

Episode 038: The Dark Triad (Psychopathy, Narcissism, Machiavellianism), sexually violent predators, Ted Bundy, and porn.

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**PSYCHIATRY &
PSYCHOTHERAPY**

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There are no conflicts of interest for this episode.

*On this week’s episode of the podcast, I interview...quite a few people! We are covering Ted Bundy, America’s most infamous serial killer, and since the world has been fascinated by him lately, I figured I’d get a group of mental health professionals in a room to talk about him. His horrific acts made the news and have scared people for decades now, and rightfully so. Did media and pornography cause this? What was his diagnosis and was it correct? **Was ted bundy a sociopath?** We have so many questions...*

As my special guests and panel of experts, I invited Dr. Tony Angelo, who is head of services for a local prison and in charge of prisoners transitioning into normal life. I also invited Dr. Randy Stinnett, a clinical psychologist who co-manages an outpatient behavioral health department in a local community health clinic. Also with me is [Nathan Hoyt](#) and Adam Borecky, 4th year medical students who will be going into psychiatry.

Traits of psychopathic antisocial behavior

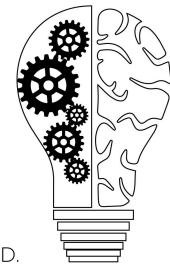
Criminals like Ted Bundy are skilled manipulators. They often scope their environment to see who will be the easiest to manipulate. They will treat you like you are their long, lost friend, but everything they do is an attempt to pull you in. They “hook” you so that they can get you to do something for them.

Ted Bundy came off as friendly and charming, described as “one of us.” A friend of his from Washington State even said, “He’s the kind of person you’d want your sister to marry.” As disturbing as this is, it is a common trait of psychopathic antisocial behavior.

Ted Bundy displayed many traits of **psychopathic antisocial behavior**. Some of the most recognizable traits were:

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- Viewing others as a pawn in his chess game
- Master manipulator
- Desire control/power
- Sexual gratification in his choices
- Enjoyed having an audience
- Calculated predatory aggression
- Strategic planning
- Feeling that some other entity is operating inside of him

Empathy qualities:

- **Normal cognitive empathy**
- **Very low affective empathy**

Someone with [low affective empathy](#) will not feel your emotions or know your emotions from a [mirror neuron experience](#). Rather he can only read facial expressions and body language without allowing cognitive but not affective empathy.

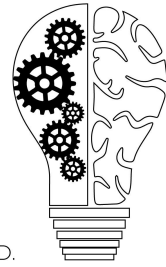
In episode 2 of the Ted Bundy documentary on Netflix, *Confessions with a Serial Killer*, in his first arrest Ted Bundy said, “A funny thing happened to me on the way to labor law class. I got two weeks on the spa on the labor floor here. And, a yes, I intend to complete my legal education to become a lawyer, and be a damn good lawyer. Uh, I think things are going to work out, that’s about all I can say.”

When he said this, he had a right sided smile and outwardly looked fairly happy and calm. According to studies done about microexpressions, the right sided smile is usually demonstrating contempt, but for him does not look as negative, and because in so many of his videos he has it on his face, he likely thought highly of himself and looked down on others.

I have noted that very good liars look positive, but often still leak microexpressions of very subtle negative emotion. Bundy seems to have expressed anger when he felt thwarted. In his statement, he makes a joke, yet showed a flash of fear or sadness while doing so. Bundy’s emotions of fear, anger, sadness, and pain leaked out through the microexpressions on his face, which are always a truth-telling mechanism.

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Below is the quote with my inserted microexpressions in it:

“[contempt] A funny [anger] thing happened to me on the way to labor law class. I got two weeks on the spa on the labor floor here [fear or sadness]. And, a yes [contempt, sadness or fear], I intend to complete my legal education to become a lawyer, and [contempt] be a damn good lawyer [anger]. Uh [pain], I think things are going to work out [fear], thats about all I can say.”

**Note it is hard to determine exact expressions from the poor quality of this video- but my microexpression research team discussed the above and this was our consensus. The fear or sadness comment comes from the eyebrows going up in the middle, but it is hard to determine if there is fear or sadness due to the poor quality of film.*

It is believed psychopaths feel little or no fear. Did Ted Bundy feel afraid?

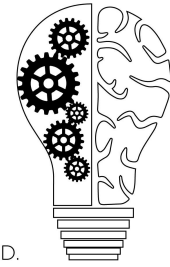
Most of the video of Ted Bundy did not show a physiological reaction to stress. But it is likely to some degree (although much less than others) that he experienced fear. It is thought that those with primary psychopathy have dysfunctional emotional processing due to issues in their amygdala. Studies show they have less fear than control groups and secondary psychopaths (more the sociopath or baked ones) which have more trait anxiety or fear ([Skeem, 2007](#)).

What was Ted Bundy’s possible diagnosis? Was Ted Bundy a Sociopath?

Ted Bundy and primary psychopathy: These typically have low affective empathy and low fear, however not all that are primary psychopaths become criminals. They are sometimes able to still follow the rules while not having any fear or empathy and can even be prosocial.

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Was Ted Bundy a Sociopath (or secondary psychopathy)? These are typically “baked” into being anti-social. Sociopaths are typically “made” to be the way they are, often resulting from a traumatic childhood. Abuse and trauma may influence their later life ability to attach to others. They have higher trait fear, more borderline traits and more mental disorders.

Antisocial Personality Disorder: This is how the DSM classifies people who have a history of illegal behaviors, deceit, impulsivity, failure to plan ahead, aggressiveness, reckless disregard for safety, irresponsibility and lack of remorse. This is usually a criminal psychopath or sociopath with repetitive crimes. They display low empathy and low connection with others. Their behavior usually results in crimes against others.

Was Ted Bundy bipolar?

When Ted Bundy was assessed while awaiting his death sentence, he was given a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. However, most depressed people become less violent and don't have much of a desire to have sex. It is also interesting to note that out of all of the violent events that happen in the US, only 5% of them are due to mental illness ([Stuart, 2003](#)). Therefore, we can conclude that **most** violent acts are **not** done by people with mental illness.

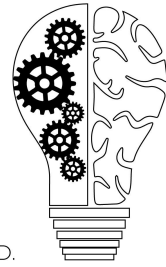
Could he have been in a manic state?

Most manic states end in death, jail or psychiatric hospitalization. Ted Bundy had no record of being hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital and was only put in jail after he was caught. Bundy was also capable of living a “normal” life. He was an active citizen, joined a church, was married and involved in politics. He played these roles for years.

With mania, this would not have been possible. Those who are manic **cannot stop their mania**. Also, Ted Bundy displayed reason in the midst of his crimes. He covered his tracks and could pretend to be something he wasn't. Those who are manic do not have the ability to pretend to be something they are not, nor have the ability to plan and cover up.

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DSM 5 antisocial disorder:

Ted Bundy would fall more in line with a DSM 5 antisocial disorder leaning more towards primary psychopathy. With this disorder, you must be 18 years or older and have committed conduct disorder before age 15. Also prevalent is a pervasive pattern of disregard for the rights of others since the age of 15 and psychopathic manifestations. Additionally, they must meet 3 or more of the following behaviors:

- Fail to conform to lawful behaviors
- Deceitfulness
- Impulsivity
- Irritability
- Aggressiveness
- Reckless disregard for the safety of others
- Irresponsibility
- Lack of remorse

Nearly all of these traits were displayed in Ted Bundy's pattern of behavior. Even when he was young he showed predatory aggression ([which I discuss in a prior episode](#)) when he set up tiger traps at camp and injured a young girl. Although he prayed with people before his death, Ted Bundy's memorable quote, "I am in the enviable position of not having to feel any guilt," showed he was wired with some primary psychopathy.

Low IQ

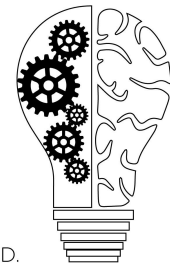
Although Ted Bundy has been referred to as a criminal "mastermind," he may have had a average or only slightly above average IQ. The article by [Ceci, 1996](#), found that cognitive ability tends to be a good predictor of academic performance; measures of academic achievement (LSAT, GRE, SAT) correlate very highly with measures of cognitive ability.

Although we do not know Bundy's actual LSAT score, only that he believed it was "mediocre," there is certainly no evidence that states he was a genius. Rather than a

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genius, I would say he was not impulsive, very calculated, and often planned and put a lot of energy into his criminal actions.



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Hearing voices

Ted Bundy often referenced hearing voices that told him to do bad things. However, it is not believed he had schizophrenia. **Occasionally antisocials will use this as a way to avoid responsibility for their behaviors.**

We call it MBD: minimize, blame and deny

Was pornography to blame?

Ted Bundy blamed his behaviors on pornography. However, pornography is not viewed as a *cause* of sexual violence. In persons who have preexisting conditions for sexual violence, it is viewed as a *contributing* factor.

In Episode 4 of the documentary, he is quoted as saying, "I never said (pornography) made me do it. I said that to get them to help me. I did (murder) because I wanted to do it."

The research confluence theory states men with hyper masculinity that also involves psychopathic tendencies have low agreeableness, abuse, hostility towards women, impersonal sexuality combined with sexual permissiveness. When you have a confluence of those two things and violent pornography it may be a contributing factor to Ted Bundy's violent, abhorrent behavior.

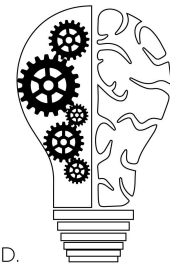
It is important to note that pornography has not been present in our society for very long. Yet, crimes against women have been happening since the beginning of time. It is because of this fact that many doubt that pornography is to blame for crimes of this nature.

[Hald, 2010](#), found that the correlation between violent pornography and attitudes supporting violence against women ($r=0.24$) was significantly higher ($P < 0.001$) than the

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correlation between nonviolent pornography and attitudes supporting violence against women ($r=0.13$): however these are still low correlations.



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Antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy as a mental illness:

Just because antisocial personality disorder is in the DSM, it doesn't mean it should be viewed the same way we view schizophrenia, bipolar, major depressive disorder, etc.

Largely, antisocial personality disorder is not something that is treated by psychiatrists. There is no medication for it and most with this disorder are not interested in help. If they come to see a psychiatrist, it is typically because they want something from you.

Narcissism diagnosis:

Ted Bundy had traits of narcissism as displayed in the DSM 5 criteria: a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, lack of empathy and a need for admiration which begins by early adulthood. To meet the criteria, 5 or more of the following behavioral features must be met:

- grandiose sense of self-importance
- preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success and power
- special or unique and can only associate with high status entities
- requiring excessive admiration
- sense of entitlement
- exploitative
- lack of empathy
- often envious of others and believes others envy him or her
- arrogance and haughtiness

I would add that some narcissists are low-self esteem, but I believe **he was a high self-esteem psychopathic narcissist.**

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Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism overlaps with narcissism and antisocial disorders. They are more likely to deceive and manipulate others for their own personal gain. They see people as objects for use and manipulation. They will have normal amounts of empathy unless they have traits of psychopathy.

The opposite of machiavellianism are people who display honesty and altruism.

In viewing **Ted Bundy**, it is highly probable that he displayed high **Machiavellianism with traits of psychopathy and narcissism—thus having all the dark triad.**

How did Ted Bundy come to be this way?

Home-grown sociopaths don't necessarily have a need to be seen and appreciated by others. They often have been made the way they are due to horrific abuse, and usually prefer to be left alone. But, psychopaths who are born with low physiological arousal, have more of the predatory aggression which we see in Ted Bundy.

A person with primary psychopathy can either choose to live in society and do things to help, although without empathy and with difficulty attaching to others. Or they can choose to do illegal things to get their drives met. Whichever one they choose will write their brain and pattern of behavior that they will follow. These people can be incredibly helpful to society or incredibly harmful.

Determinism versus free will

It often comes down to determinism versus free will. In other words, did he make the choices or did his mental illness cause them? Ted Bundy went to prison for the choices he made, not the psychological predisposition that he had. However, when one goes into **determinism**, they will blame others for the choices that they made.

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It is important to remember **these people do have a choice**. Because, ultimately, there is another dimension here, which is the moral dimension. We all have the responsibility to others and to society.

However, there are people who have less choice than others. **For example, a person with a frontal lobe injury will have less “choice” than someone who does not.** Ultimately, choice must be in line with responsibility. But I have known people to “check themselves in” for desires to do bad things, and get help. **Sometimes we only have a small choice to change our environment.**

Treatment

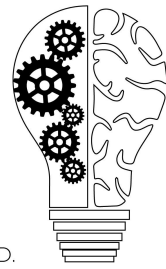
With the Ted Bundy type of psychopath, therapy will most likely not benefit them. This type of person should be put in prison for life.

Therapists must be especially on guard with someone like this, which can be uncomfortable for therapists and clinicians. **You must view your interactions with them like a chess match.** Because, everything about your interactions is a game to them.

Towards their therapists, they may exhibit these types of behaviors:

- Play into your desire to “make a difference,” which is fertile ground for them to manipulate you.
- Express prosocial behaviors.
- Trap you by making you believe you have reached them in a way no one else has.

However, the “baked” sociopaths, or those with features of antisocial behaviors, can benefit from therapy. Clients will very rarely be as healthy and whole as you want them to when they leave therapy.



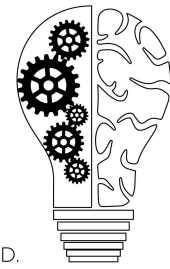
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However, the goal is for them to leave with better connection to people, **not use sex as a coping strategy, be more intimate (non-sexually) with humans, and relate better to authority.** This will lower their risk of sexual violence, and help them on a track to be able to fit into society.



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Approaching therapy

You can give all the tests you want, but one of the most valid tests of psychopathy is the “hair on the back of your neck” test. **You just know it when you’re in the presence of psychopathy.** It will alarm your body’s natural detection mechanisms. You can just “feel” it. I know that isn’t technical jargon, but it’s so true.

The goal in therapy should be to change their mindset away from objectifying people. It is suggested that you get access to their large criminal history in order to learn what they have done and use that strategically in their treatment. This will arm you with the knowledge of what they have done and what they are capable of.

Approaching them with the idea that they are likely to continue their cycle of behavior unless they do something to change it is an ideal approach. Discussing the importance of change itself and how change occurs can be helpful.

Focus primarily on the dynamic risk factors or “stable factors”:

- Issues with authority
- Intimacy
- Hostility and attitudes towards women

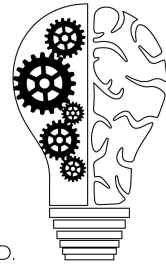
Targeting those aspects one by one and digging into each one is a strategic approach. Improvement in each of these areas will lessen their risk of continuing their behaviors significantly.

Final Thoughts

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There will always be that one in a million person who will use their predisposition to harm others and create a life of criminal behavior.



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However, the glamorization of criminals like Ted Bundy from the media tend to breed a culture focused on the fear of these one in a million criminals.

It is important to remember that the media carries a bi-directional quality. Where the consumer drives what the media will pay attention to. **Limiting the attention we give these types of criminals will lessen their need to be publicized and noticed.**

For Nate Hoyt's extensive notes on this episode - go [here](#)

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