

Disruptive behaviors: a 14-year-old boy case

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



Z is a 14-year-old boy in eighth grade. He has been labeled by authority figures in his school as a problematic child, and enrolled in a supplementary academic program on Saturdays during the academic semester, and throughout most his summer. As this program focuses on children from first grade through eighth, Z is one of the older kids enrolled. Although Z often engages in aggressive and defiant behavior, he should not be deemed a psychopath due to the context of his aggression and the social circumstances that he has lived through.

To begin, Z has spent the past four years of his life under the care of his grandmother. His mother is an extremely absent parent who does not care for Z's wellbeing, and his father was never involved in his life. Due to the circumstances of his parents, Z was socialized from a very young age to toughen up so he would not be taken bullied or overlooked. Furthermore, Z has exhibited aspects of antisocial personality as indicated in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 in characteristics such as a lack of empathy for others, lack of guilt for his actions, and a failure to conform to social norms of respect (DSM-5, 2013). Frick (2009) compares childhood-onset antisocial children with adolescent-onset antisocial children in terms of their level of aggression and persistence of antisocial behaviors, and found that those in the childhood-onset cohort were linked to greater family instability and parents with less effective parenting strategies. Z's extreme lack of strong parental role models and unstable living situation seemingly combine to create a path towards aggressive and defiant behavior.

Z's aggressive behavior are typically shown in actions such as yelling at or shoving another student. However, most of his aggressive actions are

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usually adaptive or reactive by nature. Connor (2002) identifies specific subtypes of aggression. Z's behavior could be classified as adaptive because he needed to exhibit a certain level of aggression in the environment that he grew up. Not conforming to the standard of aggression in his immediate environment would result in him being seen as weak and more picked on; thus, there is a survival value to his aggressive behavior. Some of his behavior such as yelling or shoving classmates are to some extent reactive by Connor's (2002) definition, in that they are in response to feeling frustrated in goal-directed behavior. Z was noticed only yelling at classmates who were unnecessarily loud in the hallways while he was in an adjacent classroom, and only shoved students who blatantly stood in his way. Taking these behaviors without context would place Z in the classification of a psychopath, especially in the antisocial sub-factor, but it is important to note that his behavior is not done with shallow affect. Z's defiant behavior is usually displayed through a refusal to comply with instructions from authority figures or easily losing his temper when things do not go his way. He also exhibits certain characteristics of the interpersonal sub-factor of psychopathy, specifically a grandiose self-worth where he believes that he is the most important person who deserves all the attention in the room.

Z however does not exhibit a lack of remorse or lack of empathy for his actions and peers, he accepts responsibility for his actions. He is also fully aware that his actions are not acceptable and will have certain consequences but continues to engage in them. Z however, is extremely focused in his math class and even excels at it, but does not display the same attention and behavior in his English or science classes. It seems like a

disservice to Z to simply label him as a problematic child with certain mental health disorders or as a psychopath based on his actions alone without taking into account the social factors influencing him. Although Z does engage in both aggressive and defiant behavior atypical of a normal development course at his age, it is not doing justice to him by associating these highly-stigmatized labels with his name.