Psychopathy
An Important Forensic Concept for the 21st Century
By Paul Babiak, M.S., Ph.D.; Jorge Folino, M.D., Ph.D.;
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and Michael Woodworth, Ph.D.

Over the years, Hollywood has provided many examples of psychopathy. As a result, psychopaths often are identified as scary people who look frightening or have other off-putting characteristics. In reality, a psychopath can be anyone—a neighbor, coworker, or homemaker. Each of these individuals may have a distinct predatory quality to them. Psychopaths see others as either competitive predators or prey. To understand how psychopaths perceive others, one must know some fundamental principles about personality. Individuals’ personalities represent who they are; they seem surprising to others because they are well-hardwired in place, unable to be altered.

Psychopathy and Personality Disorder
The term psychopathy refers to a personality disorder that includes a cluster of interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial traits and behaviors. These involve deception, manipulation, irresponsible, impulsive,(sumation seeking, poor behavioral controls, shallow affect; lack of empathy, guilt, or remorse; sexual promiscuity; callous disregard for the rights of others; and unethical and antisocial behaviors. Psychopathy is the most dangerous of the personality disorders. To understand it, one must know some fundamental principles about personality. Individuals’ personalities represent who they are; they result from genetics and upbringing and reflect how persons view the world and think the world views them. Personalities dictate how people interact with others and how they cope with problems, both real and imagined. Individuals’ personalities develop and evolve until approximately their late 20s, after which they stabilize throughout their lives. Psychopaths are grandioses, selfish sensation seekers who lack a moral compass—a conscience—and are unable to be altered.

Psychopathy is apparent in a specific cluster of traits and characteristics (see table 1). These traits, ultimately, define adult psychopathy and begin to manifest themselves in early childhood. Many psychopaths exhibit a profound lack of remorse for their aggressive actions, both violent and nonviolent, along with a corresponding lack of empathy for their victims. This central psychopathic concept enables them to act in a cold-blooded manner, using those around them as pawns to achieve their goals and satisfy needs and desires, whether sexual, financial, physical, or emotional. Most psychopaths are grandioses, selfish sensation seekers who lack a moral compass—a conscience—and are unable to be altered.

Chameleons and Predators
In general, psychopaths are glib and charming, and they use these attributes to manipulate others into trusting and believing in them. They may lead people to go down roads they have no intention of following. Psychopaths are adept at imitating emotions and they believe

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The psychopath’s egocentricity and need for power and control are the perfect ingredients for a lifetime...
Given the risk that psychopathic offenders pose for society, their ability to potentially manipulate the authorities poses concern. Psychopathic killers more likely will deny charges brought against them, and parole boards more likely will release them than non-psychopathic counterparts, while psychopathic offenders charged with other crimes are 2.79 times more likely to be released. Their acting ability can enable them to frequently manipulate and persuade members of parole boards to release them approximately 2.5 times faster than other offenders up for parole, despite their longer list of offenses and elevated risk. Psychopaths can adopt a wide range of strategies for questioning a psychopath. Professionals working in law enforcement, corrections, and other security-related professions must understand psychopathy and its implications.

Conclusion
Psychopathy is not a diagnosis. About one-third of individuals in prison deemed "antisocial personality disorders". The current official Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnosis for the chronically antisocial, will meet the criteria for severe psychopathy. NAPA's upcoming Revised Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychopathology will be the official diagnostic blessing of American psychiatry after approximately one-half century of research. Understanding the minds of psychopaths and their personality and behavioral traits allows authorities to design strategies that more effectively deal with them. The clinical description of psychopathy makes it difficult for officers to obtain accurate information from them unless the law enforcement interviewer has been educated in specific strategies for questioning a psychopath. Professionals working in law enforcement, corrections, and other security-related professions must understand psychopathy and its implications.

Psychopathy has been described as the single most important clinical construct in the criminal justice system. More recently, it is considered the most important forensic concept of the early 21st century. Because of its relevance to law enforcement, corrections, the courts, and others working in related fields, the need to understand psychopathy cannot be overstated. This includes knowing how to identify psychopathy, the damage they have caused, and how to deal with them more effectively.

Endnotes

2 Hare and Logan, "Criminal Psychopathy: An Introduction for Police.


10 Woolworth and Porter, "In Cold Blood: Characteristics of Criminal Homicides as a Function of Psychopathy.

11 John F. Hare, "Psychopathy Checklist-Revised, 2nd ed. (Toronto: ON Multi-Health Systems, 2003); and Babiak and Hare, Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work.


18 Meloy, The Psychopathic Mind: Origins, Dynamics, and Treatment


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