

70 Million Psychopaths and Other Delights

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 18 September 2012 13:42

It's an old story, one that keeps poking back into view this election cycle: How to reach people with your particular message? Most of the time, we're stuck in our own channels and ruts, either stuck preaching to the choir or unable to usher new people into the tent.

This trend of stuck messaging, to pick a phrase, is clearly present in politics today, with each so-called "side" aghast at the clearly observable insanity of their opposites, everyone's listening skills turned off at the source.

Two camps have been routinely described by the Occupy movement: the elite 1%, and all the rest of us rabble in the remaining 99%. As it turns out in real life, 1% of the population are also likely psychopaths.

Many psychopaths are within that 1% elite, and some are not. These are not necessarily violent or criminal people, simply those whose brains show little if any stress or concern while observing others coming to harm.

With 7-billion-plus people spinning around with us on this fine planet, that leaves more than 70 million psychopaths to contend with.

(Sidebar: And yes, it may sometimes seem that all 70 million are planning to vote the straight Psycho-Teabag ticket in this country, but it's not so. If it's of any comfort, only the psychopaths in our *own* country can actually vote here.)

What possible evolutionary purpose is served by psychopaths? How do we successfully go forward with such personalities in our midst?

These are some of the questions Joe Brewer is trying to answer as the founder of Cognitive Policy Works, an educational and research center in which the cognitive and behavioral sciences are applied in politics.

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In an AlterNet article, he asks a number of intriguing questions about these 70 million people who are devoid of empathy. Brewer is attempting to work out a loose framework for how we might all make adjustments to more successfully deal with psychopaths and, in turn, improve chances of survival for our civilization and species.

As with most reasonable approaches with unreasonable people, it seems to come down to the carrot-and-stick trick: Be inclusive where possible, and be ready to apply stout sanctions.

* * *

If you were concerned about the number of sociopaths in the mix, they can average from 2% to 4% of the population, which is a lot of people showing no conscience or care about others.

After all, 4% works out to 4 out of 100 -- or 1 in 25. And, as most of us know, or have known, 25 people, this tends to really hit home.

Of course, not all sociopaths are serial killers. Most are simply impulsive, irresponsible, narcissistic, and without remorse, to quote one brief description. Most of these people have figured out how to mimic emotion, and so, blend in with the other 96%.

Undetected.

* * *

- To slightly paraphrase William Ralph Inge: *The proper time to influence the character of a child is about 100 years before birth.*

- We have a lot of work to do and, like Willard Romney's departure from Bain, it needs to be

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done *retroactively.*

* * *

Are all these people axe murderers? No, of course not. But many have their values, internal logic, and self-reasoning twisted into knots, mounted upside down, and turned inside out, or so say the rest of us.

Most people cannot imagine living in such a conscience-less state. I recently ran into a nicely-worded, illuminating taste of what that viewpoint might look like, from the inside:

- *I stole your money so that you will learn to stop hiding it from me.*

Sound to you like any "too big to fail" banking scenarios yet? How about Enron? Bernie Madoff? Big Oil? Wall Street in general? Anyone you know -- an ex, maybe?

The list, of course, is endless.

The case, of course, has been made that America is an incubator and playground for these errant personality types.

All this, of course, is delivered to you in plenty of time for Halloween.

Here, I beg your indulgence at this point, and ask you to imagine this last line, pronounced in the rich, theatrical voice of Vincent Price, Boris Karloff, or Alfred Hitchcock:

All kinds of "-opathies" in our world to go "bump" in the night -- little gifts that keep on giving,

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all through the long night... ☐ Sleep tight.

70 million psychopaths:

<http://www.alternet.org/visions/how-will-99-deal-psychopaths-1?page=0%2C1>

Definitions:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=what-psychopath-means>

Sociopaths Next Door:

<http://ranprieur.com/readings/americanpsycho.html>

A host of intriguing, allied materials is housed here:

<http://www.tecumsehproject.org/psychopathy.html>

Psycho bosses:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/19/business/psychopath-boss/index.html>

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Detection guide:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Detect-a-Sociopath>

General reference:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antisocial_personality_disorder

Two books of interest:

The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us - Robert D. Hare, PhD

The Sociopath Next Door - Martha Stout

And, an interesting discussion thread:

<http://www.thelovellogic.com/forum/showthread.php?1637-1-out-of-25-people-in-the-world-are-sociopaths-was-your-ex-one-of-them>

Concerns about distribution of psychopaths in government:

<http://www.911-strike.com/psychopaths.htm>

And, an intense assortment of mixed audio adventures in psychopath testing:

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<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/436/the-psychopath-test>