

# Enjoying another's misfortune: A functional analysis

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# Research Motivation

## ▶ Schadenfreude

- Definition:
  - ▶ Pleasure at the misfortune of another
- Research problems
  - ▶ What is misfortune?
  - ▶ Research has equated status competition and moral violations
  - ▶ How real is the construct of schadenfreude?

## ▶ Antipathy

- An alternative concept proposed and defined
- Broader than schadenfreude
- Facilitates identification of functional design of human psychology
- Antipathy research can
  - ▶ Evaluate the schadenfreude construct
  - ▶ Demonstrate meaningful differences between kinds of antipathy

# Presentation Overview

- ▶ What is schadenfreude?
  - Schadenfreude research
- ▶ An attempt to cut nature at its joints
  - An evolutionary psychology analysis of antipathy
- ▶ Using antipathy to clarify the nature of schadenfreude
  - Research program
  - Pilot study

# Schadenfreude

- ▶ Etymology: German
  - schaden = damage
  - Freude = joy, happy
- ▶ Definition:
  - when one feels pleasure at the misfortune of another
- ▶ Misfortune definition:
  1. adverse fortune; bad luck.
  2. an instance of this; mischance; mishap.

# Schadenfreude Research

- ▶ Van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, & Niewedg (2005)
  - "schadenfreude is only enabled when a third party or circumstance causes the misfortune"
  - IVs
    - ▶ Domain of interest
    - ▶ Threat of status inferiority
  - DV
    - ▶ Schadenfreude measure (at German loss)
    - ▶ Satisfied, relieved, happy, and schadenfreude
- Dutch participant reaction to German loss in soccer (World Cup)
  - ▶ Experienced schadenfreude if
    - Interested in soccer
    - Reminded of Dutch inferiority in soccer

# Schadenfreude Research

- ▶ Van Dijk, Ouwerkerk, Goslinga, Nieweg, & Gallucci (2005)
  - IV1: Misfortune
    - ▶ stole laptop and under criminal investigation
    - ▶ poor presentation, had to rewrite much of thesis
  - IV2: Psychological closeness
    - ▶ Male vs female participant and stimulus person
  - DV: Schadenfreude measure (5 items)
    - ▶ What happened gives me satisfaction
    - ▶ I like what happened to [...]
    - ▶ I couldn't resist a smile
    - ▶ Actually I had to laugh a little
    - ▶ I feel Schadenfreude
- Outcome: More schadenfreude if caught stealing and same sex as rater

# Beyond Schadenfreude

- ▶ What causes schadenfreude?
  - Disliked soccer team losses to another team?
  - Being investigated for stealing a laptop?
  - Not preparing sufficiently for a presentation?
- ▶ Why would the failure of a competitor activate the same psychological processes as someone caught after a crime?
  - Envy vs desire for punishment
  - An evolutionary functional analysis suggests that different psychological processes may be activated by different antecedents



# Beyond Schadenfreude

- ▶ Schadenfreude loosens meaning (i.e., precision) by
  - attempting to accommodate competition and morality related themes
  - restricting definition to “misfortune”
- ▶ A more general level of analysis, antipathy, can
  - accommodate
    - ▶ competition
    - ▶ morality related themes
  - and avoid “misfortune”

# Antipathy

- ▶ Antipathy definition
  - experiencing a hedonic valence opposite to the hedonic valence experienced by a target
  - ▶ Hedonic valence: pleasantness or unpleasantness of feeling
- So, 2 kinds:
  - ▶ displeasure at another's pleasant experience
  - ▶ pleasure at another's unpleasant experience
    - includes schadenfreude
    - occurs when event increases own fitness and reduces the other person's fitness (Johnston, 1999)

# Antipathy: A functional analysis

- ▶ Competition
  - **Domains**
    - ▶ Status (prestige and dominance)
    - ▶ Social resources (e.g., friends, family, coworkers)
      - Mates
    - ▶ Physical resources (e.g., money, territory)
  - Between individuals or groups

# Antipathy: A functional analysis

- ▶ Competition
  - **Function**
    - ▶ provide access to resources (broadly defined)
  - **Mechanism**
    - ▶ recalibration of one's relative resource access, both in one's own head and in the minds of others

# Antipathy: A functional analysis

- ▶ **Competition**
  - Psychological architecture
    - ▶ **Cognition**
      - monitor position relative to competitor(s)
    - ▶ **Feelings**
      - envy, inferiority/superiority, threatened, secure/insecure, dominant/subordinate, entitled
    - ▶ **Behaviors**
      - improve own reputation/position
        - ▶ try harder
      - worsen competitor's reputation/position:
        - ▶ gossip and rumors
        - ▶ physical fight

# Antipathy: A functional analysis

- ▶ **Morality related themes**
  - **Domains**
    - ▶ Violation of social and moral norms
    - ▶ Unfair treatment
    - ▶ Betrayal/rejection
  - **Function**
    - ▶ deter cheating and defection
  - **Mechanism**
    - ▶ wrong-doer recalibrates the desirability of cheating/defecting

# Antipathy: A functional analysis

- ▶ **Morality related themes**
  - Psychological architecture
- ▶ **Cognition**
  - Monitor appropriateness of other's behavior, feelings, attitudes, and intentions
- ▶ **Feelings**
  - "punitive sentiment," anger, spite
- ▶ **Behaviors**
  - Punish or ostracize wrong-doer

# Antipathy: A functional analysis

- ▶ If competition and morality are different processes . . .
  - Research questions:
    1. Can the difference between competition and morality related themes be demonstrated empirically?
    2. Do individual differences exist in experiencing competition and morality related themes?
      - Frequency
      - Intensity

# Antipathy: Research project

- ▶ 5 studies:
  1. Pilot study
    - ▶ Collect self-generate stories during which participants felt antipathy
    - ▶ 39 participants
  2. Replicate and extend Study 1
    - ▶ 200 participants (on-line)
  3. Participants rate frequency and intensity, based on their experience, for each of a list of antipathy events selected from Study 1 and 2
    - ▶ 1000 participants (on-line)
    - ▶ factor analyze results to develop an antipathy scale
  4. Participants complete antipathy scale, related scales, and do behavioral tasks related to antipathy (e.g., punish wrong-doer)
    - ▶ 100 participants
  5. Participants complete antipathy scale and related scales
    - ▶ 1000 participants (on-line)

# Antipathy: Pilot study

- ▶ Goals
  - Demonstrate functionally distinct types of antipathy
  - Generate list of events that result in antipathy
- ▶ Method
  - Participants describe an event which was pleasant for them but unpleasant for the person or group who experienced the event
  - Characterization of target and event (qualitative):
    - ▶ who experienced the event
    - ▶ relationship
    - ▶ cause
    - ▶ what they *did* that you did not like
      - *unintentionally* or *intentionally*
    - ▶ what about the person or group you disliked
    - ▶ good came out of the event
    - ▶ what emotions felt [*before, during, after*] the event
    - ▶ why do you think you felt pleasure at the event
    - ▶ demographics
      - sex, age, height, weight, ethnic background

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ► Quantitative questions

- general
  1. How unpleasant was the event for the person or group who experienced it?
  2. To what degree did the fact that the event was unpleasant bring you *pleasure*?
  3. To what degree did the fact that the event was unpleasant bring you *pain*?
  4. For you to feel pleasure at the event, how important was it that the person or people who experienced it found it unpleasant?
  5. If you were the only person in the universe to ever know about the event, would it still bring you pleasure?
  6. To what degree did the person or people who experienced the unpleasant event *deserve it*?

## Punitive Sentiment

# Antipathy: Pilot study

- ▶ Questions that differentiate between competition and injustice (quantitative)

## Competition

To what degree did the event . . .

7. *increase* your social status (i.e., your social standing or social rank)?
8. *increase* the social status of any person (or group) with whom you are associated?
9. *decrease* your social status?
10. *decrease* the social status of any person (or group) with whom you are associated?
11. *increase* the social status of the person or group who experienced it?
12. *decrease* the social status of the person or group who experienced it?

7. To what degree did the event *increase* your social status (i.e., your social standing or social rank)?

None       A lot

No response

# Antipathy: Pilot study

- ▶ **Predictions**
  - Competition
    - ▶ Participant (or associate) status will increase
    - ▶ Target (or associate) status will decrease
    - ▶ Won't be important that the target suffered
  - Morality related themes
    - ▶ Important that the target suffered
    - ▶ Pleasant if only participant knows
    - ▶ Target deserved to suffer
- ▶ **Data analysis strategy**
  - Code antipathy stories by functional type ( $\kappa = .62$ )
    - ▶ Competition
    - ▶ Morality related themes
  - Compare different types of antipathy on quantitative measures

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ► Results: Coding

- Story examples
  - Competition
    - Ex-husband and new girlfriend break up
    - Rival team lost
    - Cocky friend loses card game
    - \*Disrespectful, abusive, dead-beat dad (sister's son's father and ex-boyfriend) gets arrested
    - Person bragged about being good at piano, then couldn't finish song
    - Mom doesn't like sibling, who was conceived when father cheated
    - Friend who never gets in trouble finally gets in trouble
    - Humorous that fiancé's complaining sister had to clean up puke
    - Beats friend in race
    - Laughed when oldest son fell down
    - Laughed when friends got splashed by car
    - Girl who stole my boyfriend got busted at a party
    - Friendship deteriorated after friend got a boyfriend, then friend got hurt
    - I didn't spend time with friend after I got a girlfriend
    - Laughed when sister got stung
    - "When my teacher tripped down the stairs the day of a test in High School Her donut went flying in the air . . ."
    - "Because I've always felt like she was competition. And I knew that this was something she was losing, and I enjoyed it."
    - I got my friend back when her boyfriend broke up with her

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ► Results: Coding

- Story examples
  - Morality related themes
    - "I felt pleasure [when abusive friend got trouble for murdering a police officer] because I was once an abused wife and found that justice had been done."
    - Girl tells a guy's girlfriend he was cheating on her
    - "she betrayed our friendship" by messing around with a mutual acquaintance
    - Teacher used to slap me on the back of the head and humiliate me, then got fired
    - Coworker, who takes credit for others' work, is punished for not knowing how to do something
    - Atheist enjoys when discussion leader did not like religion, but others did
    - Sister didn't care about sickness, so I let her sleep in the sun and get burnt
    - When I discipline my sister
      - "When my baby daddy got brutally attacked," he was abusive to her
      - Coworker was "idiot" and "very lazy" and so happy he got fired
      - "He blew me off" and got in trouble
      - Coworker who drank alcohol at work got busted
    - \*Friend lied, saying would graduate, but didn't because of a girlfriend
    - Group member got a bad grade on a presentation after not pulling her weight
    - Friend wasn't helpful or loyal during breakup — "I felt so betrayed by her"

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ► Results: Competition

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Variable	Competition	Morality
Increase your status	1.87 (1.74)	1.94 (1.69)
Increase status of associate	1.35 (0.89)	2.31 (2.12)
Decrease your status	1.22 (0.85)	1.50 (0.97)
Decrease status of your associate	1.52 (1.28)	1.63 (1.20)
Increase status of target	1.43 (1.20)	1.81 (1.38)
*Decrease status of target	2.30 (1.70)	4.00 (2.22)

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\*  $p < .05$

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ► Results: **Morality related themes**

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Variable	Competition	Morality
*Important that event was unpleasant	3.65 (2.17)	5.38 (1.54)
Still pleasant if only you knew	4.91 (2.09)	5.69 (1.82)
*How much was unpleasant event deserved?	4.00 (2.31)	6.63 (0.62)

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\*  $p < .05$

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ▶ Results summary

- ▶ **Predictions:**
  - Competition
    - ▶ Participant (or associate) status will increase
    - ▶ Target (or associate) status will decrease
    - ▶ Won't be important that the target suffered
  - Morality related themes
    - ▶ Important that the target suffered
    - ▶ Pleasant if only participant knows
    - ▶ Target deserved to suffer

Supported?

No

**No**

No

**Yes**

No

**Yes**

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ► Results

- Two variables differentiated competition and mortality related themes as predicted
  - Important that the target suffer
  - Target deserved to suffer
- One variable was in the reverse direction
  - Morality related punishment reduced status more than competition
- Status-change variables had small means
  - (excluding target status reduction)
  - 1.22 – 2.31

# Antipathy: Pilot study

## ▶ Conclusions

- Two variables differentiated successfully between types of antipathy
- Little variability on status questions suggests people didn't use them as desired
- ▶ Previous suggestions for status questions:
  - "respect"
  - "want to be around you"
- Some stories seem to fit more than one category
- May want to break categories down more, for example
  - ▶ Status competition
  - ▶ Social resource competition

# Antipathy: Pilot study

- ▶ Any suggestions for improvements?
  - Theory
  - Next study (based on pilot)
  - Future 3 studies