Psychopathy and Aggression

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Psychopathy is a personality disorder characterized by a major affective deficit accompanied by a disregard for the rights of others and for societal rules in general (e.g., Hare, 1996). As defined by the well-validated Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991), psychopaths are manipulative, callous, remorseless, impulsive, irresponsible individuals (e.g., Hare, 1996, 1998). In this chapter, we begin by outlining the contribution of psychopathy to the prediction of whether and the degree to which a person will engage in aggressive behavior. Our attention then turns to a much newer focus of research—the characteristics of violent actions by psychopaths. We review studies investigating the nature of their violence, examine the possible link between psychopathy and sadistic behavior, and consider how this work informs our understanding of their criminal motivations.

The Link Between Psychopathy and Aggression

Research has established a strong link between psychopathic traits and aggressive behavior in each of adult offenders, antisocial children and adolescents, and civil psychiatric patients.

Adult Offenders

A large number of studies have shown that the presence of psychopathic traits is associated with a propensity for violent behavior. In one of the earliest investigations of the relationship between psychopathy and violence, Hare and Jutai (1983) found that adult psychopathic offenders had been charged with violent crimes about twice as often as nonpsychopaths. Virtually all the psychopaths in their sample had perpetrated at least one violent crime compared to about half of the nonpsychopaths. Within a large sample of federal offenders (average age of 43.5 years), Porter, Birt, and Boer (2001) found that psychopaths had been convicted of an average of 7.32 violent crimes compared to 4.52 violent crimes by nonpsychopathic offenders. This pattern of a relatively high level of violence by psychopaths is witnessed throughout their criminal careers (e.g., Harpur & Hare, 1994; Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001). Thus, it is clear that psychopaths are a highly aggressive group simply from examining the sheer number of violent crimes they have perpetrated.

Knowledge of the psychopathy/aggression link greatly aids in the prediction of future violent behavior in adult offenders (e.g., Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1993; Hemphill,
Hare, & Wong, 1998; Rice & Harris, 1997; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1996). For example, Serin and Amos (1995) found that psychopaths were about five times more likely than non-psychopaths to admit to lying in violent recidivism within 5 years of their release from prison. Recent meta-analyses indicate that psychopathy as measured by the PCL-R (Hare, 1991) shows an overall effect size of 0.40 on violent recidivism (e.g., Hare, 1998; Salekin et al., 1996).

Children and Adolescents with Conduct Problems
Although most research on psychopathy has focused on adults, growing evidence suggests that psychopathy is related to aggression much earlier in life. It appears that precursors to psychopathy emerge in early childhood in the form of “callous-unemotional” traits (e.g., Frick, Bodin, & Barry, 2000; Frick,roll, & Hare, 1999; Lyman, 2002; Porter, 1996), which map closely onto adult psychopathic traits especially Factor I features on the PCL-R. Such characteristics are associated with high levels of aggression in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Furthermore, psychopathy is a strong predictor of violent recidivism in both criminal offenders and civil psychiatric patients.

**FLAWED PREDATORS: PSYCHOPATHIC AGGRESSION IN THE CLINICAL TRADITION**

It has been long recognized that psychopaths expend much time and energy in exploiting others. These “standoffish” offenders often do not give in to remorse, guilt, or fear of punishment. They have few inhibitions against using other people for material gain, drugs, sex, or power. Accordingly, psychopaths are adept con artists, often with a long history of frauds and scams. Some may even become cult leaders, corrupt politicians, or successful corporate leaders. This proficiency as “extra-species predators” (Hare, 1993) is likely to derive from their superficially engaging personality and skill use of deception through verbal and nonverbal communication. That is, their high level of psychological dangerousness to others is masked by well-planned, ill-intended social artistry. Thus, psychopaths are not only pernicious actors of the psychopathic involvement forethought and are instrumental and skillfully orchestrated. In fact, most antisocial behavior by "white collar" psychopaths may be characterized in this way (e.g., Hare, 1993).

Clinical and empirical observations suggest that some physically aggressive actions by psychopaths shape these characteristics of premeditation and instrumentality. For example, psychopaths often perpetrate well-planned armed robberies or hostage takings (e.g., Hervé, Mitchell, Cooper, Spidel, & Hare, 2016). Even in adolescence, psychopathic individuals often plan aggressive acts from which they anticipate positive rewards (Pardini, Lochman, & Frick, 2006). However, most psychopaths have difficulty controlling themselves at times. Their actions may be highly spontaneous and foolhardy, facilitating their own arrest and incarceration. In other words, psychopaths sometimes show a violent temper that seems to be out of touch with the obvious circumstantial requirement for much of their crime. In this light, psychopaths are "flawed predators," frequently preying on others but unable to reliably control their behavior. One of us (first author) conducted a risk assessment on a psychopath named "Glen," who, according to his family members was a "likeable" child but had "lived to everyone" and was "like Jekyll and Hyde," quickly changing from being friendly to aggressive (see Porter & Porter in press). Throughout adolescence and into adulthood, he had committed various types of violence, primarily premeditated and unsupervised. To this respect, psychopaths might appear to others to have two "personalities." For example, Joseph Stalin (who likely was a psychopath) was seen by many as having an engaging and charismatic personality. He maintained great power while continuing to dominate, intimidate, and deceive other people on a massive scale. Therefore, although psychopaths are dangerous individuals, their potential for uninhibited aggression and violence is disguised by harm (albeit superimposed), supercogitizenship, and an outward appearance of normalcy. Ishihara, Kaine, Lencz, Björklund, and LaCasse (2001) have referred to those psychopathic individuals who manage to retain their veil of normalcy and function successfully (but unethically) in society, as "successful psychopaths" (see also Benning, Patrick, Lynam, & Ackerman, 2003).

Psychiatric Patients
While the base rate of psychopathy in civil psychiatric patients is low relative to the rate in federal offenders (e.g., Douglas, Offord, Nicholls, & Grant, 1999), the association between psychopathy and aggression extends to this population. For example, in a study of 1,136 psychiatric patients from the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Project, Skeem and Mulvey (2001) found that psychopathy scores predicted future serious violence, despite a psychopathic baseline of only 8%. During a 1-year follow-up period, 50% of psychopaths and 22% of nonpsychopaths committed violence. Furthermore, there was a 73% chance that a patient who became violent had scored higher on psychopathy than a patient who did not become violent (see also Douglas et al., 1999). Overall, psychopathic features are associated with a high level of aggression in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Furthermore, psychopathy is a strong predictor of violent recidivism in both criminal offenders and civil psychiatric patients.

**REACTIVE AND INSTRUMENTAL ASPECTS OF AGGRESSION BY PSYCHOPATHS**

A key consideration in understanding violent behavior is whether the motivation of the perpetrator is "defensive" or "offensive." That is, was the perpetrator reacting aggressively to a desperate, emotional situation or, instead, was the aggressive action more volitional and instrumental? One longstanding view holds that aggression is founded in frustration and provocation. Berkowitz (1983) argued that aggression is best conceptualized as a hostile reaction to a perceived threat or dangerous situation. A second major view posits that aggression or violence involves goal-directed behavior with specific intended consequences (e.g., Bandura, 1986). As such, to understand the violent act, it is necessary to consider the external goals of the perpetrator. There appears to be merit in both of these perspectives (e.g., Stanford, Houston, Mathias, Villemarette-Pittman, & Green, 1998). Consideration of both reactive and instrumental elements of aggression is essential toward understanding the motivations behind violent actions (e.g., Brown, Atkins, Osborne, & Milam, 1996; Dodge, 1991). Thus, individual differences in the aggressors (e.g., Stanford, Houston, Villemarette-Pittman, & Green, 2003) for example, instrumental aggression by children is associated with pathological affective functioning and foreshadows a pattern of long-term antisocial behavior (e.g., Pulkkinen, 1996; Vinzani, Gendreau, Tremblay, & Oligny, 2000). However, sometimes a violent act may contain elements of both reactivity and instrumentality (e.g., Bushman & Anderson, 2001). For example, Barratt, Dowdy, Lieberman, and Kent (1999) found that up to 30% of the aggressive acts coded in their study could be classified as either strictly premeditated or impulsive. Therefore, researchers of aggressive behavior must consider their operational definitions beyond simply "instrumental" or "reactive" in order to capture the complexities of motivations for violence.
Qualities of Psychopathic Violence in General

Given the concurrent attributes of callous premeditation and poor behavioral controls associated with the actions of psychopaths in general, predicting whether their violence will be primarily reactive or instrumental is not straightforward. However, according to Cleckley's (1976) anecdotal evidence, violence by psychopaths is more instrumental than violence by other offenders, who typically commit reactive violence because of rage or despair. In the first empirical test of this observation, Williamson, Hare, and Wong (1987) examined characteristics of violent offenses that had been committed by 101 Canadian offenders. They found that psychopaths were more likely (45.2% of the time) to have been motivated by an external goal such as material gain than were nonpsychopaths (14.6% of the time). In addition, psychopaths were less likely (2.4% of the time) to have experienced emotional arousal during their crimes than were nonpsychopaths (31.7% of the time). In the next study to examine the relationship between psychopathy and instrumental violence, Cornwell and colleagues (1996) investigated the premeditated violent crimes of 106 male offenders incarcerated in a state prison. Adopting a different approach from Williamson and colleagues, they focused on whether offenders had committed one or more acts of instrumental arousal during their criminal history. They found that psychopaths were more likely to have perpetrated an instrumental violent crime than were nonpsychopaths, who usually had a pattern of reactive violence, as Cleckley had predicted. Furthermore, as with the finding by Williamson and colleagues, instrumental violence was associated with a self-reported lack of emotional arousal during their violent acts. Chase, O'Leary, and Heyma (2001) found a relationship between psychopathy and the use of instrumental violence by male spousal assailers. Within a sample of 60 abusive males, no men who were classified as being "reactively aggressive" were psychopathic, compared to 17% of those who were "instrumentally aggressive." Dempster and colleagues at the University of British Columbia interviewed 75 adult male violent offenders participating in an inpatient treatment program. Although psychopaths were found to have committed more instrumental violence, they also had displayed impulsive behavior in the context of their crimes. Hart and Dempster (1997) concluded that while psychopaths may be more likely to commit instrumental crimes, their behavior is best described as "impulsively instrumental." From these studies, it became clear that violence by psychopaths is more likely than violence by others to have an instrumental component. Nonetheless, for many of their documented acts of violence, there was no evidence of an external goal. For example, in the Williamson and colleagues (1987) study, the majority of violent acts by psychopaths in the sample were not instrumental. This supports the idea that poor behavioral controls or impulsivity in psychopaths contributes to their violence (also see Dempster et al., 1996). Overall, these data established that psychopaths engage in both major forms of aggression, whereas violent nonpsychopaths are unlikely to engage in instrumental violence.

Characteristics of Homicides by Psychopaths

Homicide is a heterogeneous crime, in terms of the characteristics of both the perpetrator and context. In particular, some homicides are highly planned, instrumental acts, whereas others involve a lack of premeditation. The latter may occur in the context of an emotional dispute or in response to a situational provocation ("a crime of passion"). The most recent study to examine the link between psychopathy and instrumental violence focused for the first time on the act of homicide. Woodworth and Porter (2002) reasoned that if the pattern for general violence held true, psychopathic murderers would perpetrate both types of homicides but would show a greater propensity toward reactive homicides. Nonpsychopaths, on the other hand, would perpetrate instrumental homicides. Porter, Birt, and Boer (2001) had previously reported that psychopaths who had killed showed higher scores on Factor 1 of the PCL-R than did other psychopathic offenders. This suggested that psychopathic murderers might be particularly ruthless individuals who would not be disinclined to commit instrumental violence. The opposite was true for nonpsychopaths; those who had committed murder showed higher Factor 2 scores than did their counterparts (Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001, in line with individuals whose behavior could be more explosive or reactive.

In the Woodworth and Porter (2002) study focused on 125 male homicide offenders incarcerated in one of two Canadian federal prisons. A "reactive" homicide was conceptualized as being unplanned and immediately preceded by a provocative situation. With this type of offender perceived that he was in a threatening, emotionally provoking, and perhaps inescapable situation before lashing out violently. On the other hand, it was possible for a homicide to be premeditated and not preceded by powerful affect. If the homicide had these characteristics and the perpetrator had an external incentive (such as material gain, drugs or sex) for committing the violent act, it was classified as "instrumental." To refine how the homicides were described, a Likert-type, 4-point scale (ranging from purely instrumental to purely reactive) was used. Offenses containing elements of both were classified as either instrumental with a reactive component or reactive with an instrumental component. The degree of instrumental/reactive of each homicide was rated by coders who were unaware of the offender's psychopathy rating. Results indicated that psychopaths were about twice as likely as nonpsychopathic offenders to have engaged in primarily instrumental homicides. In fact, nearly all (93.3%) of the homicides perpetuated by psychopaths were primarily instrumental, compared to 48.4% of the homicides by nonpsychopathic offenders. Perhaps most surprising was the finding that psychopaths were unlikely to have perpetrated a reactive homicide, despite earlier findings that they often engage in reactive violence generally (Cornell et al., 1996; Williamson et al., 1987). These data called into question the assumption that the behavior of psychopaths is truly impulsive. Woodworth and Porter (2002) proposed a "selective impulsivity" explanation in which psychopaths' impulsive aggression in other contexts may not be as uncontrollable as it appears. Rather, it may reflect a choice not to inhibit such behavior when the perceived stakes are lower (see also Arnett, Smith, & Newman, 1997; Newman & Wallace, 1993). When they recognize that the consequences of such a response may be severe (e.g., life imprisonment), they are able to inhibit their behavior and/or delay their revenge (perhaps resulting in an instrumental homicide). Instead of using aggression impulsively, they are more likely to plan and execute an instrumental murder, perhaps with a belief that an arrest for this type of behavior is unlikely. Another finding in the Woodworth and Porter (2002) study was that Factor 1 scores, but not Factor 2 scores, contributed to the instrumentality of the homicide. Therefore, it would appear that while Factor 2 behavioral features may have a more direct and obvious relationship with criminal offending and recidivism (e.g., Walters, 2003), the Factor 1 core emotional and interpersonal traits of psychopathy may help to better explain the specific types of violence in which psychopaths choose to engage (also see Skeem, Poythress, Edens, Lilienfeld, & Cape, 2003).

SELF-GRATIFYING ASPECTS OF AGGRESSION BY PSYCHOPATHS

The foregoing discussion establishes that psychopaths often use aggression for instrumental gain. Their violence can simply be a ruthless means to an end. However, there is recent evidence that psychopaths may derive gratification or enjoyment from their violent behavior. Analyses of their sexual violence, in particular, suggest that both thrill seeking and sadistic interests may play an important role in psychopathic crime.

Evidence for a Thrill-Seeking Motivation

It has been long recognized that: psychopaths are thrill seekers and that this attribute extends to crime (e.g., Hare, 1993), especially sexual violence. As with other forms of crime, psychopathy is associated with an increased risk for sexual aggression and sadism (e.g., Kosson, Kelly, & White, 1997; Quinsey, Rice, & Harris, 1995). Recent work indicates that psychopathy is associated with particular types of sexual violence and particular types of sadistic interest (e.g., Paulhus & Berenson, 2004). One research suggests that psychopaths are both opportunist and thrill seekers in their sexual
offending. For example, in a study of 436 sexual offenders, Firth and Kroener (1995) found that psychopathic rapists were more opportunistic in their offending than their nonpsychopathic counterparts. In both adolescent and adult offenders, psychopathy is associated with higher levels of violence on the commission of sexual offenses (e.g., Gerton, McBride, Lewis, O'Shaugnessy, & Hare, 1994), consistent with a thrill-seeking motivation (e.g., Porter, Campbell, Woodworth, & Birt, 2001; see also Hare, 1993).

If thrill-seeking motives for psychopaths to commit sexual offenses, one might expect them to select a wider range of victims than other offenders who often "specialize" (especi ally paropathic offenders). To examine this hypothesis, Porter and colleagues (2000) reviewed both the criminal records and PCL-R scores of a large sample of incarcerated Canadian offenders. They found a remarkably high base rate of psychopathy (64%) among those offenders who had targeted both child and adult victims. The base rate of psychopathy in the mixed group was higher than the prevalence in both rapists (35.9%) and child molesters (15%). Using a contingency table analysis from that dataset indicated that the presence of psychopathy was associated with higher recidivism and poorer conditional release performance for all groups (mixed offenders, rapists, and molesters). Rice and Harris (1997) also found that offenders with multiple victim types showed the fastest rate of violent recidivism. It is likely that, in the absence of incapacitation or remorse, psychopathic offenders may adjust to a different victim type when the opportunity presents itself or when they become "bored," as one offender in the Porter and colleagues (2000) study reported.

Additional research is needed to more fully examine the degree to which thrill-seeking acts as a motivator for psychopathic violence. In particular, little work has addressed thrill-seeking motives contributing to nonsexual violence or the possible interaction of thrill seeking and instrumental aggression.

Evidence for a Sadistic Motivation

The term "sadism" has been used to describe a range of cognitions and behaviors associated with the derivation of pleasure through inflicting physical or emotional pain on another person. Some authors have argued for a link between psychopathy and sadism (e.g., Hart & Hare, 1997). According to Kraitschkin (1898/1965) classic study Psychopathia Sexualis, sadistic violence requires both sexual and personality pathology ("lust and cruelty") in the perpetrator. In this view, many individuals who experienced sadistic impulses did not act on them for "moral" reasons. Others who lacked morality acted on such impulses and derived enjoyment from perpetrating these acts. However, consideration of both sexual and nonsexual elements in understanding sadism continued in the psychiatric literature. Sadism has referred to both a pathological personality structure (sadistic personality disorder in earlier editions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM; American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and pathological sexual functioning (sadism).

Research has addressed the possible link between psychopathy and each of these conditions (Hare, Cooke, & Hart, 1999; Holt, Meloy, & Snodgrass, 2000). Using the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI-II; Millon, Davis, & Millon, 1997) and the Personality Disorder Examination items for sadistic personality traits, Holt and colleagues (1999) found that such traits were more common in violent psychopaths than violent nonpsychopaths in a maximum-security prison. Violent and sexually violent offenders did not differ in their level of sadistic personality traits, lending the authors to argue that the traits were not tied specifically to sexual pleasure. On the other hand, some research has found that higher PCL-R scores are associated with more irrelevant visual and auditory stimuli. There is a significant but modest correlation (r = 0.28) between PCL-R scores and deviant sexual arousal (Barbaree, Seto, Serin, & Poppers, 1994; Quinsey et al., 1993; Serin, Malcolm, Khanna, & Barbarere, 1994).

As with instrumental aggression, an examination of the crime of homicide specifically may shed light on the role of sadistic violence by psychopaths. A sexual homicide is one that includes sexual activity before, during, or after the commission of the crime. Unlike murderers in general (see, e.g., Porter, Birt, & Boe, 2001), sexual murderers are more likely than other violent offenders to be psychopathic. For example, Meloy (2000) found that about two-thirds of a sample of adult sexual homicide offenders scored in the moderate-high range on the PCL-R. A similar high base rate of psychopathic traits is seen in adolescent sexual homicide offenders (Myers & Blashfield, 1997).

Research examining offender behaviors exhibited in the course of sexual homicide would provide insight into this apparent link between psychopathy and sexual homicide. Porter, Woodworth, Earle, Druge, and Boer (2003) examined the relationship between PCL-R scores and the types of aggression evidenced during the crime in a sample of 38 Canadian sexual murderers. The main source of information was the detailed file description of the case as known in the Criminal Profile Report, based on police, forensic, and court information. Of major interest was the level of gratuitous and sadistic violence that had been perpetrated on the victim. Gratuitous violence was defined as excessive violence that went beyond the level that would be necessary to complete the homicide. Evidence for gratuitous violence included torture, beating, mutilation, and the use of multiple weapons from the crime scene. Evidence that the offender obtained enjoyment or pleasure from the violent acts was coded as sadistic violence (this was coded from self-report information or evidence from the crime scene). To avoid potential circularity in PCL-R scoring, a sub-sample of cases was coded by diagnostician who had not read the descriptions of the violent crimes. Similarly, when crime scene descriptions were coded by a coder who was unaware of the PCL-R score and other file information. One finding replicated the work mentioned previously: most offenders (84.7%) scored in the moderate to high range on the PCL-R (significantly higher than those of a group of nonsexual murderers). More important, homicides committed by psychopaths (n = 18) showed a significantly higher level of both gratuitous and sadistic violence than homicides by non-psychopathic offenders (n = 20). Most psychopaths (82.4%) had committed sadistic acts on their victims, compared to 52.6% of the nonpsychopaths. In examining the offender files, it became clear that for many other offenders, the homicide was intended to prevent the victim from reporting a sexual assault and did not serve the same "psychological" function that it seemed to for psychopaths.

Collectively, these findings suggest that psychopaths may be more likely than other offenders to derive pleasure from the suffering of others. The sadistic violence perpetrated by psychopaths could relate to a thrill-seeking motive or sexual sadism, or both. However, we hypothesize that it reflects a generalized callousness and thrill seeking (see Porter, Campbell, et al., 2001). Although there is a lack of research specifically in this area, the combination of these characteristics (and particular the thrill-seeking motivation) would suggest that there may be a link between psychopathy and serial homicide—particularly the predatory sexual variety.

SELF-DIRECTED AGGRESSION

Does the propensity of psychopaths to perpetrate violent acts against others extend to self-directed aggression such as suicidal behaviors? Given the superficial affect, self-promoting tendencies, and grandiosity associated with psychopathy, such behavior may seem highly unlikely. Davis and Hare (1976), perhaps psychopaths never or rarely become sufficiently distressed to commit suicide. However, he observed that psychopaths frequently make empty threats of self-harm and engage in many bogs attempts characterized by "remarkable cleverness, premeditation, and histrionics" (p. 221). According to this view, self-directed aggression by psychopaths may occur but is highly instrument, and rarely lethal, unlike the self-directed aggression by others which is associated with "internalizing" problems (e.g., depression). Verona, Patrick, and Joiner (2001) conducted one of the only studies to examine the relationship between psychopathy and self-harm in adult offenders. Using structured interviews and prison file records, they coded for a history of suicide attempts in a sample of 313 inmates. They found that there was a small but significant correlation (r = .11) between PCL-R scores and a history of suicidal behaviors. Suicidal behavior was mainly related to Factor 2 scores and to the presence of an antisocial personality disorder.
diagnosis but was unrelated to Factor 1 scores. Gretton (1998) found that within a group of male adolescent offenders, more psychopathic individuals (37%) had a history of self-injurious behavior than did nonpsychopaths (21%). Unfortunately, these studies relied heavily on self-report and did not examine the severity of the suicidal behavior. More research is needed to clarify the psychopathy/self-aggression relationship by coding self-harm incidents in terms of severity and motivation. Although the Verona and colleagues (2001) research indicated that suicidal behavior mainly related to PCL-R Factor 2 scores, we think that psychopaths also engage in a substantial amount of sincere self-harm actions that are intended solely to manipulate others (which would be more consistent with higher scores on Factor 1).

Violence from the Psychopath’s Perspective

Asking a psychopath to provide his or her view on violence is unlikely to elicit an honest response. Psychopaths long have been characterized as having a remarkable disregard for the truth (e.g., Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1998; Meloy, 1989; Porter, Birt, Yuille, & Hervé, 2001), to the extent that deceit often is regarded as a defining characteristic of the disorder. A small number of empirical studies have also demonstrated a link between psychopathy and deceptive behavior (e.g., Lykken, 1957; Rogers et al., 2002; Sero, Khattar, Labouvie, & Quinney, 1997). Because psychopaths are known to lie frequently, recent studies have examined the psychopath’s perspective on violence through less direct/more subtle means. One line of research has employed verbal stimuli to examine whether psychopaths view violence in a negative light. A second approach indicates that psychopaths use deception and minimize their role when they describe their violence, even in the context of a confessional research interview.

According to one view, psychopaths are more likely to engage in instrumental acts of aggression because they do not interpret their victims’ emotional distress cues or violence as aversive (Blair, 2001; see also Nett, Kimble, Berman, & Haycock, 2002). In line with this hypothesis, a recent British study suggests that psychopaths who have committed homicide do not view violence as unpleasant. Gray, Maccolluch, Smith, Mossis, and Snowden (2003) measured implicit beliefs about murder in psychopathic and nonpsychopathic murderers, and psychopaths and nonpsychopathic offenders who had committed other offenses. Using a modified Implicit Association Test (IAT), the researchers presented participants with a word which they then had to associate with being either “unpleasant” or “pleasant” and either “peaceful” or “violent.” In general, control participants responded to word stimuli with a right or left button press when words of contrasting valences required responses with the same button. For example, when the response key was assigned for pleasant and violent words, participants usually found the task to be more difficult. Results indicated that psychopathic murderers did not display the same impairment in response time as nonpsychopaths when incongruent words (pleasant and violent words) called for equivalent responses. That is, they responded as if they did not associate violence and unpleasantness, and showed diminished emotional reactions to violence compared with nonpsychopathic murderers.

A second line of work has recently examined the manner in which psychopaths describe their violent crimes. Porter and Woodworth (2005) interviewed 50 incarcerated offenders about their violent crimes. Naive coders then rated either the offender’s version or the official version of the crimes in terms of the instrumentality or reactivity of the offense. When the self-reported and official descriptions of the violent offenses were compared, it was found that psychopaths were significantly less likely than nonpsychopaths to “reframe” the offenses in an excruciating way. That is, although nonpsychopaths also had a tendency to reframe their offenses as reactive (regardless of the actual nature of the offense), psychopaths were significantly more likely to downplay the level of instrumentality of their violence, describing it as more reactive than the official version of the offense. Furthermore, only psychopaths were significantly more likely than nonpsychopaths to omit major details of the homicide offense. The results of this study further replicated Woodworth and Porter's (2002) finding that instrumental violence was related to the Factor 1 interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy, and not to the Factor 2 social deviance/behavioral features (see also Patrick & Zempolich, 1998). In addition, results revealed that the tendency to exaggerate the reactivity of the homicide was strongly related to the Factor 1 scores but not to the Factor 2 scores. Thus, it appears that the interpersonal an affective characteristics of psychopathy account for not only the type of violence used by offenders but also the manner in which they discuss it. control participants responded to word stimuli with a right or left button press when words of contrasting valences required responses with the same button. For example, when the response key was assigned for pleasant and violent words, participants usually found the task to be more difficult. Results indicated that psychopathic murderers did not display the same impairment in response time as nonpsychopaths when incongruent words (pleasant and violent words) called for equivalent responses. That is, they responded as if they did not associate violence and unpleasantness, and showed diminished emotional reactions to violence compared with nonpsychopathic murderers.

Subtypes of Psychopathy

Clearly, there is much variation in the types and amount of aggression committed by different psychopaths. In observing the wide behavioral differences between individual psychopaths, some theorists have suggested the possibility of subtypes of the disorder. Cleckley (1976) himself questioned the validity of psychopathic subtypes, claiming that they potentially could serve to confuse the defining characteristics of psychopathy. However, more recently, some research may support the notion that there are separate subtypes that can be distinguished (and possibly lead to a more refined understanding of the disorder). For example, Millon and Davis (1998) concluded that there are 10 different subtypes of psychopathy. At the core of each subtype was a marked self-centeredness and disregard for the rights of others; however, Millon and Davis postulated that there were unique characteristics that made each of these subtypes different and recognizable. Others have suggested that psychopathy can be broken down into two main subtypes: primary and secondary psychopathy (e.g., Blackburn, 1998). Primary psychopathy is comprised of constitutional deficits that are not attributable to psychological learning; such individuals display the defining personality characteristics of psychopathy (such as grandiosity, lack of guilt or remorse, and callousness) from an early age. These individuals display low levels of anxiety and lack prosocial emotions (such as guilt and love) that otherwise prevent them from engaging in extremely callous actions. On the other hand, secondary psychopaths do experience social emotions, and their hostile behavior is believed to be more a product of their negative life experiences and environment. Therefore, this behavior can be thought of as an adaptation to harsh environmental contingencies (such as bad parenting) and/or could be best explained in terms of some other pathologies or syndrome (such as hysterical). Although research is needed, it is likely that that primary psychopathy would be more directly related to the type of instrumental violence that is observed in studies of homicide: aggression described previously.

Other researchers have also distinguished different subtypes of psychopathy based on separate etiological pathways. For example, Porter (1996) proposed that there were two main types of psychopathy with distinct causal factors. He suggested that primary psychopaths were born with a predisposition to the core interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy and that normal environmental development was not possible. However, Porter argues that secondary psychopaths acquired the affective features associated with psychopathy after experiencing long-term neglect or abuse (or other early traumatic experience) in early childhood. Furthermore, he suggested that this emotional detachment was spurred by dissociation and a more gradual blunting (or shutting down) of emotions. Although conducting the appropriate empirical test of this theory is difficult, recent innovative research has shown some support for this theory of secondary psychopathy (see Poythress & Skeem, Chapter 9, this volume).
Psychopath subtypes as well as the etiological pathways. This is an area that will likely be the focus of much investigation in coming years.

Cognitive Ability as a Potential Moderator of the Psychopathy–Violence Association

Why is most of the ruthless conduct of some psychopaths nonviolent while others show a persistent pattern of violence? Perhaps some psychopaths view aggressive or violent behavior as being more necessary to achieve their personal goals and psychopaths. As noted earlier, some psychopaths, especially white-collar or corporate psychopaths, seem to rarely use physical aggression.

A potential moderator of the relationship between psychopathy and violence is intelligence. That is, more intelligent psychopaths may be less inclined to use aggression because they can use their cognitive resources to devise nonviolent means (such as conning and manipulation) to get what they want. Less intelligent psychopaths may resort to violence to compensate for their inferior abilities to manipulate others through language. Heilbrun (1982) found that past violent offending in a sample of 168 male inmates was influenced by the interaction of intellectual level and psychopathy. Less intelligent psychopaths were more likely to have a history of impulsive violence than more intelligent psychopaths (and than less intelligent nonpsychopaths). Heilbrun (1985) reported that the most dangerous offenders in a sample of 223 offenders was one with the following characteristics: psychopathic, low IQ, social withdrawal, and history of violence.

While these early studies offered some evidence for intelligence as a moderator of psychopathy and violence, little research has addressed the issue in recent years, largely due to methodological obstacles. Specifically, the majority of psychopaths in society may succeed in corporate or political circles and/or use violence less frequently and thus may be less likely to wind up in prison. As such, they would be less likely to be studied by psychological researchers, who has less intelligent psychopaths are available in disproportionate numbers for research.

Another potential issue in this area is that psychopaths with higher cognitive function

ing may be as likely to commit violence as other psychopaths but be much less likely to be apprehended for such acts. Ishikawa and colleagues (2001) tested a community sample of 16 "unsuccessful" and 13 "successful" psychopaths (classified based on their PCL-R scores and whether they had received criminal convictions) on measures of autonomic stress reactivity and executive functioning (referred to as the capacity for initiation, planning, abstraction, decision making). The two groups had engaged in a substantial and similar amount of self-reported criminal behavior, including violence. The results indicated that the successful psychopaths exhibited greater autonomic reactivity to emotional stressors and stronger executive functioning than unsuccessful psychopaths. This suggested that psychopaths who are less likely to be caught and convicted for their violent acts have the capacity for better planning and decision making than their unsuccessful counterparts. While Ishikawa and colleagues did not address the type of violent acts perpetuated by successful and unsuccessful psychopaths, we hypothesize that successful psychopaths may have been more likely to use premeditated instrumental violence than their counterparts.

CONCLUSION

There is a clear relation between psychopathy and aggressive behavior. In fact, psychopaths probably commit more nonjustified violence than any other group. For example, sexual violence by psychopaths in general seems to be motivated by sadistic interests and thrill seeking. Research has demonstrated that psychopaths are much more likely than other murderers to commit sexual and sadistic violence on their victims during a sexual homicide. Although some violence by psychopaths is reactive, this type of behavior is typically avoided when the stakes are the highest. Nearly all homicides by psychopaths tend to be highly premeditated and cold-blooded. We argued that impulsive behavior in psychopaths may have less to do with a lack of control than with a rapid, conscious consideration of the gravity of the consequences. Future research may also reveal that distinct manifestations of psychopathic violence are related to unique subtypes or facets of the disorder.

Perhaps the overriding problem is that psychopathic individuals have a wholly self-oriented and a profound emotional deficit, as evidenced from studies of language, personality, empathy, neurology, and behavior. This translates into a pattern of ruthless aggressive and criminal actions. A major challenge for researchers in future work is to determine the etiological factors contributing to the development of psychopathy and individual differences in psychopathic aggression.

REFERENCES


Psychopathy and Substance Use Disorders

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Substance use disorders (SUDs) such as abuse of, or dependence on, alcohol and/or illicit drugs affect 20–40% of the general population (e.g., Contier et al., 1995; Grant, Harford, Dawson, & Chou, 1994), placing them among the most prevalent of mental disorders. Given such pervasiveness, it should not be surprising to find these problems occurring in the context of other diagnoses and, indeed, the comorbidity of SUDs and personality disorders has been reported at rates as high as 60% in outpatients (Skodol, Oldham, & Gallagher, 1999). More specifically, SUDs are often evident among individuals with externalizing disorders or behaviors of the sort marked by overt acting out and a general lack of behavioral control. Antisocial personality disorder (APD) and its precursor, conduct disorder (CD), are prototypical examples of externalizing disorders that are especially likely to be comorbid with SUDs (Strain, 1995). Similarly, delinquency and criminality frequently co-occur with substance use problems (Soderstrom, Sjolind, Carlstedt, & Forsman, 2004; Timmerman & Krasnegorkamp, 2001). Thus, the nature, implications, and management of the connection between various forms of antisocial behaviors, including psychopathy, and SUDs appear to warrant further exploration.

The goal of this chapter is to enhance the understanding of psychopathy through an analysis of its relation to SUDs. One acknowledgment pertinent to this pursuit is the fact that considerably less is known about psychopathy—as compared to APD—as it relates to SUDs. Accordingly, we begin with a brief summary of the association between APD and SUDs and then touch on the distinctions between APD and psychopathy and the relevant assessment issues to set the stage for examination of psychopathy as a condition comorbid with SUDs. A description of the association between the key phenotypes of interest within various samples will then follow. The apparent close connections between antisocial behavior, psychopathy, and SUDs naturally set up the question of why these problems often manifest together. Consequently, an overview of prominent models purporting to explain this comorbidity is provided and one particularly promising model that ties various forms of externalizing behavior together is highlighted. Next, the clinical consequences of the comorbidity between SUDs and psychopathy is reviewed to elucidate and underscore the complications that can stem from the dual diagnosis. Finally, given these consequences, issues related to clinical management of individuals with both psychopathy and SUDs are discussed.