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The Interaction of Psychopathic Traits and Self-Agency in a Student and Community Sample

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The current study aims to explore the relationship between an individual's psychopathic traits and their experience of agency as previous research has yet to examine the contributions of these constructs in a non-criminal sample. The current study hypothesized that an individual's total psychopathy and blame externalization subscale scores would have a negative correlation with their scores of self-agency. The participants (N = 73, 63% female), who were university students or nonstudents from the local community, completed online surveys assessing their psychopathic traits and experience of agency via the Psychopathic Personality Inventory (PPI) and Sense of Agency Scale (SoAS). Our analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between the blame externalization subscale of the PPI and an individual's SoAS score. In other words, those with higher blame externalization reported a lower sense of self-agency. There was no significant relationship between total PPI and SoAS scores. Given the results, we suggest that the tendency to blame others to rationalize poor behavior as it occurs in blame externalization may affect how an individual experiences agency, or control over one's own actions. The two main limitations of the study are that the sample size was small for a study of this kind and there was a disproportionate sex ratio. Future research in larger and more diverse samples will be necessary to further explore relationships between other subdomains of psychopathy traits and self-agency.