phenomena first described in the late 1930's which came to prominence in popular culture (Cleckley, 1941). Unlike a killer this psychopath doesn't murder the victim but relentlessly stalks trying to ruin their lives on every level, all the while posting updates to an eager online audience.

Defining the pathology of SSMP

Serial social media psychopathy is carried out by a particular type of individual and while the platforms and tools used may give rise to a new presentation, the pathology was essentially seen in historic presentations as early as the 15th century when looking at the definition of witch hunting; "An investigation carried out ostensibly to uncover subversive activities but actually used to harass and undermine those with differing views" [5]

SSMP has much in common with and could be argued as a modern day equivalent of witch hunting which carries no pathological definition in the DSM 5. Similarly, psychopathy itself is conspicuously absent from the classification. Anti-Social Personality Disorder (APD) being the only route clinicians have recourse to for diagnosing psychopathic individuals [6].

In both clinical practice and research, psychopathy and sociopathy are often used interchangeably which does a disservice to the true definitions and is a relevant differentiation to make here; the sociopath deriving strongly from environmental causes and the psychopath being of a genetic or hard-wired manifestation [7].

Like their serial killer counterparts SSMP's trawl for victims who fit a criteria [8]. Seemingly unlike the serial killer they tend to have multiple victims on the go at once, bypassing the need to wait until one is dead and out of the way, for the next victim to be targeted.

Choice of victim

Unlike the usual mark for a psychopath who tend towards vulnerable easy targets to exploit for financial/psychological gain [8], the SSMP makes much of the fact they do not perform their 'services' for financial gain. There is a certain inverted snobbery here as victims are often despised for being wealthy or having a high lifestyle.

SSMP's have other motives for targeting the victim, including; dispensing comeuppance, ruining reputations and taking someone down a peg or two from positions the psychopath has judged undeserved. The victims are usually everything the psychopath craves to be but is unable to achieve. Typically successful, educated, well thought of, high profile and leaders in their field. The SSMP searches for an Achilles heel, transgression or flaw to distort and magnify before a baying audience. If no such flaw is found then someone close to the victim may have one and they can then be condemned by association. Perhaps a victim has a close association

with a matter, person, product, book or a film the psychopath is against and as such can stir up controversy and more importantly polarisation. The SSMP has one view of life which is deemed correct (theirs) and see themselves as moral crusaders ultimately superior in every way. Victims mark themselves for a target by crossing their paths at the wrong time and coming to notice for opposing views. Any deviance from the SSMP's views by a person of prominence is an act of war and the declaration of hostilities.

Methods of attack

Once a victim has entered the SSMP radar the game is on. Professional persons of interest are attacked by continued reporting/complaining to professional bodies and or law enforcement, child protective services, regulatory bodies, pestering employers, friends, clients, patients and associates.

The SSMP defames, slanders and badmouths with much distorted and embellished stories of how they or others have been badly treated (abused) by the victim and hence makes the case to the audience for a deserved vilification. Purporting they have transgressed with some crime deemed to warrant the attack. Every aspect of the victim's life that can be examined will be put under a microscope. The SSMP acts as judge, jury and executioner, putting their own distorted spin on perceived transgressions. The online audience await further revelations in tabloid style updates advertised as 'new criminal uncovered' and 'exposing soon'

Victims are targeted to be the recipients of a possibly life-long campaign. With the SSMP always just around the corner and ready to pounce on any snippet of information that comes their way. The ultimate aim is to end all normal social/professional interaction or positive human connection the victim has with other inhabitants of the planet [9]. Essentially to kill the victim without actually ending their life. A seemingly impossible task, however this is what keeps the SSMP motivated and focused. Public shaming campaigns, harassment through public bodies and defamatory media campaigns are all tools in the SSMP's arsenal of weapons used to great effect. However the SSMP seems unable to grasp why and how the victim keeps getting up and carrying on with their lives. The SSMP appears to be driven by hatred and envy which erupts in anger amounting to an ongoing protracted narcissistic rage [10], fuelled on by the victims seeming reluctance to lay down and die.

Defining and Diagnosing Psychopaths

Psychopaths routinely maintain at least two separate personas. One, a positive, gregarious, revered personality that is embraced by the unsuspecting audience. The other is their dark self (Hare, 2003). Pathology is differentiated from multiple personality disorder, now termed Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) as an updated disorder in the new classification [6]. Psychopaths can swap at will between personas; not so for those suffering from DID.

Psychopaths seek admiration for their self perceived greatness. When violent psychopaths become serial killers they seek recognition [8]. They often use elaborate methods to contact law enforcement in order to make themselves known. They court

media attention and can have trademarks that differentiate their handiwork from other killers [2]. However a serial killer's endeavour is usually confined to a solitary one. Due to the consequences at stake they try to evade capture until they are ready to be caught.

Similarly the SSMP seeks recognition but can reveal themselves in full daylight engaging with the audience as they torment their victims, often by posting updates of the latest harassment and reactions to it. Similar to the serial killer, the SSMP craves contact with the victim as an essential part of the ritual. As the phenomena is played out on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter they endeavour to make sure the victim knows whenever they have uploaded a post or video. Contact may be in the form of silent stalking phone calls from unlisted numbers, making fake profiles and befriending the victim in order to point out posts or videos in the guise of being friends.

Psychopaths have a parasitic lifestyle and believe the world owes them a living [1]. Similar traits are exhibited by the SSMP, whom are rarely if ever gainfully employed. Psychopaths lack true empathy (but can feign a semblance of it), are grandiose individuals with a vastly overdeveloped sense of entitlement, believe that social rules do not apply to them and often don't care to understand them anyways [2].

Hare psychopathy checklist -revised (PCL-R)

The most common way of detecting whether a person is a psychopath is by using The Hare Psychopathy Checklist -Revised (PCL-R) [1] a diagnostic tool, set to determine if someone is on the psychopathy spectrum. The checklist has 20 traits - each have a score between 0-2, the highest mark someone can achieve therefore being 40. In the US a rating over 30 determines a psychopathic individual while in the UK a score of over 25 is clinically significant (Table 1).

Table 1: 20 Traits Hare Psychopathy Checklist applied to Serial Social Media Psychopathy (SSMP).

Psychopathy Traits	Common	SSMP Traits
Interpersonal Traits		
pathological lying	Yes	pathological lying
glib and superficial charm	Yes	glib and superficial charm
grandiose sense of self	Yes	grandiose sense of self
manipulative behaviour	Yes	manipulative behaviour
Emotional Traits		
lack of Empathy	Yes	lack of Empathy
Lack of remorse or guilt	Yes	Lack of remorse or guilt
callousness and lack of empathy	Yes	callousness and lack of empathy
failure to accept responsibility	Yes	failure to accept responsibility
Lifestyle Traits		
parasitic lifestyle	Yes	parasitic lifestyle
lack of realistic long-term goals	Yes	lack of realistic long-term goals
impulsivity	Yes	impulsivity
irresponsibility	Yes	irresponsibility
need for stimulation	Yes	need for stimulation
sexual promiscuity	Variable	sexual promiscuity
many short-term marital relationships	Variable	many short-term marital relationships
Anti-social Traits		
poor behavioural controls	Yes	poor behavioural controls
early behaviour problems	Yes	early behaviour problems
juvenile delinquency	Variable	juvenile delinquency
revocation of conditional release	Variable	revocation of conditional release
criminal versatility	yes	criminal versatility

Differentiating typical psychopathy and SSMP

Three individuals whom exhibited SSMP were observed over a period of three years in this study. Differences between them and typical manifestations of psychopathy seem to lie in how anti-social traits manifest and their marital relationships. One of

the individuals was promiscuous with many children by different fathers and two were involved in a long term relationship with each other. Anti-social traits were present in poor behaviour controls and early behavioural problems. However there appeared to be lack of involvement with law enforcement both in early life and

as adults. This may possibly be due to the syndrome manifesting as a preference for emotional and psychological damage inflicted on others rather than financial and other crimes which draw law enforcement attention.

Cases of SSMP observed on social media

The cases observed on social media so far seem to exude scenarios whereby the SSMP will attach themselves to worthy causes, building reputations as advocates, campaigners or activists. Initially impressing campaign leaders, by bringing complete focus and singlemindedness to the cause. However they are inevitably too zealous for mainstream groups whom have ethical standards the SSMP will eventually fall foul of.

SSMP modus operandi

The SSMP's modus operandi is a no holds barred free for all where anything goes and the end justifies the means. No ethical, moral or fairness concerns need apply in the aim to annihilate the victim on every level. Such a reckless and chaotic framework results in actions which are unethical at best and usually illegal at worst. Often they are asked to leave or get phased out from legitimate activist groups'. The SSMP may then target the people who have ousted them. It is not unusual to encounter a psychopath targeting a previous confidante friend or colleague which makes no logical sense to onlookers in the groups.

The SSMP ends up spending their time tormenting the life out of someone fighting for a cause they themselves have declared a passionate belief in. In effect they may hold similar views but differ vastly in acceptable campaigning methods. SSMP's cannot campaign on an issue they only know how to attack people. Having no internal filter the psychopath will stop at nothing in an effort to annihilate the victim. This includes going after partners, children relatives and friends.

Narcissism and psychopathy

Psychopaths are narcissistic in their core personality traits.

pattern of grandiosity (either in fantasy or behaviour), have a envious, and lack empathy [6] Narcissists are characterized by a pervasive constant need for admiration, are arrogant, The audience encouragement validates the psychopath and perpetuates the cycle of their activities which generate approval and admiration and forms a channel for narcissistic supply [11].

Sometimes the SSMP gets it completely wrong in their choice of victim and the audience can turn in an unexpected twist to victim support. Rather than drop the issue and move on, they are convinced in their choice and become entrenched. They eventually end up fighting the audience, which leads to blocking them and having to attract a new group. The psychopath then posts about how they are a victim, and that no one understands the issue only them.

The audience are deemed as bullying the psychopath by not agreeing! Victim mode gives way to full on narcissistic rage, a state of livid anger and meltdown at the audacity of being contradicted or slighted [11].

Similarities-serial killers and serial social media psychopaths (SSMP)

Common traits appear across most types of serial killers and those traits can likewise be seen in their online serial social media psychopath (SSMP) counterparts.

- A. A need for power and control-they portray themselves as powerful people who have special information that only they know
- B. Manipulators-present themselves in a false light
- C. Egotistical-a bragger talking about how they are revered in high places and align themselves with people in power believing them to be 'peers' and 'equals'
- D. Superficial charm-a thin surface credibility that cracks when angry
- E. A disturbed childhood-psychological or other abuse factors present from an early age

Such traits are discussed in detail by researchers at the Centre for Applied Criminology at Birmingham City University who have explored many case studies of modern day and historical serial killers [12]. Serial killers are comprised of two types according to Holmes typology. Serial killers can be act-focused, and kill quickly, or process-focused, and kill slowly [13].

Those who desire the quick end to the victim to rid the world as quickly as possible of them; and those who enjoy watching the victim suffer prolonging the inevitable killing. SSMP's seem to enjoy watching the victim suffer while playing to their audience.

Public shaming and serial social media psychopathy (SSMP)

The victims of serial social media psychopaths differ from the targets of public shaming. This phenomena was expertly and accurately described in 2015 as the reemergence of public shaming as an Internet phenomenon, particularly on Twitter [14]. This type of modern day public shaming focuses on one particular 'crime' the target has committed. Usually an inappropriate tweet or post which goes viral and invites collective public condemnation.

In this scenario the perpetrator is shamed and or condemned by many people sharing the tweet or post. There is no one person orchestrating the campaign. While the knock-on effects can be catastrophic for the perpetrator, interest is usually just focused on that one transgression. Whereas the activities of an SSMP campaign are being systematically orchestrated by one person and are far more sustained and wide ranging to include all aspects of the victims life, work and family. The SSMP will use fake profiles to troll them and their children, call up workplaces and even make malicious reports on the victim to police and child protective services.

Twitter and Facebook posts will eventually move down the feed of the online shaming victims and audience, while search engine experts can be employed to counter the effects of adverse searches. However the targets of an SSMP are often lifetime targets of psychopathic character assassination. Stalking reveals new

transgressions all the time for which the victim is again held up for public scrutiny and vilification. This is nothing short of a full-on unbridled attempt to totally destroy any credibility the victim has [9].

Enabling partners

Dangerous but thankfully rare psychopaths have the misfortune to tie up with an enabling partner. A state of affairs whereby a partner, instead of pulling one back actually encourages and aids in counterproductive behaviours [15]. Examples of historical enabling couples include UK serial killers Ian Brady and Moira Hindley convicted after the abolition of the death penalty in 1966 [16]. In more conventional relationships partners curb each other's excesses and talk reason when one partner oversteps socially acceptable behaviour boundaries. In psychopathic enabling couples the partner encourages and often suggests worse ways the victim could be affected [17]. They often aid the social media psychopath to carry them out. Clearly such behaviour indicates the partner undoubtedly has psychopathic traits themselves.

The dynamic between the couple suggests that one partner is the leader and one the follower however in that following they reveal their own sadistic tendencies that get to be played out. In one particular serial social media psychopathic couple the partner made a fake online profile in which he presented as a depraved sexual sadist, however trailed around after his wife as a tame devoted fan!

The Audience-who watches online psychopaths?

The audience are a strange mix of people some of whom have no clue what's really going on, and others who are fully aware of the agenda. The psychopath has not revealed their dark side to the first portion of the audience. Made up of fellow campaigners and activists interested in legitimate causes, they would likely frown upon the methods of the psychopath if revealed in full.

However other parts of the audience are made up of those whom are in on it - they know the dark side and often help out in some of the darker activities. They hold similar views themselves and are often polarised black and white thinkers. They follow the psychopath in increasingly outrageous activities in a cult like following.

Protected by the safety of their online environment they are free to enjoy the shaming, defamation and humiliation of a target while commenting their indignation with glee. The comments follow a theme of; Harder, Faster OMG! How awful! How terrible the target victim is. They deserve all they get. Thank goodness I'm perfect! Great efforts are exerted to completely polarise the victim in the eyes of the online audience. The victim is presented as evil personified with no saving graces. Groupthink [18] takes over and it is soon apparent the group has entered a dynamic of collective condemnation;

"Groups quickly reach consensus decisions with amazing disregard for obvious warning signs that they are on the wrong track. Extremely cohesive groups, oriented around a strong leader, will ignore or punish dissenting opinions" [18].

Polarising the victim in such absolute terms is a completely unnatural and illogical concept as no one is all bad or all good. However the groupthink phenomena ensures no one raises dissent over the consensus of opinion.

Audience policing

Most psychopaths ultimately want control and power [19] and just so for the SSMP. They exert their influence over the audience instructing them from time to time as to the 'rules'. An audience member cannot be friends with anyone the Psychopath disapproves of. Often they will be told to unfriend people or face being culled from the page or group.

Audience culling

The audience are treated to updates from the stalking of the victim's life. Sensational revelations are spun in a tabloid like fashion to keep them focused and polarised in complete condemnation. The purpose of the victim is for the SSMP to portray an object for vilification to the audience. Making them feel justified and validated in their firmly held polarised opinions. When the audience fail to agree or join in they are unfriended or culled from the group.

Google launches counter measures

In an attempt to police unworthy content, Google has added a new "upsetting-offensive" content flag to its search engine guidelines as the company makes a renewed effort to clamp down on inaccurate and offensive content. Recently Google stated they are increasing efforts to clamp down on offensive and inaccurate content. Google, along with social media giants Facebook and Twitter have been criticised in recent months over their handling of offensive and explicit content, as well as the circulation of fake news on their platforms [20]. Google, a multi-billion dollar corporation has not commented officially on the latest update to its search guidelines, but senior engineer Paul Haahr told industry blog Search

Engine land

"We're explicitly avoiding the term 'fake news,' because we think it is too vague. Demonstrably inaccurate information, however, we want to target" (Rodger, 2017). Creative and effective solutions need to be found. Perhaps a unit could be set up to deal with the activities of social media psychopaths much as they deal with other offensive content once it is flagged. A Google Social Media Psychopathy Unit (GSMPU) could be set up to monitor posting activity for social media psychopathy. Rather like Facebook where a post can be sent for review if it violates community standards. Although the way that system is implemented many would argue doesn't work, it is a good idea nevertheless. Maybe Google could do it better.

The GSMPU could have options on a search engine entry such as a drop down box

- A. Does this search result lead to offensive content
- B. Do you think the content is Social Media Psychopathy
- C. Is this content about you or someone you know

- D. Is this content fair and accurate
- E. If not what evidence do you have to support the claim it is not fair and accurate
- F. Has the author made content about you or the person you know before that social media psychopathy was sanctioned for When a case is made for social media psychopathy the ranking posts of that person should come with a disclaimer 'this person has been flagged for social media psychopathy' so that everyone can then take what they have to say with a pinch of salt. However that in itself is a form of public shaming so the process should be set up to rehabilitate the social media psychopath rather than just flag them. For example the system could be accumulative in that you have to be sanctioned three times for the disclaimer to appear on your posts. You will then have a period of three months in which you must have no reports for social media psychopathy for the disclaimer to be removed. On a second offence the period gets longer to six months then nine months and twelve months and so on.

Conclusion

A novel form of serial social media psychopathy (SSMP) has appeared online where the victims are not killed in the physical sense (as in serial killing), but sought to be terminated professionally and socially by the psychopath. This is done by stalking, reporting and trolling the target, their associates, friends and family. An audience is engaged and absolved of wrongdoing by the target being presented as a morally reprehensible being deserving of all atrocities. The audience watch the destruction in the form of updates on the psychopaths' page or group. Sometimes in presenting a sympathetic target the audience relate to rather than polarise, the psychopath is driven to narcissistic rage by audience disapproval. The majority of psychopaths do not reside in jail but out among us causing mayhem and destruction. Some are more dangerous than others and one of the most insidious types stalk online groups and pages for victims whom fit a certain criteria.

SSMP's share common traits of serial killers and appear to be motivated by the same pleasure in watching a victim suffer. Psychopath couples are more dangerous than single psychopaths as they encourage the partners depravity rather than acting as a brake.

Search engines and social media companies announced recent action to curb the activities of those who post offensive and inaccurate content and this could be extended to serial social media psychopathy. The novel phenomena of Serial Social Media Psychopathy described here is in infancy of description but not likely inception. As yet this phenomena is undescribed in the

literature and calls for more investigation to identify pathology, causes, effects and remedial action [21].

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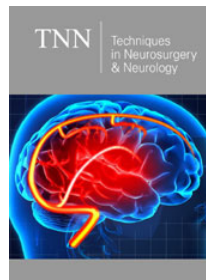
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