

Ap psychology fall term project



**ASSIGN
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AP Psychology Fall Term Project Introduction I am more interested in the abstract and philosophical aspects rather than the more concrete biological aspects of psychology. The topic that interested me the most so far this year and the topic that I continued to research was the topic of morality. I didn't have a specific question I wanted to address but as I read some articles about people who were institutionalized for violently expressing psychopathic personality traits, I came across an article that asked a question of its own.

The article brought up the idea that traits of psychopathy including ruthlessness, charm, mindfulness, focus, fearlessness, and action can be beneficial to the individual. From this idea, the question I sought to answer was " If we all take on typically immoral psychopathic tendencies, are they no longer immoral? " Summary The article I read came from Scientific American adapted from the non-fiction book *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us about Success* by Kevin Dutton. The main question posed by Dutton is: Can the typical traits of a psychopath benefit people at certain points in their lives?

The article is more of an interview with some patients at Broadmoor, " the best-known high-security psychiatric hospital in England" and an observation rather than a study with measurements and variables. However, applying knowledge of Kohlberg, Bronfenbrenner, and Gillian's theories make the article even more interesting. In the article, Dutton discusses the inmates' solutions to problems similar to that of the Heinz dilemma, psychopathy and the brain, and a relation to psychopathic traits to religion and happiness.

If what he discusses were put into terms of variables, the independent variable could be expression of psychopathic traits and the dependent variable could be anything the traits effect from happiness to inner or universal morality. Discussion In the article, the ideas of the psychopaths can be looked at and evaluated using both Kohlberg and Brofenbrenner's theories on moral development. In the article Dutton asks one of the inmates a hypothetical question. An old woman moves out of her house to live with her daughter and son-in-law.

The house is in an up and coming neighborhood and she can get a good price if she sold it. The only problem is the tenant who doesn't want to move out. How do you get the tenant to leave? The first thing the psychopath said was " I'm presuming we're not talking violence here" indicating that psychopaths do have a sense of the Level II conventional morality described by Kohlberg. The psychopath recognizes that violence is typically punished and looked down upon by law and society, putting the psychopath into at least Stage 4 of Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

Essentially the psychopath solves the problem by saying that someone should pretend to be someone from the health department and tell the tenant that the house is not safe to live in and he must leave as soon as he can. He doesn't explain his reasoning but most psychopaths are concerned with one thing only: getting the job done. However, the article doesn't go into why or how the psychopath determined this was the best way to remove the tenant.

If the psychopath figured the action would lead to reward (getting the tenant out) and that is the only consequence, he would be in Stage 1 of Kohlberg's

theory and orientation 1 of Bronfenbrenner's theory. On the other end of the spectrum, if the psychopath figured that if the house got sold and the old woman and her daughter and son-in-law could live comfortably, that the expulsion of the tenant (whether he became homeless or even finds another place to stay) would be the greatest good for the greatest number, putting him in Stage 5 of Kohlberg's theory.

This would be orientation 4 of Bronfenbrenner's theory called objectively oriented morality in which the standing goals of the group override that of the individual. As the conversation continues, the discussion turns to worrying about the future affecting actions in the present. The psychopaths discuss the idea that there's no use in getting your mind wrapped in what might happen when everything in the present is perfectly fine and that you shouldn't let your brain get ahead of you. Do in the moment what makes you happy. Dutton describes this as mindfulness.

Dutton brings up the fact that embracing the present is something that psychopathy and schools of spiritual enlightenment have in common. When it comes to psychology, Dutton brings up a " mindfulness-based cognitive-behavior therapy program for sufferers of anxiety and depression. " Surely, mindfulness and living in the present has its benefits but ignoring the future can produce dangerous consequences as well. Since some stages of morality are based on self satisfaction, others the law and religion, and further the good of society, I have answered my question " If we all take on typically immoral psychopathic tendencies, are they no longer immoral? " The answer I came up with is, " it depends. " The reason " it depends" is because, well, it does. Anyone can have psychopathic traits of mindfulness, ruthlessness,

action, charming, and fearlessness; it's just about how we use them. Sure, Dutton suggests these traits can lead to happiness and success, but in the right amount and for the right reasons. What we consider the "right reasons" and "right amount" is also based on our own levels of morality. If everyone was charming, fearless, ruthless, and mindful, we would all be doing what we could to get ahead and be happy.

If doing what is necessary to be happy and get ahead became a universally moral idea, then sure, there wouldn't be a problem with psychopaths, liars, and cheaters. But in the world in which we live, where we all have our own different ideas of good and bad with exceptions and loopholes included, under the "right" circumstances, these traits are acceptable and useful, but at the "wrong" times they can be damaging and violating. Should we all just become psychopaths? I guess it just depends. Citation Dutton, K. (2013, January). Wisdom from Psychopaths? [Electronic version]. Scientific American.