

The polymorphously perverse psychopath: Understanding a strong empirical relationship

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The relationship between psychopathy and sexual offending has been empirically established, but it is little understood. The author proposes nine explanations to provide a conceptual basis for this empirical relationship: (1) search polygyny, (2) callousness and a lack of empathy, (3) a lack of attachment or bonding, (4) sensation seeking as a product of chronic cortical underarousal, (5) grandiosity, (6) entitlement, (7) a predominance of part-object relations, (8) a high frequency of predatory violence, and (9) the leaving by consensual sex partners when the psychopathy is identified. These explanations, constructed from anthropological, psychobiological, attachment, psychoanalytic, and aggression research, find some direct and indirect empirical support in the extant literature. They contribute to understanding the “polymorphously perverse” sexuality of the psychopath. (Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic, 66[3], 273-289)

The construct “psychopathy” has received an enormous amount of clinical, forensic, and research attention during the past 20 years (Millon, Simonsen, Birket-Smith, & Davis, 1998), primarily due to the work of Hare (1998) and his colleagues. Psychopathic disorders have been recognized, moreover, since the late 19th century, being originally discussed by German psychiatric researchers (Millon et al., 1998). The most widely used measure of the construct, the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991), has demonstrated interjudge and temporal reliability, concurrent validity, and predictive validity when tested by independent researchers (Cooke, Forth, & Hare, 1998) in a variety of experimental and naturalistic designs. Psychopathy is composed of two factors, aggressive narcissism (Meloy, 1992) and chronic antisocial behavior (Hare et al., 1990), which correlate about .50. Most recently, item response theory and confirmatory factor analysis have identified three factors (Cooke & Michie, 2001), of which two – an arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style and a deficient affective experience – appear to further delineate the aggressive narcissism, or core personality, of the psychopath.

It therefore comes as no surprise that psychopathy has also emerged as a significant correlate and powerful predictor (when considered in terms of explainable variance) of sexual reoffending. Quinsey, Harris, Rice, and Cormier (1998) found that two factors, psychopathy and absolute sexual deviance as measured by the penile plethysmograph, accounted for the largest proportion of explainable variance in models that postdicted sexual reoffending by rapists and child molesters. Psychopathy is a required item in their two actuarial instruments, the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) and the Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide (SORAG) (Quinsey et al., 1998). Rice and Harris (1997) reported a correlation of .47 between SORAG scores and any violent reoffense in a 10-year cross-validation study of 159 sex offenders.

Using scores equal to or greater than 30 on the PCL-R, the validated cutoff for labeling a subject a psychopath for research purposes, Forth and Kroner (1994) labeled 26.1% of convicted rapists (N = 211), 35% of serial rapists and murderers (N = 60), 18.3% of mixed sex offenders (N = 163), and 5.4% of incest offenders (N = 85) as psychopaths. Prentky and Knight (1991) found higher percentages of psychopaths among smaller samples of rapists (45.3%) and child molesters (30.5%). Individuals who commit sexual homicide also show high rates of psychopathy (Meloy, 2000).

Adult psychopathic rapists and child molesters who have been treated are more likely to recidivate violently (80% at 6 years post release) than treated nonpsychopathic rapists and child molesters (20% at 6 years post release) (Quinsey, Lalumiere, Rice, & Harris, 1995). Adolescent sex offenders show similar disparities after 12 to 36-month follow-up for conviction of a nonsexual violent offense (O'Shaughnessy, Hare, Gretton, & McBride, 1994).

Serin and his colleagues (2001) did a 7-year follow-up of 68 sex offenders and found that the offenders with the highest psychopathy scores showed the highest recidivism rates. Most strikingly, Seto and Barbaree (1999) reported on sex offenders treated in a 5-month relapse prevention program in a medium security prison and found that an interaction between psychopathy and treatment behavior significantly predicted both sexual and nonsexual recidivism. Men who were more psychopathic and were rated as showing greater treatment improvement and change by their therapists were more than five times as likely to commit a new serious offense.

Two other widely used sex offender risk assessment instruments, however, the RRASOR and the STATIC 99, do not directly measure psychopathy and show good predictive accuracy (ROC areas of .68 and .71, respectively, in a combined sample of 1,208 rapists and child molesters; Hanson & Thornton, 2000). The ROC area is generally the probability that a randomly selected recidivist sex offender would have a higher score on the instrument than a randomly selected nonrecidivist sex offender.

Although it is neither necessary nor sufficient to predict recidivism per se, the relationship between psychopathy and sexual offending appears to be strong and positive. Furthermore, it is not a tautology: Only one item of 20 on the PCL-R, sexual promiscuity, is partially defined by sexual offending, and one other item, criminal versatility, may be elevated by a history of sexual offenses. Neither of these two items load on the identified two factors of the PCL-R (Hare, 1991).

Although studies to date have scrutinized the degree of influence of psychopathy among sex offenders, few published studies have empirically measured the sexual behavior, whether offensive or not, of nonrandom samples of psychopaths. Several studies, however, have measured the relationship between mating effort – the amount of behavior expended to locate, court, guard, and sexually interact with members of the preferred sex and age – and psychopathy (Lalumiere & Quinsey, 1996; Seto, Khattar, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 1997; Seto, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 1995). Mating effort is often defined by an earlier age at first intercourse, more sexual partners, more casual sex, and a greater interest in partner variety. There is also some research that high mating effort is reflected in some acts of sexual coercion (Quinsey & Lalumiere, 1995). Three studies (Lalumiere & Quinsey, 1996; Seto, Khattar, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 1997; Seto, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 1995) recruited college students and community subjects and found a positive relationship between measures of psychopathy and indicators of mating effort, consistent with

prevalent theory that mating effort is an important component of the psychopath's life history.

Although the research continues to confirm the relationship between psychopathy and such *polymorphous perversity* (a term originally coined by Freud [1905/1953]¹ to capture the many expressive ways in which sexual impulses manifest in young children), there are few proffered explanations for this relationship, and the best measures, such as the SORAG, are atheoretical. In the hope of continuing to stimulate, and perhaps refine, theory-driven empirical investigations of the sexuality of the psychopath, I would like to offer a series of nine explanations as to why he² is "polymorphously perverse": (1) search polygyny, (2) callousness and lack of empathy, (3) lack of bonding, (4) sensation seeking, (5) grandiosity, (6) entitlement, (7) part-object relations, (8) predatory versus affective violence, and (9) leaving by sex partners.

Search polygyny

Anthropologists use the term *search polygyny* to describe a male mating strategy in which the subject is geographically mobile and attempts to impregnate as many different women as possible. From an evolutionary perspective, the psychopaths who do search polygyny the best would have the greatest likelihood of remaining in the gene pool across generations, and therefore of being reproductively successful, long after their individual demise. This, in turn, would suggest that the psychopaths who inhabit our communities today are the biological descendants of those psychopaths who were the most successful search polygynists.

Psychopaths typically do not bond to others or form secure attachments, two prerequisites for stable "pair bonding" (Meloy, in press). In the absence of pair bonding, there is less likelihood of a family-kinship network, which provides a safe environment within which to raise the young. Family helps ensure that children will be nurtured and protected and mature to adulthood, a further developmental prerequisite for their own reproductive success. In the absence of pair bonding, a family-kinship network, and competent parenting of his young, the adaptive psychopath engages in an alternative mating strategy: the more impregnations of different women in different locations (hedging one's bets, so to speak, to maximize a mate's physical health and minimize her exposure to ecological disasters), the greater the likelihood that some of the offspring will survive to reproduce. This mating strategy is more common among reptiles than mammals, the latter being more likely to nest and parent their progeny.

Although search polygyny does not necessarily predict sexual offending, such an active mating strategy would appear to increase the risk of opportunistic sexual offending toward postpubescent young females for the following reasons: (1) the sexual mate would more likely be a casual acquaintance or a complete stranger, rather than a bonded partner, therefore increasing the possibility of nonconsent; (2) there would be many sexual mates, therefore increasing the possibility of nonconsent by some of them; (3) search polygyny

¹ This phrase was accompanied by Freud's first mention of cruelty, which he considered an impulse that arises from the instinct for mastery. Cruelty was independent of, but related to, sexual development. I am using the term "polymorphous perversity" in this article's context to capture the many abnormal sex acts and objects that appear to capture the erotic attention of the psychopath.

² Because most reported psychopaths are male, I will use male pronouns.

may involve sexual coercion as an active mating strategy (Lalumiere & Quinsey, 1996); and (4) the vaginal rape of young, postpubescent females by an unknown psychopathic male would maximize his reproductive success and minimize his parental responsibility, although with increased evolutionary risk: imprisonment or an early, violent death. As one psychopathic male put it, implying a certain manifest destiny, "I am convinced that it is a sin not to spread your seed in every hole you can find. The object of the male race is to procreate."

Callousness and lack of empathy

Psychopaths typically demonstrate a callous disregard for the rights and feelings of others (Hare, 1991). This lack of empathy may find its genesis in the absence of bonding, an attachment deficit that biologically may dilute the psychological identification with another (Meloy, 1988). In psychoanalytic theory, early internalizations, some of which are identifications with the parents, are a developmental prelude to later feelings of empathy (Schafer, 1968).

The extreme of callousness is sadism, wherein indifference toward others has been transformed into pleasure at their suffering. Sadism also involves pleasure through the dominance and control of another. Given the degree that psychopaths attempt to dominate their objects, rather than affectionately relate to them, it is not surprising that there is a strong and positive empirical relationship between measurable sadism and psychopathy (Holt, Meloy, & Strack, 1999).

Sexual sadism is sexualized pleasure or arousal through the suffering and dominance of another (Shapiro, 1981). Sexual sadism, although a rare paraphilia that is present in only a small minority of sex offenders (Abel, Becker, Cunningham-Rathner, Mittelman, & Rouleau, 1988), is often accompanied by psychopathy. Dietz, Hazelwood, and Warren (1990; Warren, Hazelwood, & Dietz, 1996) reported criminal behaviors among sexual sadists that were very consistent with psychopathy. Geberth and Turco (1997) found that most serial murderers share diagnoses of both sexual sadism and antisocial personality disorder. I (2000) reported the pairing of sexual sadism and psychopathy among certain sexual homicide perpetrators: those referred to in the literature as organized, ritualistic, and compulsive.

An unempathic and callous attitude would need to be in place to surmount the vocalized pain and suffering of the victim during certain sexual attacks. For example, criminal sexual sadists prefer anal intercourse (Dietz et al., 1990), a sex act that dominates and controls the victim from behind and dehumanizes the victim for the perpetrator, because there is little face-to-face emotional exchange without the perpetrator's consent. This is in striking contrast to the preferred sexual activity of most normal adults, which is vaginal intercourse—a position that heightens emotional exchange between partners as intercourse occurs (Janus & Janus, 1994). The anal assault of a child always raises the strong possibility of both psychopathy and sexual sadism because at best, the callous attitude of the perpetrator has overcome the plaintive wail of the child or, at worst, the child's suffering enhances the perpetrator's sexual arousal. As one 60-year-old sexual sadist, a chronic perpetrator who preferred to abduct and torture young adult females, reported: "I never left bruises or marks. They didn't turn me on. It was the physical pain and fear. . . I practiced and tested everything on me. I'd find it stimulating too."

Lack of bonding

There is a growing body of research, to which I have already alluded, that suggests that psychopaths do not form emotional bonds with others. Bowlby (1944) first labeled these individuals “affectionless” in his early attachment research, and other psychoanalysts clinically documented and interpreted the absence of attachment as a developmental prelude to serious antisocial behavior in adolescence and adulthood (Meloy, 2001). Attachment researchers subsequently described this attachment pathology as avoidant (Ainsworth, 1989), and recent research has described these individuals as evidencing a dismissive attachment style (Bartholomew, 1990). Gacono and I (1994) found Rorschach indices of chronic emotional detachment in many samples of antisocial individuals, and subsamples of psychopaths were more frequently emotionally detached. Other psychological tests, such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2, have various scales of antisocial behaviors that significantly correlate with emotional detachment (Friedman, Lewak, Nichols, & Webb, 2000). Fonagy (1999) hypothesized that a dismissive attachment pattern, which he found prevalent among a small sample of violent criminals, may be a developmental adaptation to cruel or neglectful parenting. Several researchers have found that psychopathy in female inmates correlates with voluntary relinquishment of biological offspring (Strahan, 1993; Taylor, 1997), behavior that suggests a lack of bonding; and Raine, Brennan, and Mednick (1997) found that birth complications and parental rejection during the first year of life predicted early onset, violent criminality in adulthood, a behavior emblematic of psychopathy. Curiously, there is no published study of a sample of psychopaths using a standard attachment measure, such as the Adult Attachment Interview.

Although the reasons for this lack of bonding may be psychobiologically acquired, inherited, or both, the sexual outcome would be the same: Despite the frequency and intensity of sexual activity with one person, a secure bond would not develop, and reciprocal affectional feelings would not deepen to inhibit the pursuit of other sexual opportunities, whether criminally offensive or not. Fisher (1998) theorized that there are three biochemically supported domains of human mating – lust, attraction, and attachment – which are relatively independent of one another. Lust is primarily served by the sex hormones androgen and estrogen; attraction is primarily served by the catecholamines; and attachment is served by the neuropeptides vasopressin and oxytocin. Her theory would posit that psychopaths will show deficits in the latter domain.

Sensation-seeking

Convergent research over the past 50 years strongly suggests that psychopaths are sensation seekers (Eysenck, 1967; Farley & Farley, 1967; Hare & Cox, 1978; Quay, 1965; Zuckerman, 1978). This stable pattern of behavior is likely a product of peripheral autonomic hyporeactivity (Hare & Cox, 1978). A similar phenomenon called “chronic cortical underarousal” has been found in more heterogeneous samples of habitual criminals (Raine, 1993). This biological predisposition is developmentally stable (Raine, Reynolds, Venables, Mednick, & Farrington, 1998), cross-culturally measurable (Raine, Venables, & Mednick, 1997), and predicts early onset, violent criminality in adults (Raine, Venables, & Williams, 1990).

Sensation or novelty seeking is largely heritable (Zuckerman, 1994), that is, a large proportion of variance of the trait can be explained by genetic variability. It likely provides a biological incentive for risky, exciting, and in some cases forbidden sexual activity by the psychopath. Such activity could include sex acts (rape) or sex objects (children) that are considered immoral and illegal in the surrounding community of the psychopath, but are embraced by him solely on the basis of risk. Repetition of such behavior and escalation of risk would be expected given the psychopath's, as well as all humans', habituation to sexual stimuli. In other words, sexual desire diminishes when the same sexual activity and object are revisited time and again. A sexual sadist would be expected to increase the suffering and torture of subsequent victims to maintain the same level of sexual arousal. The likelihood of the psychopath escalating his sexual violence would also be increased by his relative fearlessness (Patrick, 1994) and low levels of anxiety (Lykken, 1957) when compared to nonpsychopathic individuals.

Grandiosity

One aspect of the psychopath's pathological narcissism is his consciously inflated sense of self (Hare, 1991; Kernberg, 1975; Meloy, 1988). He is a legend in his own mind. Grandiosity is clinically measured not by his confidence, but by the disparity between his reported successes and his actual life circumstances. It is maintained, moreover, through the devaluation of others in real life, not just in fantasy; the latter is more apparent in the narcissistic personality without psychopathy.

The grandiosity of the psychopath leaves its mark on his sexual behavior through his control, deception, or both of the sex object. In the larger domain of interpersonal relations, psychopaths relate to others on the basis of power gradients (dominance/submission) rather than affection. This desire to control the other may range sexually from intermittent sexual assaults in a marriage (Dutton, 1995) to abduction of a victim and criminal sexual sadism (Dietz, Hazelwood, & Warren, 1990). In both cases, coercion and subjugation contribute to the psychopath's conscious sense of being omnipotent.

Deception also serves grandiosity because the successful act of deceit demonstrates to the psychopath, once again, that he is brighter, wiser, more clever, and perhaps trickier than his victim: He is an omniscient figure whose repetitive patterns of "putting something over on someone" lead to reinforcing feelings of contemptuous delight (Bursten, 1972). Manifest sexual behavior that is mendacious could range from a series of sexual liaisons unknown to one's spouse – felt as a sense of expansive delight rather than as burdensome guilt – to the conscious development of a plan to deceive a child into sexual acts through the use of rewards and lies. Seto et al. (1997) showed that psychopathy is related to various measures of sexual and nonsexual deception.

Entitlement

Another aspect of the psychopath's pathological narcissism is his sense of entitlement, the pernicious belief that he has a right to take from others regardless of the cost to them. There is a complete absence of reciprocal altruism (Trivers, 1985), a term used by anthropologists to describe the mutual give-and-take that, with few exceptions, permeates

our species. The psychopath wants what he wants when he wants it. In sexual activity, shared erotic pleasure is replaced with heightened sexual excitement and gratification at all costs. "No" always means "yes" and, depending on the degree of psychopathy, such a rationalization may be necessary to excuse the coercive behavior. The articulation of such an excuse communicates that the perpetrator is at least aware that his behavior may be offensive to some. The absence of any need to rationalize often accompanies severe psychopathy and the lack of any anxiety concerning social condemnation by others.

Entitlement and grandiosity may feed off one another and, as an attitude and a fantasy, respectively, they consciously defend against feelings of envy for what is not possessed: If the object is devalued, it was not worth having in the first place. One serial sexual murderer who was raping and killing stranger females while also engaged in a consensual sexual relationship with his girlfriend, characterized the difference: "One is taking, the other is sharing." Another sexual murderer reported intense arousal and anger when he witnessed his mother's sexual promiscuities when he was 12 years old, the same age as his selected female victim. A third sexual perpetrator, a psychopathic pedophile, described sitting in his condominium and masturbating on his couch one afternoon when two young girls in his neighborhood – he befriended his preferred victim pool of 8- to 10-year-old females wherever he lived – wandered in the open front door. He looked at me quizzically and said, "What would you expect me to do, stop?"

Part-object relations

Psychoanalysts have theorized that psychopaths are organized at a borderline or preoedipal level of personality (Kernberg, 1984). There is some empirical support for this assertion (Gacono & Meloy, 1994). Object relations theory describes such internal representations of self and others as part-objects (Kernberg, 1975) while self psychologists refer to these representations as selfobjects (Kohut, 1971). In both theories, internal representations are not whole, real, and meaningful, with the subtle affective colorings that shape mature experience; instead, representations are either positive or negative, good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, and inside or outside (regardless of the constraints of reality), depending on their emotional valence.

Pornographic magazines parallel such psychological maturity, or lack thereof. In the so-called mainstream publications, such as *Playboy*, the entire body of the naked woman is displayed, pleasurable affect and all, and there is an attempt to keep her a whole object with a paragraph or brief story, concerning her background and future aspirations: "Ginny wants to be a psychiatrist after she completes her medical school education." She is usually looking at the reader, in a static attempt to stimulate the fantasy of a sexual-affectual relationship that is desired, or perhaps longed for, by the reader: a fantasy imbued with hope for the future, or perhaps regret for what never will be.

As one peruses the less mainstream publications, such as *Hustler* or *Swank* (although they still advocate consensual heterosexual sex), the photographs now become part-objects: a breast, a vagina, a buttock, a nipple. The autobiographical and aspirational paragraphs are gone, and the woman photographed as a whole person with pleasant affect is much less frequent – one begins to see fear and anger if her face is visible at all. There is also an emergent interest in exploring, penetrating, and perhaps violating her boundaries. The magazines now begin to look like gynecological textbooks, with photos of both labia

majora and minora, and with visual attempts to peer inside the woman's genitalia. External versus internal reality is less clear, the image does not guide, let alone support reality testing, and often impersonal dominance and submission, rather than personal affectional relating, are more apparent in the narratives: "Ginny likes you to do to her what you want." It is a blatant invitation to indulge the narcissistic fantasies of the reader.

Such magazines should appeal to the psychopath, but no empirical research has tested such an hypothesis. One study has asserted an empirical link between sexual sadism and an interest in detective magazines, the latter suffused with photos and narratives concerning subjugation, domination, and torture of women (Dietz, Harry, & Hazelwood, 1986).

Such part-object relating makes perversity, what Stoller (1975) referred to as an "erotic form of hatred" easier. If the psychopath does not conceive of others as whole, real, and meaningful individuals, there will be no feelings such as guilt, remorse, gratitude, or love: socialized emotions that might inhibit impulses to sexually aggress. The 60-year-old sexual sadist mentioned earlier had some difficulty controlling his whole-object representations and more socialized emotions—they would sometimes interfere with his pleasure through torture: "If I talk to her, it's a big mistake. I start liking her and get concerned about her. Then I'm concerned about how she feels about me."

Another psychopathic sexual murderer of four stranger females reported his prehomocidal interests in both partialism and piquerism. He would coerce his girlfriends into letting him poke pins into their breasts. One of his sexual fantasies was to completely cover a woman in a white sheet, and then cut two holes through which only her breasts would be exposed. Over the course of almost two decades, his sexual demands and assaults on consensual partners became more frequent and severe. When he began to kill, he dismembered his first victim, a prostitute, to dispose of her body, but then kept one breast upon which he masturbated.

Predatory versus affective violence

Although there have been many proposed models for classifying violence, converging lines of theory and empirical research have divided violence into two modes: predatory (instrumental, premeditated, attack) and affective (impulsive, reactive, defensive). Labels have varied, but the underlying characteristics have been similarly described and, in some cases, measured by different research groups (Barratt, Stanford, Felthous, & Kent, 1997; Cornell et al., 1996; Meloy, 1997; Raine et al., 1998). Predatory violence is planned, purposeful, and emotionless, with autonomic arousal absent. Affective violence is a reaction to a threat, accompanied by anger and fear, and involves high levels of autonomic (sympathetic) arousal. The evolutionary basis of predatory violence is hunting; affective violence is rooted in a protective and defensive response to an imminent threat. Both serve reproductive success and genetic viability. Our ancestors thousands of years ago were adept at both predatory and affective violence – more so than their neighbors who did not survive to reproduce and raise their young.

Psychopathic criminals, when compared to nonpsychopaths, engage in more frequent predatory and affective violence (Cornell et al., 1996; Hare & McPherson, 1984; Serin, 1991; Williamson, Hare, & Wong 1987). They are hunters, an adaptive ancestral trait, and in the of sexual offending, are likely to be the most successful sexual or

predators. Data on serial offending support this explanation wherein serial rapists and serial murderers show higher degrees of psychopathy than other sexual offenders (Forth & Kroner, 1994; Meloy, 2000; Prentky & Knight, 1991; Quinsey et al., 1995; Schlesinger, 2000; Serin et al., 2001). Serial offending, typically defined as at least two offenses committed over time between which there is a cooling off period, requires planning and preparation. It also requires success – at least once – to become a serial offender.

Sexual predation, and predatory violence in general, is served by number of characteristics of the psychopath: (1) low levels of anxiety and autonomic hyporeactivity, (2) chronic emotional detachment that subserves a lack of empathy, (3) sensation seeking, (4) fearlessness, (5) manipulateness, (6) deception, (7) criminal versatility, (8) lack of guilt or remorse, and (9) shallow affect. Hazelwood and Burgess have extensively documented the offense behaviors of the serial rapist, many of which are consistent with a moderately to severely psychopathic personality. In a study of 41 subjects who raped 837 victims, Hazelwood and Warren (1995) reported that the vast majority of the victims were stranger females who were selected on the basis of proximity, availability, and access to their homes; the rapes were premeditated and were initiated by surprising the victim (lying in wait or approaching her while sleeping); a threatening physical presence was used to control the victim; the degree of the rapist's pleasure and the duration of the rape both increased when the victim resisted (suggesting a sadistic dynamic); and unlike the sexual sadist, the most common sex act was vaginal intercourse, perhaps an attempt at coercive impregnation. The serial rapists had extensive and diversified criminal histories as adults, and although they came from average or better socioeconomic strata, the vast majority were institutionalized as children or adolescents (orphanage, detention center, or mental health facility). These findings suggest that economic deprivation did not play a role in their personality development, and object relations disruptions may have played a role in their hypothesized attachment pathology. Deviant sexual arousal, however, needs to be added to the personality makeup to produce a serial sexual offender (Quinsey et al., 1998). In this sample of serial rapists, a large proportion had witnessed sexual violence or disturbing sexual activity by their parents, and had been sexually assaulted. As one serial rapist, who had a confirmed history of physical and sexual abuse by his parents, described to me his internal state during his raping: "I had no erectile problems, no anger, no other emotion. There was no guilt or remorse. Anger doesn't play a role once you start. It's adrenalin and focus" (PCL-R score >30).

Hazelwood and Warren (2000) advanced their work on the violent sexual offender in a recent formulation of the impulsive and ritualistic type. As they wrote,

The impulsive offender seems to be situationally motivated and characterized by a character style and erotic predisposition that allows for the opportunistic pairing of sexual and aggressive impulses. The ritualistic offender appears to be far more specific in his intent and criminal behavior, and largely motivated by the complex re-enactment of specific, sexual fantasies that pair himself and the victim in erotically repetitious and arousing interaction. (p. 278)

Although Hazelwood and Warren (2000) assert that the impulsive offender is more likely to be psychopathic given his impulsivity, risk taking, cruelty, minimal use of fantasy, and generally antisocial history, it is probable that the ritualistic offender (which would include

the sexual sadist) is just as psychopathic, but in a more refined, deliberate, erotically channeled, and fantasy-motivated manner. Psychopathic differences, or the lack thereof, in their proposed typology are empirically testable. The geographical hunting patterns of both types – impulsive offenders travel shorter distances and generally rape over a smaller area – strongly infer predatory rather than affective violence, although the specificity of victim selection and desire to conceal one’s identity may also vary across the two types (Warren et al., 1998).

Sex partners leave

The most obvious explanatory reason for the relationship between psychopathy and sexual offending is the fact that emotionally healthy consensual sex partners, with few exceptions, would leave the relationship with such a man, once his psychopathy had been identified, necessitating his search for other sexual objects. This is not to argue, however, that sexual coercion is a product of mate deprivation. The opposite appears to be true. Lalumiere, Chalmers, Quinsey, and Seto (1996) demonstrated that men who identify themselves as sexually coercive tend to report higher self-perceived mating success, have significantly more extensive sexual histories, and do not report relatively lower socioeconomic status. Self-identified coercive men have a stronger sex drive, are more authoritarian; are less empathic; show more hostile masculinity; are more domineering in laboratory interactions with women; prefer partner variety, uncommitted sex, and less intimacy; and view dating in terms of sexual possibilities (Lalumiere & Quinsey, 1996).

There are two cautionary exceptions to this final explanation. First, women in domestically violent relationships with a psychopathic man may not be able to physically leave, and recent research suggests that they may be most vulnerable to assault when they challenge his dominance and control (Babcock, Jacobson, Gottman, & Yerington, 2000). Second, there are women who, by virtue of their personality and various conditioning paradigms, become compliant victims of the psychopath. Research in this area is meager, but two studies address it in terms of personality assessment of the women (Meloy, 1992) and conditioning behavior of the sexual sadist toward his female partners (Hazelwood, Warren, & Dietz, 1993).

Summary and conclusions

The relationship between psychopathy and sexual offending has been empirically established, but it is little understood. I have proposed nine explanations to provide a conceptual basis for this empirical relationship: (1) search polygyny, (2) callousness and lack of empathy, (3) lack of bonding, (4) sensation seeking, (5) grandiosity, (6) entitlement, (7) part-object relations, (8) predatory violence, and (9) leaving by sex partners. Some of these explanations find direct or indirect empirical support in the extant literature. Others need to be tested as hypotheses. Theory explains data, and new data shape subsequent theory. The “polymorphous perversity” of the psychopath is best understood if this scientific dynamic is kept alive.

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