UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY

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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

• WHAT IS PSYCHOPATHY?
  • Psychopathic phenotype and etiological mechanisms

• HOW HAVE THE FIELDS OF PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY OPERATIONALIZED THE PSYCHOPATHY CONSTRUCT?

WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR PSYCHOPATH?

Serial killer
Corporate psychopath
Con artist
Chronic offender
Psychopaths can be described as intraspecies predators who use charm, manipulation, intimidation, and violence to control others and satisfy their own selfish needs. Lacking in conscience and feelings for others, they cold-bloodedly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret.

WHAT IS PSYCHOPATHY?

• UNDERSTANDING CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR
• INSTITUTIONAL ADJUSTMENT
• PREDICT RECIDIVISM
• INCREASED RISK FOR OTHER EXTERNALIZING BEHAVIORS (E.G., SUBSTANCE ABUSE, GAMBLING, SEXUAL ACTING OUT)
• WHITE COLLAR CRIME

CORE PSYCHOPATHIC TRAITS
INTERVIEWS WITH PSYCHOPATHIC OFFENDERS

- Conducted interviews with 4 incarcerated offenders drawn from research project at Northpoint Training Center.
- All were incarcerated for violent offenses and one was incarcerated for sexual offenses.
- All scored exceptionally high on various measures of psychopathy.

LACK OF EMPATHY & REMORSE

2 Counts of Murder, Burglary 1st, Robbery 1st
Attempting to Escape from Penitentiary
Sentence: 25 years to life

LACK OF EMPATHY

Murder, Robbery 1st
Sentence: Life with Parole
FEARLESS DOMINANCE

2 Counts Robbery 1st, 2 Counts Burglary 1st, Unlawful Imprisonment 1st, Impersonating a Peace Officer, Felony Offender, Complicity Promoting Contraband 1st

Sentence: 20 years

CONNING AND MANIPULATIVE

3 Counts Sexual Abuse 1st, 2 Counts Sodomy 2nd, Criminal Attempt Rape 1st

Sentence: 20 years

CONNING AND MANIPULATIVE

2 Counts of Murder, Burglary 1st, Robbery 1st, Attempting to Escape from Penitentiary

Sentence: 25 years to Life
GRANDIOSITY

3 Counts Sexual Abuse 1st, 2 Counts Sodomy 2nd, Criminal Attempt Rape 1st
Sentence: 20 years

THRILL SEEKING

3 Counts Sexual Abuse 1st, 2 Counts Sodomy 2nd, Criminal Attempt Rape 1st
Sentence: 20 years

OPERATIONALIZING THE PSYCHOPATH

What themes emerge across conceptualizations?
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: PSYCHOPATHY OVER THE YEARS

- **Historical Examples**
- Initial use of the term psychopathy and psychopathic
- Early precursors included Moral Insanity (Pritchard, 1832), Morally depraved and sadistic (Krafft-Ebing, 1904), Swindlers (Kraeplin, 1915)

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Cleckley: The Mask of Sanity (1941)

**The Psychopath**

The psychopath talks entertainingly and is brilliant and charming, but nonetheless carries disaster lightly in each hand.

The psychopath is capable of concealing behind a perfect mimicry of normal emotion, fine intelligence, and social responsibility, a grossly disabled and irresponsible personality.

Cleckley: The Mask of Sanity (1941)

- Criteria based observations of psychiatric patients
- Positive adjustment indicators
  - Brilliant, socially adept, liberal in judgment, low anxiety, and low level of guilt
- Behavioral deviance indicators
  - By-passing, weak impulses
  - Failure to learn from experience, reckless
- Emotional unresponsiveness & social detachment
  - Lack of guilt, remorse, or shame
  - Emotional, social, or intimate
- Psychopaths were not described as violent, cruel, or antagonistic
KARPMAN (1946)

- **Primary Psychopathy**
  - Core deficits in affective functioning linked to genetic etiology

- **Secondary Psychopathy**
  - Externalizing, antisocial proclivities
  - Reflect poor psychosocial learning associated with an environmental etiology

LYKKEN: PSYCHOPATHY VS. SOCIOPATHY

- Psychopathy and sociopathy are two distinct kinds of antisocial personality disorder:
  - **Psychopaths**
    - Born with temperamental differences: impulsivity, cortical underarousal, fearlessness
    - Engage in risk-seeking behavior
    - Inability to internalize social norms
  - **Sociopaths**
    - Relatively normal temperaments
    - Result of negative sociological factors: parental neglect, delinquent peers, poverty

MCCORD & MCCORD: THE PSYCHOPATH: AN ESSAY ON THE CRIMINAL MIND (1964)

- Emotional coldness, social detachment, dangerous/aggressive, motivated by rage rather than fear/anxiety
- Cold, vicious, and predatory

Christian Bale in *American Psycho*
HARE’S PSYCHOPATHY CHECKLIST

Psychopathy Checklist Originally Developed in the 1970’s
- Based on work in Vancouver Prisons and Cleckley’s Clinical Descriptions

- Semi-structured interview and review of records
- 20-item rating scale (0, 1, 2)
- Scored from 0 – 40

PCL-R ITEMS

1. Glibness/Superficial Charm
2. Grandiose Sense of Self
3. Need for Stimulation/Proneness to Boredom
4. Pathological Lying
5. Conning/Manipulative
6. Lack of Remorse/Guilt
7. Shallow Affect
8. Callous/Lack of Empathy
9. Parasitic Lifestyle
10. Poor Behavioral Controls
11. Promiscuous Sexual Behavior
12. Early Behavioral Problems
13. Lack of Realistic, Long-term Goals
14. Impulsivity
15. Irresponsibility
16. Failure to Accept Responsibility
17. Many Short-term Relationships
18. Juvenile Delinquency
19. Revocation of Conditional Release
20. Criminal Versatility

Source: Hare & Neumann (2008)
PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY INVENTORY (PPI)

- SCOTT LILIENFELD (EMORY UNIVERSITY)
- PSYCHOPATHY CONCEPTUALIZED AS A CONSTELLATION OF MALADAPTIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS
  - DE-EMPHASIZED BEHAVIORAL DEVIANCE
  - NO INDICATORS OF OVERT ANTISOCIAL CONDUCT
  - INCREASED COVERAGE OF FEARLESSNESS AND STRESS IMMUNITY IN LINE WITH CLECKLEY’S CLASSIC CONCEPTUALIZATION
- DEVELOPED IN MID-1990S
  - REVISED AND PUBLISHED FOR CLINICAL USE IN 2005

PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY INVENTORY (PPI)

- TOTAL SCORE: GLOBAL PSYCHOPATHY
  - 3 FACTORS:
    - FEARLESS DOMINANCE
      - SOCIALLY DOMINEERING, MANIPULATIVE, CALM IN STRESSFUL SITUATIONS, FEARLESSNESS
    - SELF-CENTERED IMPULSIVITY
      - IMPULSIVITY, AGGRESSION, NON-PLANFULNESS, REBELLIousNESS
    - COLDHEARTEDNESS
      - CALLOUS DISREGARD FOR OTHERS, IMPOVERISHED EMPATHY

PSYCHOPATHY & ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER

- PSYCHOPATHY WAS ALWAYS THE TARGET CONSTRUCT FOR ASPD
- CONSTRUCT EMERGED AS A REPRESENTATION OF PSYCHOPATHY IN DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS
  - DSM-II: SOCIOPATHIC PERSONALITY DISTURBANCE
  - DSM-III: ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY
  - DSM-IV: ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER
  - DSM-IV-TR AND DSM-V: ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER
PSYCHOPATHY & ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER

- Psychopathy is most closely aligned to Antisocial Personality Disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - 5th Ed (DSM-5).
- Very broad definition
- Inter-reliability
- Psychopathy is narrower and more pathological than ASPD
- ASPD symptoms - heterogeneous and widely behavioral:
  1. Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behavior
  2. Grandiosity
  3. Impulsivity/failure to plan ahead
  4. Antagonism/hostility toward others
  5. Pseudocholinergic reaction
  6. Conscience impersistence
  7. Lack of remorse

- Antisocial Personality Disorder vs. Psychopathy
  - ≈ 60-80% prisoners have ASPD
  - 15-25% psychopathic

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- Antisocial Personality Disorder
  - 40-50% prisoners have ASPD
  - 15-25% psychopathic

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DSM-5 SECTION III PERSONALITY DISORDERS

- Personality Disorders have two major defining features:
  1. Impairment in self and interpersonal functioning
  2. Maladaptive dimensional personality traits

DSM-5 ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER

A. Impairment on self- and interpersonal functioning
   - Persistent legal or related trouble
   - Unable to form intimate/meaningful relationships with others

B. Pathological personality traits in the following domain:
   - Antagonism, characterized by:
     • Manipulativeness
     • Deceitfulness
     • Callousness
     • Hostility
   - Disinhibition, characterized by:
     • Irresponsibility
     • Impulsivity
     • Risk taking

DSM-5 ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER

- Psychopathy Specifier
  - Add/Pol trait facets:
    • Attention seeking (Antagonism)
    • (Low) Withdrawal (Detachment)
    • (Low) Anxiousness (Negative Affectivity)
  - Fearless-Dominance/Boldness
DSM-5

- DSM-5 proposal was not formally adopted
- DSM-IV model was retained in DSM-5
- Section III (Emerging Measures and Models) for further study
- Need more empirical research on personality trait models and how these will define the disorders
- Future adoption – DSM-5.1?
Karpman (1946)

One of the greatest stumbling blocks in the better understanding of the psychopath... is that the group under this heading altogether too many conditions that have little in common with each other except certain outward forms of behavior which we are pleased to call psychopathic...

...we have grouped together a large number of people who have only one point in common... antisocial behavior.

Considerable debate

What links and distinguishes various theories and psychopathy together?

- Chris Patrick (FSU)
  - Patrick, Fowles, & Krueger (2009) sought to organize the historical literature and measurement models (e.g., PCL-R, PPI) in the psychopathy literature
- Organized phenotypic variance of psychopathy into three common domains
  - Disinhibition
  - Meaness
  - Boldness

Disinhibition

- Propensity toward low impulse control
- Lack of planning and foresight
- Insistence on immediate gratification
- Deficient behavioral constraint
MEANNESS

- DISDAIN FOR AND LACK OF CLOSE ATTACHMENTS
- DEFICIENT EMPATHY, CALLOUSNESS
- EXCITEMENT SEEKING
- EXPLOITATIVENESS, RELATIONAL AGGRESSION
- EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CRUELTY

BOLDNESS

- CALM AND FOCUSED IN SITUATIONS INVOLVING PRESSURE OR THREAT
- ABILITY TO RECOVER QUICKLY FROM STRESS
- HIGH SELF-ASSURANCE AND SOCIAL EFFICACY
- TOLERANCE FOR UNFAMILIARITY AND DANGER
- THRILL SEEKING BEHAVIOR WITH LITTLE FEAR
- NEXUS OF SOCIAL DOMINANCE, LOW STRESS REACTIVITY, AND THRILL-ADVENTURE SEEKING

EXPERIMENTAL FINDINGS FOR PSYCHOPATHY

- ELABORATING ON POTENTIAL NEUROBIOLOGICAL ETIOLOGICAL MECHANISMS
**EXPERIMENTAL FINDINGS**

- Lykken (1957) and Hare’s (e.g., 1966) early work
  - Low fearfulness
  - SCR in anticipation of aversive stimuli
  - Countdown paradigm

**EXPERIMENTAL FINDINGS**

- Affective Processing – Hare & Colleagues
  - Psychopaths do not react differently to negative or neutral stimuli (e.g., words, images) compared to non-psychopaths (Williamson et al., 1991; Kiehl et al., 1999)
  - Example:

**EXPERIMENTAL FINDINGS**

- Violence Inhibition Mechanism – R.J.R. Blair
  - Aggression and violence is inhibited through reading distress cues in others
  - Psychopaths have significantly lower SCR response to distress cues than non-psychopaths (Blair et al., 1991; Blair, 1999)
Regional gray matter volumes negatively associated with PCL-R Total scores, controlling for brain volume, age, and substance dependence.