

Wolf In Sheep's Clothing: Psychopathic Traits and Social Mimicry in a Dating Context



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ABSTRACT

- examined the relationship between psychopathic traits and social mimicry in a dating context
- Study 1:** Self-Report Psychopathy scores (SRP-4) were unrelated to self-reported **spontaneous** mimicry but were positively associated with **instrumental** mimicry.
- Study 2:** psychopathic traits were unrelated to **spontaneous** mimicry while watching a dating profile video but were positively related to the use of **instrumental** mimicry in their dating profile videos
- Findings support the idea that people with psychopathic traits use mimicry deceptively.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

- Many researchers have suggested that psychopaths are **social predators** (e.g. Hare, 2001).
- The **Social Predator Hypothesis** assumes that people with psychopathic traits are a) able to accurately judge vulnerability, b) *able to avoid detection/appear trustworthy*, and c) willing to take risks.
- The present set of studies focused on the **ability to avoid detection in order to appear trustworthy**. Jones (2014) suggested that this may be accomplished through mimicry.
- One context in which impressions are particularly important is dating. There are clear downsides to dating a psychopath as they tend to exploit other people, yet psychopathic traits are associated with success in dating
- These 2 studies looked at whether men with psychopathic traits might use mimicry in dating contexts.
- There are two types of mimicry (Kulesza et al., 2015); **spontaneous mimicry**, which is an automatic reaction to the other person in an interaction, and **instrumental mimicry**, which is intentional and can be used deceptively to create an impression.
- We expected that psychopathy would be related to instrumental mimicry but did not have any predictions for spontaneous mimicry.

METHODS

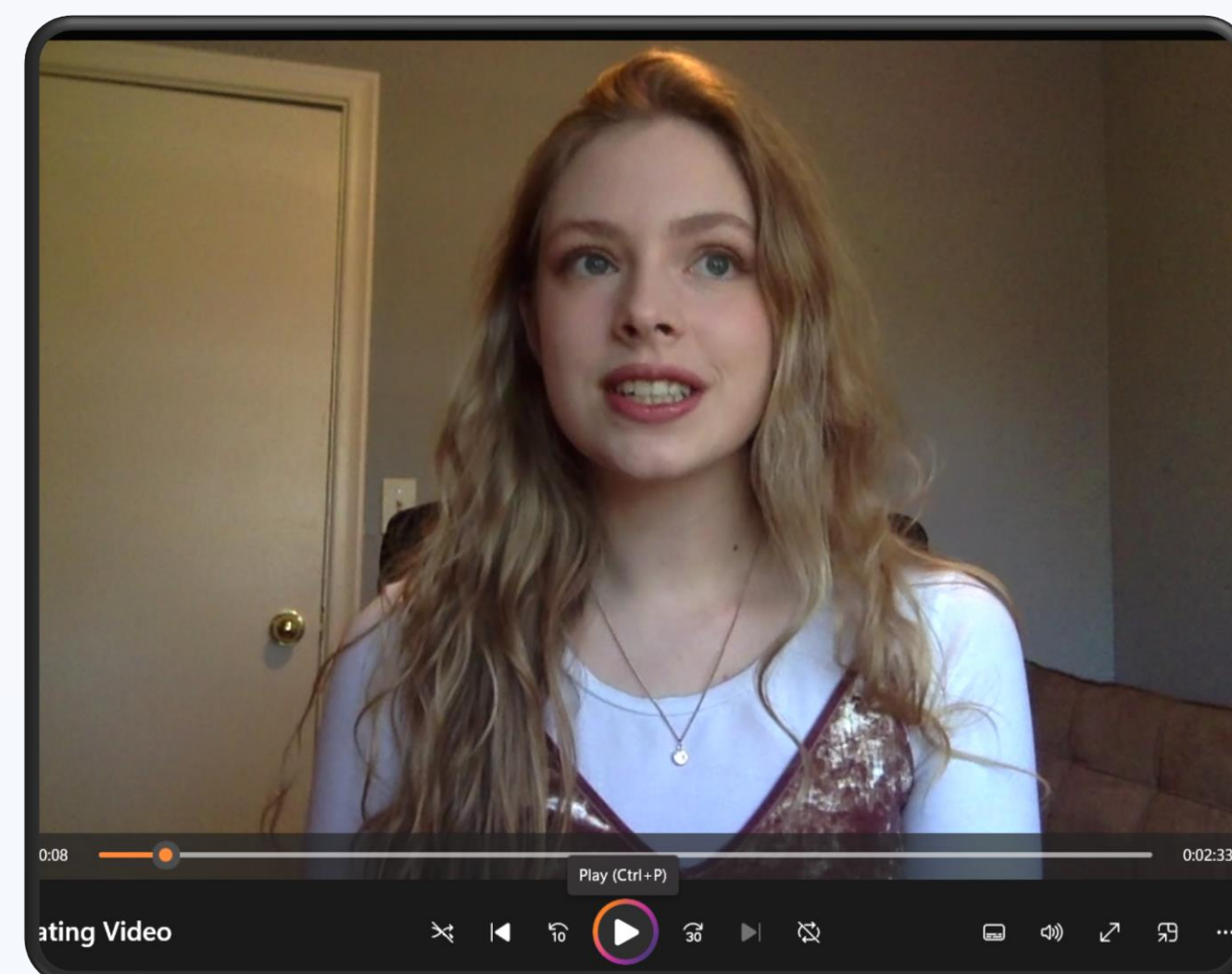
Study 1

Participants were 165 heterosexual male undergraduate students ($M_{age} = 21.24, SD = 4.75$).

Materials

- Self Report Psychopathy Scale: 4* (Paulhus et al., 2016)
- HEXACO facet measure* (developed for this study)

METHODS continued



Study 2

Participants: 65 heterosexual male undergraduate students ($M_{Age} = 21.94, SD = 5.91$).

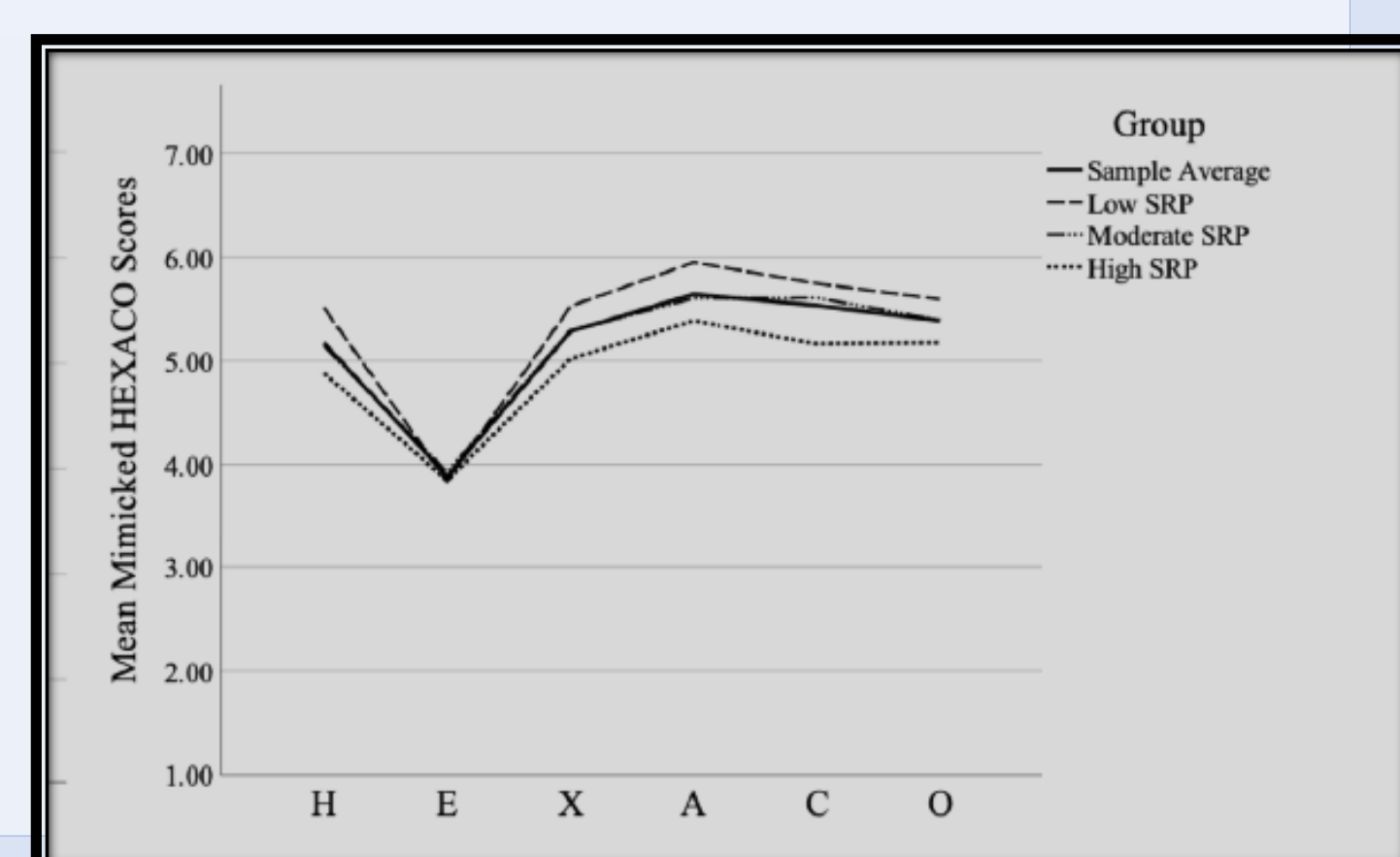
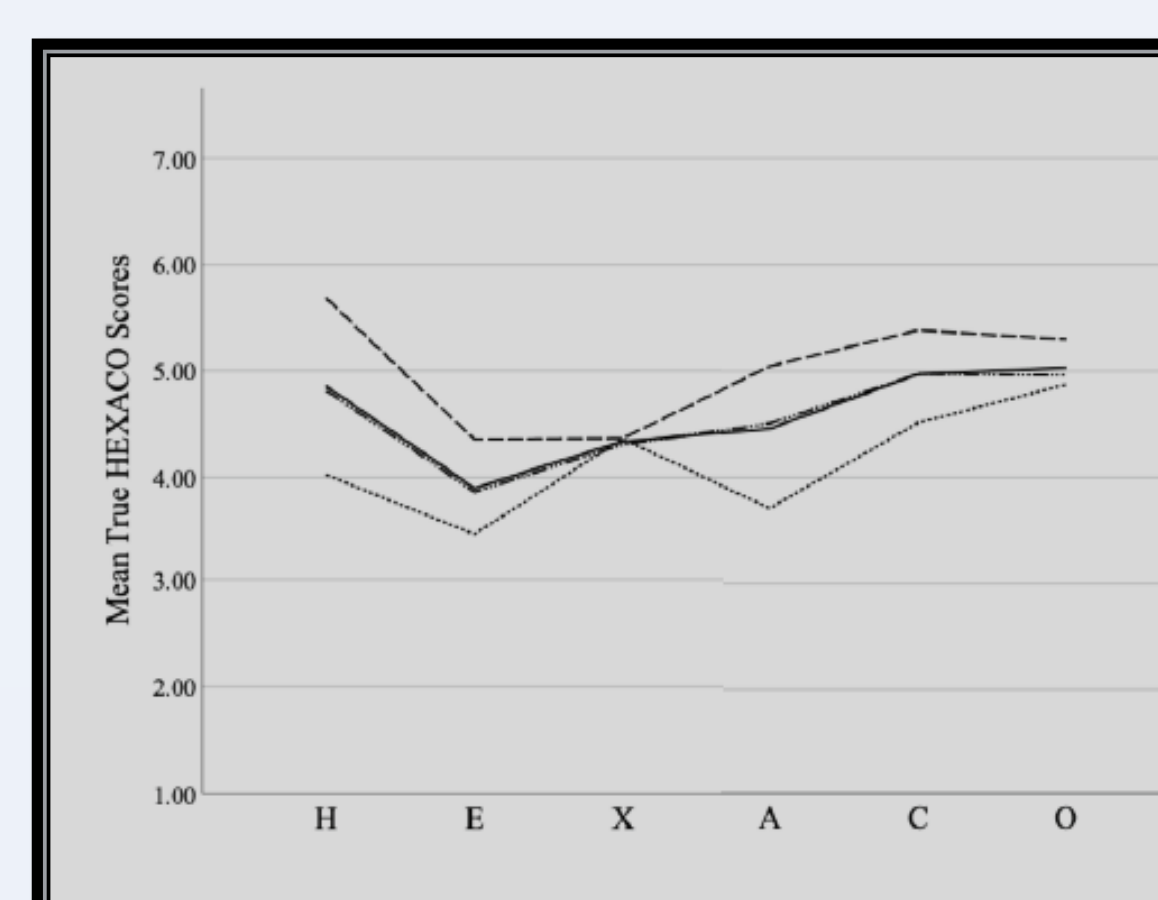
Materials and procedure

- Same materials
- In Study 2, we recorded participants while they watched the dating profile video (to get a behavioral measure of **spontaneous mimicry**) and asked participants to create their own dating profile video that could be coded for **instrumental mimicry**.

RESULTS

Study 1 (Brazil et al., 2023)

- SRP scores were significantly and positively correlated with self-reported **instrumental** mimicry ($p < .05$) but relationships with self-reported **spontaneous** mimicry were nonsignificant.
- A repeated measures ANCOVA found that participants changed their HEXACO facet ratings when asked to appear appealing to the woman in the video ($F(6, 137) = 9.99, p < .001$), and this change was affected by psychopathic traits ($F(6, 137) = 10.07, p < .001$).
- As can be seen in Figure 1, participants with higher levels of psychopathic traits tended to change their scores more dramatically, particularly for Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, and Agreeableness.
- It was also interesting that people with lower psychopathic traits tended to reduce scores on H, E, A



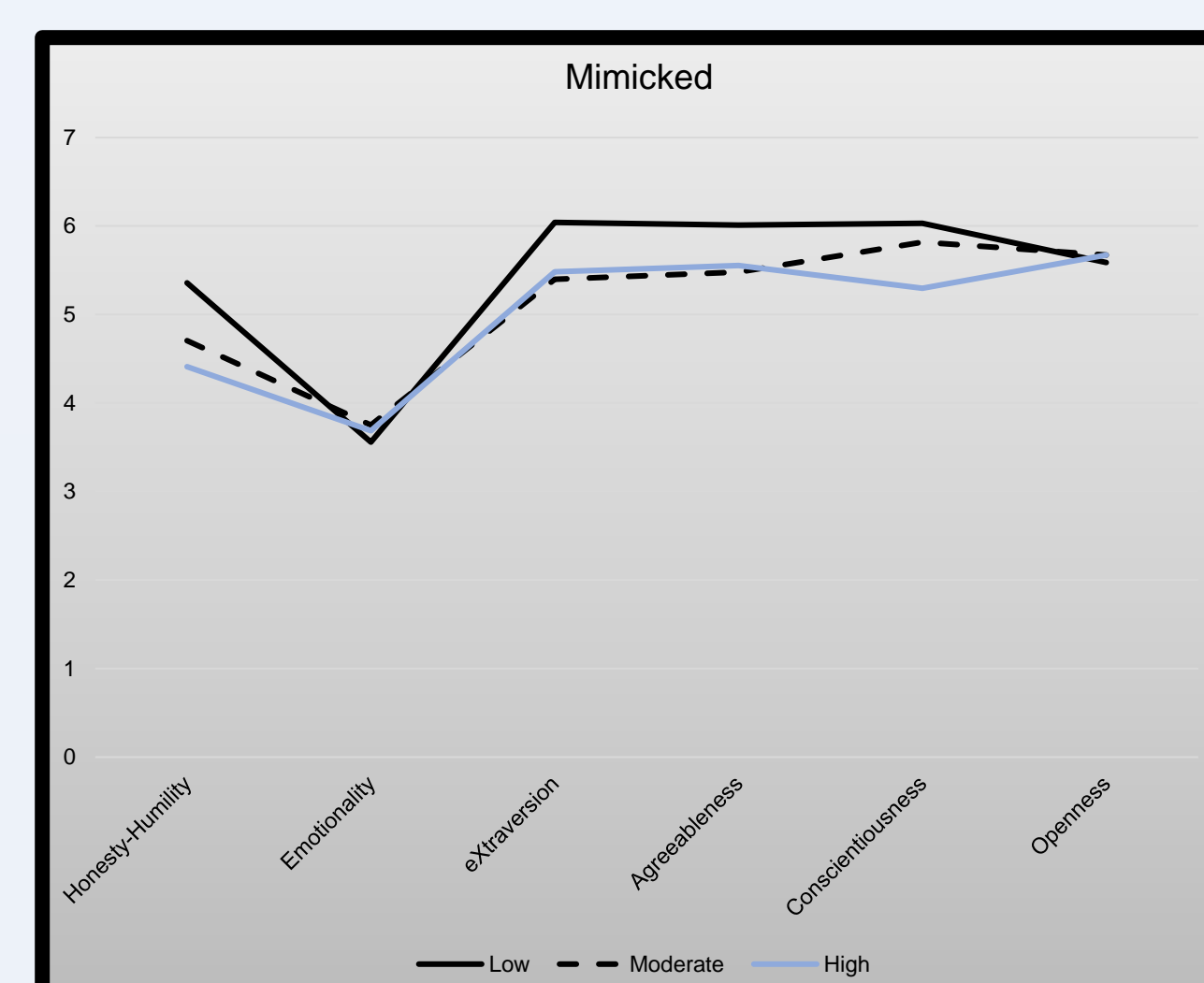
RESULTS: continued

Study 2 (Book et al., in preparation)

- As can be seen in Table 1, psychopathic traits were unrelated to **spontaneous**/reactive mimicry measures, with the exception of laughter, which was positively correlated with psychopathic traits.
- As expected, there were moderate to large positive correlations between psychopathic traits and **instrumental** mimicry.

		Factor 1	Factor 2	Total
Reactive/Spontaneous	Self-reported general	-.18	-.08	-.15
	Self-reported during video	-.15	-.04	-.12
	Coded body reactions	-.15	.0001	-.10
	Laughter	.29*	.42**	.37**
Instrumental	Self-reported general	.42**	.25*	.39**
	Used to make dating profile	.25*	.23	.27*
	Coded instrumental mimicry	.34*	.48**	.43**
N = 50				

- A repeated measures ANCOVA found that men tended to alter their HEXACO scores to appear more appealing to the target in the video ($F(6, 48) = 3.42, p = .007$), and this was affected by psychopathic traits ($F(6, 48) = 3.70, p = .004$).
- Univariate tests found that these effects were significant for Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, and Agreeableness ($p < .05$). For illustration and interpretation purposes, we split the sample into low, moderate and high psychopathy scores (based on percentiles) and then graphed the true and mimicked HEXACO scores (as in Study 1).



- the high psychopathy group tended to increase their scores on Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness while the other two groups tended to stay relatively stable on those traits. As well, the low psychopathy group **DECREASED** their Emotionality scores, while the other two groups stayed the same.

CONCLUSIONS

- These studies examined whether men with psychopathic traits make use of mimicry in dating contexts.
- As expected, psychopathic traits were unrelated to **spontaneous mimicry**, whether self-reported or behavioral, but were positively correlated with the use of **instrumental mimicry** (self-reported and behavioral).
- Men with psychopathic traits reported using instrumental mimicry in their everyday lives, and during the creation of their dating profile videos.
- They also tended to increase their scores on Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness when asked to appear more appealing to the woman in the video.
- Overall, these results support Jones' (2014) idea that psychopaths are affective mimics.
- Future research should examine whether the instrumental mimicry is effective in making them seem trustworthy.
- As well, it will be important to examine whether this tendency extends to other contexts, such as employment contexts, friendships, and other areas where impressions are important.

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