

Successful Psychopathy Traits of Agent 47 in *Hitman: World of Assassination* (2023)

Yoseph Kevin¹; Theophilus Joko Riyanto²

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University,
Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, INDONESIA
Email: a11220057@john.petra.ac.id¹, jokri@petra.ac.id²

ABSTRACT

In the world of *Hitman: World of Assassination*, Agent 47 is a morally grey, biologically engineered professional assassin who murders evil elites. Individuals who possess a grey morality are known as anti-heroes. They are often linked to individuals who possess *dark triad* traits often linked to psychopathy. Studies have shown that successful psychopaths exist (Cleckley, 1941 as cited by Wallace, 2023, p. 19). This concept of successful psychopathy is present in Agent 47, making him an interesting subject to analyze because it challenges the moral definition of a condition normally considered a neurological deficit. This study applies a conceptual framework called *The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale* by Louise Wallace (2023), focusing on how Agent 47 fulfills the criteria required to be considered a successful psychopath. Our findings indicate that Agent 47 is a successful psychopath based on Wallace's (2023) framework.

Keywords: agent 47, criteria, positive outcome, successful psychopath, traits

INTRODUCTION

Interactive media, particularly video games, has increasingly become a powerful medium to create and popularize complex character archetypes. Along with their popularity, video games are interesting to look at as they have been a part of pop culture for quite some time. The Entertainment Software Association's 2020 Essential Facts report notes that over 214 million people in the United States play video games, with most players falling within the 35–44 age range. One important aspect of modern video games is the moral complexity of their characters, in particular, those that are somewhere in the middle between heroism and villainy (Rohmer, 2021, p. 3). Unlike traditional heroic narratives that center on good values and morally green minds, many modern videogames get players to play the role of characters defined not by pure white and pure black moral standard, but somewhere in between – morally grey, ultimately introducing the term anti-heroes. This trend raises the issue of how these characters are portrayed, aestheticized and considered normal in the current era.

Hitman: World of Assassination (2023) is a third person stealth game and has gained significant popularity within its franchise and fans, making its protagonist, Agent 47 a widely recognized and well-documented figure for character analysis. This study focuses on Agent 47, whose characterization consistently reflects traits associated with psychopathy while he simultaneously demonstrates high functionality, discipline, and goal-directed control. This combination is what makes him a compelling subject, as he embodies the concept of "successful psychopathy". This is a concept found in *The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale* (Wallace, 2023), which describes individuals who exhibit psychopathic traits without the social dysfunction typically associated with psychopathy. This will be the foundation of the theoretical framework of this study. By analyzing these elements, the study aims to demonstrate how IO Interactive, through *Hitman: World of Assassination* does not simply portray a normal or prototypical psychopathic character, but a successful psychopath who is able to utilize his psychopathy to achieve positive outcomes on various aspects while avoiding major unwanted outcomes.

ANALYSIS

The main objective of the analysis is to analyze the psychopathic traits that can be found within Agent 47, the game's main character, and how these traits affect him which ultimately leads him to become a successful psychopath. The analysis uses the framework titled *Validation of the Successful*

Psychopathy Scale (Wallace, 2023) to validate this concept. The framework identifies six key facets of successful psychopathy: Callous-Unemotional, Social Potency, Manipulation, Stress Immunity & Confidence, and Risk-Taking. This is the first step to be able to prove that Agent 47 is a successful psychopath based on Wallace's framework of the Validation of a Successful Psychopath. If Agent 47 is proven to possess these traits, these can prove to be a strong step to how he can be considered a successful psychopath.

Having no Empathy for Others

Being callous-unemotional is not considered a deficit, instead it is reframed as important assets ready at 47's disposal. This is because by utilizing this inherent lack of remorse which is one of the aspects included within callous-unemotional behavior, Agent 47 effectively silences his conscience and internal hesitation that would otherwise fail a high-stakes mission. This lack of guilt allows for a goal driven and dehumanizing intent of completing his mission where his targets are no longer viewed as humans, but just an objective to complete and eradicate. In the mission titled Club 27 located in Bangkok, Agent 47 executes a celebrity by the name of Jordan Cross in cold blood despite pleading for his life.

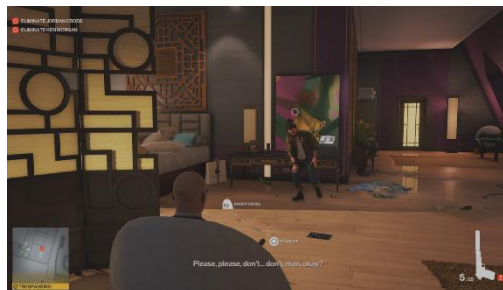


Figure 1: Agent 47 killing Cross

Source: Screenshot from *Hitman: World of Assassination* (IO Interactive, 2023)

When Cross enters the room and realizes he has been cornered, his emotional distress is clearly seen as he goes into a state of panic, confusion and paranoia (as seen in the line “why was it just plain, would be the purpose with one blackmail? Some sick game? What if I just smashed it right now?”). Upon Cross' realization that it was all a setup, Agent 47 acts callous-unemotional, and can also be seen rejecting a bribe. Agent 47's reaction highlights a total absence of emotions such as guilt or anxiety, further reinforcing the callous unemotional trait which he possesses. Further lines in the dialogue also shows that in Agent 47's perspective, Cross's begging regarding whether his mistake of murdering his girlfriend justifies his death does not mean a thing. Ultimately after further pleading, Agent 47 does not budge and ends up killing Cross

A second proof of Agent 47's callousness — such as lacking empathy, guilt and remorse — can be seen in the Hokkaido mission, *Situs Inversus*. In this mission, he is tasked with eliminating Soders, a defect of the ICA who is to undergo a heart transplant surgery. He infiltrates the hospital compound and may choose to kill Soders by destroying Soders' new heart — demonstrating a profound lack of empathy, guilt, and remorse that is included in the core emotional deficit of the disorder.



Figure 2: Agent 47 ripping out Soder's right-sided heart donor

Source: Screenshot from *Hitman: World of Assassination* (IO Interactive, 2023)

Having a High Level of Social Potency



Figure 3: Agent 47 playing the role of therapist
Source: Screenshot from Hitman: World of Assassination (IO Interactive, 2023)

The presence of Social Potency can be found within Agent 47, notably in the Sapienza mission "World of Tomorrow". Social Potency refers to the interpersonal charm and ability to influence others in order to achieve a specific outcome (Wallace, 2023, p. 195). Agent 47's performance as Dr. Oscar Lafayette during Silvio Caruso's therapy session proves this. This application of social potency allows him to read the situation and act accordingly to manipulate the social environment to his advantage. This advantage ultimately leads him to be able to steer the social interaction into a deadly end.

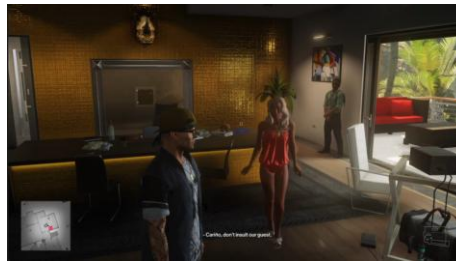


Figure 4: Agent 47 playing the role of celebrity tattooist, P-Power
Source: Screenshot from Hitman: World of Assassination (IO Interactive, 2023)

Another proof of this trait can be found in the "Three-Headed Serpent" mission. This time, Agent 47 assassinates Rico Delgado by employing social potency to charm Catalina Delgado, his wife. Agent 47 begins displaying his interpersonal charm here to Catalina by getting into his role of P-Power when greeted with high-energy praise, returning the warmth which was shown through several different interactions. Furthermore, he establishes good rapport by playing along with Catalina's interaction. For example, he can be seen listening and offering a somewhat dark and ironic comforting line when she vents about her husband and plays along when prompted to take a selfie together. These interactions ultimately lead him to manipulate Catalina into defending him when confronted by her own husband by using his interpersonal charm.

Exhibiting a High Level of Manipulation Skills

Agent 47's mastery in the art of manipulation is seen in the Paris mission "The Showstopper". In this instance, Agent 47's acquisition of the fireworks remote provides proof of his expert usage of manipulation – particularly conning. This encounter shows how Agent 47 uses conning to get what he wants. He is faced with a scenario that might typically trigger panic or dysfunctional impulsivity in an unsuccessful psychopath. This is because prototypical psychopaths have a hard time regulating impulse controls when faced with spontaneous situations due to damage to the prefrontal cortex (Wallace, 2023, p. 92).



Figure 5: Agent 47 steals the remote control by conning.
 Source: Screenshot from Hitman: World of Assassination (IO Interactive, 2023)

Agent 47, however, shows a completely different response to what an individual with high levels of psychopathy would do. In this instance, he relies entirely on his calm demeanor and manipulative abilities to verbally defuse the members' suspicion. Agent 47 calmly states, "Novikov asked me to fetch this for him." This shows how, instead of escalating the situation possibly to the level of physical altercation, Agent 47 uses his calmness and conning ability to trick the crew. This ability to "mimic normal human interactions and use these characteristics to deceive and manipulate others for their own benefit" is a core trait of the successful psychopathy construct, masking his lethal intentions

Exhibiting a High Level of Fearless Dominance

Agent 47 consistently demonstrates a calm and controlled manner even in situations involving extreme danger or confrontation – resulting in a high level of fearlessness as a result of his absence of impulsive behavior. This fearlessness is shown in instances where Agent 47 consistently demonstrates a calm and controlled manner even in situations involving extreme danger or confrontation. This is due to successful psychopaths exhibiting a high level of emotional control due to having better executive functioning. Wallace (2023) describes how successful psychopaths are individuals who display psychopathic traits associated with boldness. This includes behaviors such as fearlessness, stress and anxiety resilience, and self-confidence (p. 75). Individuals with fearless dominance are often characterized by a reduced stress response and greater emotional control when facing pressure or risk. (Wallace et al. 2022, p.16). Throughout the game, Agent 47 regularly infiltrates heavily guarded locations, navigates complex social environments, and carries out assassination missions under constant threat of detection. Despite these risks, he consistently maintains a calm and controlled demeanor, as well as successfully carries out his mission flawlessly.



Figure 6: Agent 47 confronted by Vidal
 Source: Screenshot from Hitman: World of Assassination (IO Interactive, 2023)

Despite Vidal's claims to have known everything about him and using psychological warfare in an attempt to intimidate him, Agent 47 can be seen pretty much immune to these provocations and even showing fearlessness as he snaps back at her. Agent 47 clearly knows that he is being ambushed and most importantly outnumbered, yet he sounds very calm and his responses are very brief. Agent 47's fearlessness manifests into him being calm and using reasoning to dismantle and showcase his confidence and stress immunity throughout this exchange. This can be seen throughout how 3 of his counterarguments are seen as questions and statements, instead of rash behavior and aggression. Second, his confidence is seen throughout how he frames himself. The line where Agent 47 calmly

replies “Yes, see your mistake?” to Vidal's statement of how he is handicapped numerically can be seen as a declaration of how he is confident enough to live through and neutralize Vidal's agents. Ultimately the dismantling of Vidal's claim and provocation under a life-threatening situation simply by questioning and gaslighting proves how he has a high level of fearless dominance.



Figure 7: Agent 47 confronted by Montgomery

Source: Screenshot from *Hitman: World of Assassination* (IO Interactive, 2023)

Aside from the confrontation with Vidal, a similar pattern of emotional restraint, and subtle boasting can be seen in the mission titled *Apex Predator* in Berlin. In this occasion, Agent 47's fearlessness can be seen manifesting into how he deliberately set off an alarm which allows him to speak and assassinate multiple agents at once – a testament to his risk-taking facet which will be discussed later and his confidence and resilience. During the confrontation, Montgomery, the captain of the platoon tasked with neutralizing Agent 47 addresses him with admiration, calling him a legend. Agent 47 responds to him by saying, “Legends die.” This is proof as to how he is very much confident in his ability to survive, implying as well that he has survived multiple near-death encounters and will do the same with this one. His stress immunity can be seen as to how he remains calm under this immense pressure and unpredictability of the situation – which is in accordance with Wallace's definition of stress immunity (p. 198).

Exhibiting a High Level of Risk-Taking in Assassinations

Agent 47 is constantly seen engaging in risk-taking operations, particularly in his methods of assassination. According to the theory, risk taking refers to the capability of an individual to make quick and calculated decisions, along with a more lifestyle related definition of impulsively seeking dangerous situations (Wallace, 2023, pp. 197, 256). Agent 47 is clearly seen to not exhibit the lifestyle definition, yet he does show signs of the tendency of making quick and calculated decisions in risky situations. This can be seen through a couple of examples, namely in the Miami mission where he assassinates Sierra Knox, along with his clever use and manipulation of sniper mercenaries in Mendoza, Argentina.



Figure 8: Agent 47 killing Knox by injecting her with poison IV as a medic

Source: Screenshot from *Hitman: World of Assassination* (IO Interactive, 2023)

The first instance can be seen as Agent 47 assassinates and even talks (before assassinating) to his target, Sierra Knox in Miami. What makes this extremely high risk and can be concluded as engaging in a high-risk action is how he assassinates the target with a poisonous IV injection while pretending to be a medical staff, all the while being monitored by actual medical staff. The incident plays out as follows: Agent 47 first spots the opportunity and willingly enters the medical compound. He then subdues a patient who is obnoxiously in the way of allowing Sierra to be examined. The highlight of this first section of the sequence is how he willingly enters the compound – which means that he is

deliberately putting himself in a risky situation where the outcome must be him injecting poison – as intel shows Sierra needing an IV injection.



Figure 9: Agent 47 killing Vidal by proxy murder
 Source: Screenshot from Hitman: World of Assassination (IO Interactive, 2023)

Another proof of risk taking can be found in the mission “The Farewell”. This time, Agent 47’s orchestration of a proxy murder in Mendoza becomes a manifestation of this trait, specifically through infiltrating a sniper tower and his usage of the mercenary sniper team to eliminate Tamara Vidal. Wallace (2023) explains that successful individuals do not lack a perception of danger – rather, they possess the executive functioning required to mitigate that danger while pursuing high-value rewards (p. 196). This “functional impulsivity” allows the individual to navigate high-stakes environments where the potential for failure is extreme, yet the reward is optimized through strategic planning. This is exactly what Agent 47 does. In this case, the risk of failure would mean completely blowing his disguise and ultimately leaving him hunted down. Ultimately, he takes the risk. This sequence clearly poses immense danger, risk of being caught and death. Even so, Agent 47 still decides to execute the plan after contemplating it and accomplishes it.

Successful Psychopathy Metrics (Wallace, 2023)

By using Wallace’s (2023) metrics to determine whether an individual is a successful psychopath, Agent 47’s character traits and operational history does prove that he is a successful psychopath. This is because several criteria have been fulfilled, which allows Agent 47 to be categorized as a successful psychopath which will be discussed in this subsection of chapter 2, that being Possession of Core Psychopathic Facets, Avoidance of Undesirable Outcome, Achievement of Communal and Agentic Success. In the case of Agent 47, he is fundamentally defined by a collection of adaptive psychopathic traits. Within Agent 47, 6 facets of core psychopathy can be identified within his character.

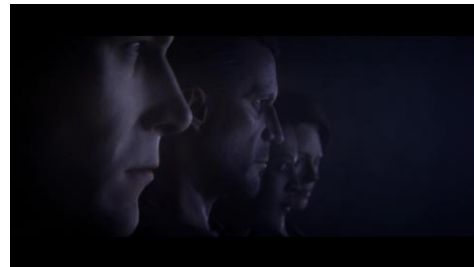
First, his callous-unemotional facet is the core foundation of his character. This is as seen in the Bangkok mission “Club 27”. He also possesses social potency as proven in the Sapienza mission, where he adopts the authoritative persona of Dr. Oscar Lafayette, and in the mission *Three Headed Snake*, where he charms Catalina Delgado. He also shows a high level of calculated manipulateness in the Paris mission, where he uses conning to bypass tech crew suspicions. Additionally, his profound stress immunity and confidence grant him a very low, seemingly nihil fear response as seen in the Mendoza mission, where he remains entirely detached during Tamara Vidal’s aggressive interrogation, instead gaslighting her and implicitly states to Vidal that he is confident in his powers to take her down despite her trap, and in the Berlin mission, where he deliberately walks into a trap, making it his own, rationally deflects Montgomery’s emotional provocations, and slaughtering an entire platoon of ICA agents, all the while taunting Montgomery. Finally, his risk-taking can be seen in the Miami mission, where he injects Sierra Knox into a medical tent surrounded by real medical staff as well as ordering a hit on Vidal by using snipers who are supposed to protect her.

Avoiding Undesirable Outcomes of His Crimes

Another criterion in Wallace's (2023) definition of a successful psychopath is one that is able to avoid undesirable outcomes. The *Hitman: World of Assassination* narrative proves that Agent 47's executive functioning allows him to have absolute freedom from the criminal justice system. This can be seen as to how throughout the entire game, there is no record, cutscene, and/or voiceover of him seeing the inside of a courtroom or a jail cell. As mentioned by Wallace (2023), the baseline definition of success for an individual with psychopathic traits is having the ability to avoid the most undesirable outcomes (e.g., incarceration) (p. 40). Being an international assassin responsible for a multitude of high-profile assassinations and not encountering law enforcement or a violent death is statistically very difficult. In Agent 47's case however, he defies these outcomes for an international assassin responsible for hundreds of high-profile homicides. It can be seen, however, that Agent 47 actively defies these outcomes and after the final mission, can be seen roaming free in Figure 10.

Agentic & Communal Success

The final criterion to consider someone a successful psychopath based on Wallace's framework (2023) is the presence of Agentic & Communal Success. Touching on agentic success, in *Hitman: World of Assassination*, Agent 47 can clearly be seen achieving said outcome. An example can be seen in this interaction between Agent 47 and Jordan Cross. This scenario touches more on another aspect of the dialogue – namely where Agent 47 rejects a bribe. This demonstrates the decisiveness which successful psychopaths have. Agent 47's response, "It doesn't work that way. Not here" reveals how he internally functions. It becomes clear that Agent 47 himself declares that internally, he is only bent on completing the task. Aside from that, this interaction also highlights Agent 47's low levels of agreeableness which is associated with successful psychopaths (Wallace et al., 2022, p. 3), which serves as a protective factor against Cross's emotional manipulation. Agent 47 can also be seen as someone highly respected and successful; this is shown with how he is ranked as a legend in the ICA, as referred to by Montgomery prior to Agent 47 slaughtering him.



Figures 10 & 11: Agent 47 walking free in the Epilogue & The 4-Man Cell of Agent 47, Grey, Hall, and Burnwood
Source: Screenshot from Hitman: World of Assassination (IO Interactive, 2023)

Moving on to communal success, Agent 47 demonstrates a highly specialized and functional form of communal success which can be seen throughout the game. Despite not actually forming a close, and normal friendship bond which can be seen in modern society, Agent 47 still does manage to operate and interact properly within small cells and individually with his colleagues, Burnwood, Hall, and Grey. The events of the World of Assassination trilogy showcase his capacity to function within a small communal cell, operating under the same goal – to take down a global elite powerhouse called Providence. The four operate with a level of synchronized professional trust rarely seen in psychopathic profiles. Ultimately, due to Agent 47's contribution in the form of sharing his memory, Hall and Diana can pinpoint a key individual which would potentially reveal further clues to the Constant.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the study concludes that Agent 47 of *Hitman: World of Assassination* can be considered a successful psychopath as he fulfills criteria based on Wallace's (2023) framework. Firstly, the possession of key psychopathy facets. Second, the fulfillment of criteria in which a "prototypical psychopath" must accomplish which are avoidance of negative outcome, along with agentic and communal success. Based on the analysis, it has been determined that Agent 47 fulfills these requirements. The analysis also demonstrates how upon possessing the core facets of psychopathy, he fulfills the second set of prerequisites which are avoidance of undesirable outcomes, and agentic & communal success. The study concludes that Agent 47 does exhibit all the 6 core facets of what is deemed to be core traits linked to psychopathy. Therefore, by possessing these traits, Agent 47 can be considered a successful psychopath. This proves and challenges the notion that psychopathy might not inherently be regarded as something negative, rather it can be a trait that if harnessed properly can be used to one's advantage.

REFERENCES

- Entertainment Software Association. (2020). 2020 essential facts about the video game industry. <https://www.theesa.com/resource/2020-essential-facts/>
- IO Interactive. (2023). *Hitman: World of Assassination* https://store.steampowered.com/app/1659040/HITMAN_World_of_Assassination/
- PlayStation. (n.d.). *Hitman 3*. <https://www.playstation.com/en-id/games/hitman-3/>
- Rohmer, A. (2021). Sympathy for the devil: The perception of morally-ambiguous characters in video games [Master's thesis, Universitat Pompeu Fabra]. UPF e-Repository. <https://repositori.upf.edu/handle/10230/48455>
- Wallace, L., Heym, N., Sumich, A. L., & Fido, D. (2020). A systematic review on the current conceptualizations of successful psychopathy. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsimpl.2022.100076>
- Wallace, L. (2023, January). The Development and Validation of the Successful Psychopathy Scale. Under review in the Journal of Personality Assessment. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/q85hx>