

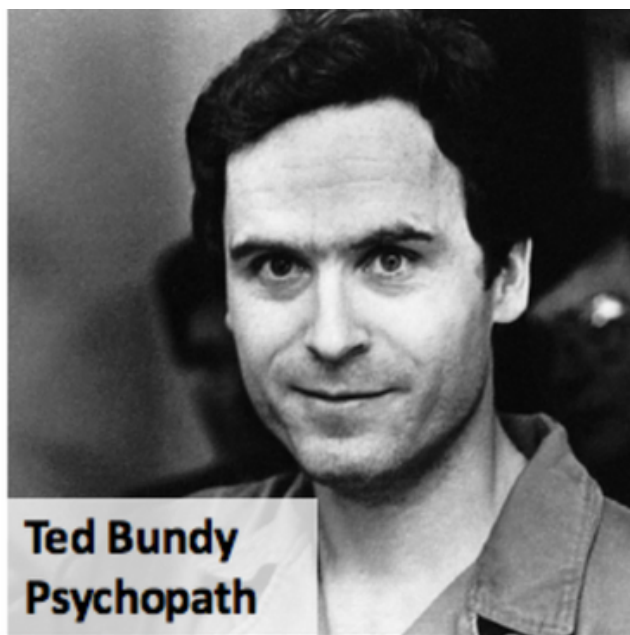
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Spot the Difference: Psychopath or Sociopath? The Donald Trump Example

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Eric Cartman
Psychopath

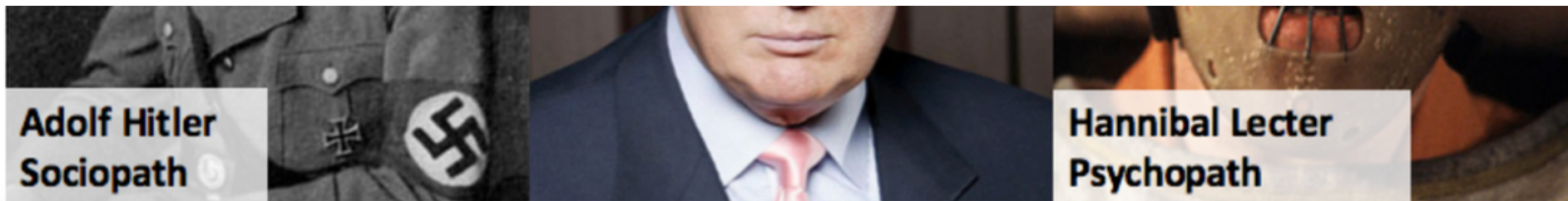


Ted Bundy
Psychopath



Joffrey Baratheon
Sociopath





The terms "Psychopath" and "Sociopath" tend to be used synonymously (and often not too seriously -- phrases like "my boss is a psycho" is akin to saying "I'm OCD" when, in fact, you just like things to be clean.) If it's not something you had to learn, using the words interchangeably is understandable. There is even disagreement and confusion within the academic and psychology communities.

Some professionals claim that there is no meaningful distinction between the labels. Others consider sociopathy to be a sub-category of psychopathy.

Psychopathy certainly has a longer a history than sociopathy. It was originally termed "moral insanity" in 1822; today we have a formal assessment tool (the PCL-R) for diagnosing psychopathy, but not sociopathy. Earlier versions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* did include *Sociopathic Personality Disturbance*, the description of which confusingly included many of the characteristics of a psychopath described by Cleckley in 1941.

Currently, neither psychopathy nor sociopathy are included in the DSM. Instead, many professionals use *Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD)* to refer to psychopathy and/or sociopathy. However, while psychopaths and sociopaths may fit some of the criteria for ASPD – notably, a disregard for the rights of others – only a minority of those with ASPD qualify as psychopaths or sociopaths.

Depending on who you ask, while there is a lot of overlap between psychopathy and sociopathy (and ASPD), they are different disorders. So let me help you spot the difference, using Donald Trump as a basis for comparison.

Why Donald Trump? Aside from the fact that, whether we like it or not, Trump is a hot topic right now, I have heard and read Donald Trump being called both a psychopath and a sociopath. For example:

"Trump is the most perfect example I have ever come across of a malignant, and probably psychopathic, narcissist." -- Sam Vaknin, Mental Health Expert

"If you Google 'sociopath' ... that is the perfect description of Donald Trump" -- Tony Schwartz, Donald Trump's Ghostwriter

So which is it?

First of all, let me say that I have neither the qualifications nor the time and access to Trump to *officially* diagnose him. I'm also not fully convinced that "psychopathy" or "sociopathy" truly exist. However, if these terms are going to be used, it's useful to know what is meant by them. It's actually been a pet peeve of mine for a while. The worst cases I've seen are descriptions of psychopathy and sociopathy that are entirely reversed.

Let's start by pointing out what psychopaths and sociopaths have in **common**:

- A disregard for the rights of others
- A disregard for laws or social conventions
- Lack of guilt and empathy
- Lack of ability to take responsibility for actions
- Deceitful and manipulative behaviour
- Impulsiveness

Even as a clinically untrained observer, one could argue that Donald Trump meets all of these criteria.

He routinely insults and degrades others. His immigration policy is in direct conflict with basic human rights. He doesn't seem to care when he offends or deceives. He never apologises, whether for calling Mexican immigrants rapists or being caught in yet another outright lie. If you catch him out, he shifts attention or responsibility to someone else, and he is easy to anger.

There is another important similarity that can be observed between psychopaths and sociopaths: narcissism. Both psychopaths and sociopaths are narcissistic. But this should be distinguished from *Narcissistic Personality Disorder*.

Like ASPD, you can be narcissistic without being a psychopath or sociopath. All sociopaths and psychopaths are narcissists, but not all narcissists are sociopaths and psychopaths.

Narcissism is characterised by:

- self-admiration; grandiosity
- being self-absorbed; ego-centric
- exaggeration of achievements
- a sense of entitlement and superiority
- exploitation of others
- delicate self-esteem
- disproportionate anger in response to criticism or disagreement
- lack of emotional insight and empathy
- etc.

I bring up narcissism because there are a number of articles online that compare narcissism with sociopathy, but appear to really be comparing sociopathy with psychopathy.

I made the following table to show the main *similarities* between sociopaths and psychopaths; narcissistic traits are at the top.

SIMILARITIES	Sociopath	Psychopath
Narcissistic traits	Self-absorbed; sense of entitlement; ego-centric; grandiose	Self-absorbed; sense of entitlement; ego-centric; grandiose
Concern for others	Weak conscience; deficient empathy; little guilt/remorse; skewed morality	No conscience; no empathy; no guilt/remorse; no sense of morality
Treatment of others	Can appear trustworthy and sincere whilst being conniving and deceitful; compulsive lying	Callous but charming; feigns superficial emotions; deceitful; compulsive lying
Sense of responsibility	Doesn't accept responsibility; resistant to learning from experiences: tendency to blame others	Doesn't accept responsibility; unable to learn from experiences: blames others

Impulsiveness	Satisfies impulses of the moment; uninterested in long-term goals	Varied propensity for impulsiveness; easily bored
Rules	Takes pride in rule breaking	No regard for societal rules

Note that sociopaths and psychopaths share most but *not all* narcissistic traits.

An important characteristic of narcissism and of sociopathy, but not of psychopathy, is an underlying fragility and sense of shame. This is not the same as feeling guilt about one's *actions*. Although psychopaths meet the other criteria for narcissism, they do not share the same need to be validated by others and their behaviour does not stem from deep insecurity. It stems from boredom, a need for stimulation, and a need for control.

Psychopaths and sociopaths also differ in terms of interpersonal and behavioural *presentation* (Skeem et al., 2003). Both are impulsive, but sociopaths are more likely to "act out" inappropriately. They tend to be less emotionally stable, more erratic, and less patient than psychopaths. If we're talking about criminality or violence, psychopaths tend to be predatory and calculating, while sociopaths tend to be opportunistic and reactive.

Both are also capable of forming relationships, but psychopaths attain these relationships by being charming and *mimicking* emotion. Sociopaths, on the other hand, are capable of emotional bonds. They are also capable of feeling guilt and empathy, but only for those with whom they have formed attachments. These feelings are also easily over-ridden by other forces, such as anger.

A final key distinction is that psychopaths are born and sociopaths are made (Lykken, 1995; 2000; Walsh & Wu, 2008). Psychopaths are believed to lack the neurological infrastructure needed to develop empathy or a sense of morality. Sociopathy, on the other hand, is believed to be induced by brain injury or upbringing. A troubled childhood fosters the fragility and delicate self-esteem I mentioned earlier.

The following table lists the main *differences* between sociopaths and psychopaths. Keep in mind that a person does not have to fit *all* the criteria to be a sociopath or psychopath.

DIFFERENCES	Sociopath	Psychopath
Driven by	Need for validation, attention, and admiration;	Stimulation; control

	immediate gratification; control	
Anger	Prone to emotional outbursts	Controlled
Behaviour	Erratic	Calculating and manipulative
Criminal behaviour	Opportunistic; is likely to engage in criminality	Premeditated; may or may not engage in criminality
Violent behaviour	High propensity for violence; prompted by anger, fear or perceived threat; reactive; defensive	Varied propensity for violence; predatory; absent of emotion or threat; proactive; attack
Relationships	Difficulty maintaining normal relationships	Able to appear normal in relationships
Attachments	May form attachments with particular individual or group; values relationships that benefit them; does not want relationships to end	Unable to form attachments; incapacity for love or emotional relationships; often social predators
Fearfulness	Fearful; vulnerable to anxiety and rejection; easy to humiliate	Fearless; arrogant; confident; impossible to humiliate
Nature/nurture	Nurture; adverse environment; tend to come from dysfunctional families and disadvantaged groups	Nature; biological in origin; numbers remain stable across cultures and time

Now let's consider Donald Trump.

First, the obvious ones. Narcissism gets a tick. Compulsive lying gets a tick. Sense of responsibility (lack thereof) gets a tick. Trump also seems to disregard many social conventions and the feelings of others. Tick.

In line with the definition of sociopath, Trump is known to throw "tantrums" when he doesn't get his way. He gets angry when he loses or when someone challenges him, and he doesn't hide it.

In terms of his relationships, Trump appears to have a good connection with his children and with those select few that admire him. In the end though, what really seems to matter to Trump is himself. People need to see him as and treat him like a wonderful man, otherwise you can expect some nasty evaluations about your own worth.

As for the rest? Well, Trump appears to have had a rather privileged upbringing, which wouldn't be in perfect line with sociopathy. I don't know

about his fearfulness, and his criminality is hard to judge. Violent behaviour? He certainly *threatens* it to anyone who heckles him, which is pretty reactive, but he doesn't seem to follow through, at least not personally.

This brings me to another important point: if psychopathy and sociopathy exist, they likely exist on a continuum and may not always make a person "bad" or "evil".

There is evidence, for example, that good can come from fostering some psychopathic qualities. Dutton argues that "functional psychopaths" who are charming but lack empathy are often able to do good (e.g., perform surgery), and are much more common than psychopathic *killers* like Ted Bundy. Psychopaths are also more likely to be CEOs, lawyers, and ... politicians.

This is relevant because many judgements about psychopaths and sociopaths are made based on incarcerated criminals. It could be that the majority of psychopaths and sociopaths are not really that dangerous, and even do good.

In my view, though, Donald Trump **IS** dangerous.

His antics may make for good entertainment *now*. We laugh at his "tiny hands" and strange hair. We mock his irrational outbursts, his fictitious claims, attempts to avoid scrutiny, and outright contradictory statements.

But as with Hitler, who was originally considered a little over-zealous, with a shrill voice and dramatic gestures, Trump is in danger of having control over an entire (and powerful) country. In the early days, Hitler was described as a clown, eccentric, a caricature. He wasn't taken seriously. Later on, when he gained more power it was thought that other politicians would be able to control him. We now know otherwise.

Like Hitler, Donald Trump is able to draw on people's fears, anger, and desire to make their country "great again". I wouldn't under-estimate the power of this rhetoric, or of the man behind the rhetoric that gets his hands on more power.

Also like Hitler, Trump removes hecklers from his rallies. Like Hitler, Trump is admired for saying what he really thinks. It's just that, instead of Jews, it's Mexicans and Muslims. Instead of the Nazi salute, Trump supporters are asked to raise their hands and swear allegiance.

And like Hitler, if I had to pick a category for **Donald Trump**, I would choose **sociopathy**. The emotional control maintained by psychopaths means they tend to fly under the radar. If Trump was a psychopath, we may not have noticed it.

If you want a quick reference for distinguishing sociopathy from psychopathy, I created a much shorter table than the two above. It reviews the way that I remember the difference

that remember the difference:

Sociopath	Psychopath
Hot-headed	Cold-hearted
Need for validation	Need for stimulation/entertainment
Emotional	Controlled
Erratic	Calculating and manipulative
Fearful	Fearless

In summary, their main differences stem from the underlying **motives** and **responses**.

Motives: The behaviour of sociopaths comes from a place of fear and a need for validation. They are strongly affected by how they are perceived by those around them and are driven to control this. Consider Trump's disgust and child-like responses to anyone who criticises him. Unlike sociopaths, psychopaths are not motivated so much by this emotion. Psychopaths are driven by a need for "entertainment".

Responses: Sociopaths can have erratic and emotional responses. They are *reactive*. For these reasons, sociopaths have difficulty maintaining relationships and a good social circle. Consider Donald Trump's failed relationships and emotional outbursts. Psychopaths, on the other hand, are *proactive*: controlled and calculating. They are able to charm others and feign emotion to maintain relationships without cultivating an actual emotional bond.

The ancient Greek word for "mind" is "psyche". If the behaviour of psychopaths is driven not by emotion (are **cold-hearted**), but by their heads, then the term **psycho**-path makes sense. And if sociopaths are driven by how *other people* see them, the term **socio**-path also makes sense. This evokes *emotions* that the sociopath can't help but express, tending towards being **hot-headed**.

The key is not to validate the sociopath.

We're not doing a great job of this so far. Trump is validated every time his fear-mongering has an impact on the polls. He is validated every time the crowd cheers. He is validated with airtime and by the people he surrounds himself with.

Potentially, instead of stamping out radical Islamic terrorism, the West are creating their own form of terrorism, directed at themselves, fostered by a sociopath with too much power and not enough foresight, and more concern for himself than for the people he claims to represent.

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