

Sociopathy and Psychopathy 1

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Closer Examination of Sociopathy and Psychopathy

Behaviors and Causes

Enrico Fionda, Tim Luo, Shayda Sabet

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University of British Columbia

Introduction

The condition of psychopathy has intrigued psychologists for years. A complicated and mysterious personality disorder, psychopathy invokes poor impulse control, the rejection of moral social norms, and often violent and aggressive behaviour. With close symptoms to that of a similar personality disorder known as sociopathy, the relation between these two conditions is a major topic of interest.

With such strong similarities between psychopathy and sociopathy, our research attempts to first identify their differences, if any, and to define the boundary between these two personality disorders. Furthermore, our research deals with the current theories relating to the constructs of psychopathy and sociopathy. With the constant nature versus nurture debate, our research identifies the possibilities dealing with whether psychopathy and sociology are adapted disorders, or genetic. By gaining a basic understanding of these relatively unknown disorders, psychologists and students alike, can expand their current theories and possibly derive a treatment for these debilitating conditions.

Annotated Bibliography

Christopher J. Patrick (1997) *Deconstructing Psychopathy, Psychological*

Inquiry 1997:244-251 Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Taylor & Francis Group)

This article describes the key points of Lykken's book, The Antisocial Personalities. Patrick explains Lykken's views that one's environment plays a major role in the development of antisocial personality disorders, and that psychopathy and sociopathy are subtypes of antisocial personality disorders. The difference between psychopathy and sociopathy is addressed as Lykken explains that psychopaths are impulsive and antisocial by nature, while sociopaths are less temperamental and may be influenced more by their environment. However, with this being said, Patrick makes it apparent that Lykken suggests that there is overlap between these two groups as they are quite similar. Also discussed in this article is the lack of fear associated with psychopaths and how this may be related to certain brain and neurological dysfunctions. This article was beneficial as it was able to summarize a great deal of useful information and explain it in a simple and understandable way. It was also addressed upon the topic of the similarities between psychopathy and sociopathy.

Herpenz, S. Sass, H. *Emotional Deficiency and Psychopathy*. 2000 Behavioral Sciences and the Law 18. 576-580.

Herpenz et. al.'s secondary research article looked at previous studies involving psychopathic individuals and concludes that 'emotional deficiency' predisposes one to violence. Although the connection between 'emotional deficiency' and psychopathy was the focus of the article, Herpenz et. al. started by describing the range conceptualization of psychopathy both historically and in the present. Herpenz et. al. begins by dividing the historical views into three broad categories, the French view, the German View, and the Anglo-American view. Herpenz et. al describe Pinel in 1809 as having started the scientific study of personality disorders (567), and that this French view regarded Personality disorders as arising out of mental functions (Citing Pinel 1809, Esquirol 1838), and as being primarily heritable (Citing Morel 1857). The Anglo-American view was that Psychopathy was both of heredity and environment, and a "moral alienation of the mind" (569), that is an inability to experience emotion. The German view considered psychopathy in a much larger scope, and value free, as 'statistical deviations'. Herpenz goes on to explain that current concepts of psychopathy are far from homogeneous as well. Herpenz then, using a variety of studies, shows that "deficient emotional responsiveness... hallmark of psychopathy."(572) That it is "poor conditioning", through "deficient emotional learning," (572), that is associated with a lack of conscience and psychopathy. Herpenz's article gives a very detailed history of concepts of psychopathy and a heritable link with psychopathy in emotional deficiency.

Mealey, Linda (1995), THE SOCIOBIOLOGY OF SOCIOPATHY: AN INTEGRATED

EVOLUTIONARY MODEL, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 18 (3): 523-599,

Department of Psychology, College of St. Benedict

Mealey (1995) explains that sociopaths stand out in society in two senses: politically, due to the unreasonable amount of crimes they commit, and psychologically, since most people have trouble fathoming their guilt-free behaviour towards the crimes.

This article outlines the difference in use of the terms psychopath and sociopath. Mealey notes that some authors use the term 'psychopath' when they refer to anti-social individuals who demonstrate a relatively high level of intelligence and from a higher socio-economic status, while using the term 'sociopath' when referring to anti-social individuals with a relatively lower level of intelligence who fall under lower socio-economic rank. Mealey proposes the role of emotion as an etiological model for antisocial behavior. Certain primary or basic emotions, such as anger and fear, which are closely related to survival are ones which predate evolution, such emotions are familiar to sociopaths. However, developing secondary emotions (such as sympathy, guilt and love) depend partially on learning and socializing in different cultures and are therefore usually lacking in those suffering from antisocial behaviour (Plutchick (1980), cited in Mealey, 1995). This article provides a lot of relevant information regarding the differences between psychopathy and sociopathy, and many detailed explanations for psychopathic behavior, however it is slightly difficult to comprehend at times, since it seems to be addressed to readers with the above expertise.

Thomas J. Pagan, Frank T. Lira (1980)

The Primary and Secondary Sociopathic Personality: Differences in Frequency and Severity of Antisocial Behaviors,

Journal of Abnormal Psychology 1980, Vol. 89, No. 3, 493-496, American Psychological Association

This article explains an experiment in which male inmates of a medium security corrections institution were divided into primary and secondary sociopath groups based on levels anxiety (primary being less anxious and secondary being more anxious). They were then monitored for anti social behaviour (such as fighting and stealing). According to the study, primary sociopaths engage in more inappropriate behaviour. Furthermore, the study contradicts past theories that primary sociopaths are not as aroused internally and therefore have difficulty processing certain aspects of fear and learning. On the other hand secondary sociopaths engaged in less severe antisocial behaviour, and are thought to be acting as a result of high arousal of internal conflicts. This article was useful as it provided a good idea of what actions sociopaths engage in. It also explained how there are different types of sociopaths and that they are motivated by different levels of internal arousal. However, this article was very complicated and difficult to comprehend.

R.J.R. Blair, K.S. Peschardt, S. Budhani, D.G.V. Mitchell, and D.S. Pine (2006),

The development of psychopathy The Authors (2006) Journal compilation (2006)

Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health. Blackwell Publishing.

This article describes in detail the different potential factors in the development of

psychopathy. It suggests that genetics and dysfunctions of the neural system are the key factors in psychopathy, however, it also mentions the roles that environment and social factors may play. Blair et. al explains that the environment, and social factors (such as abusive relationships) help to magnify the brain dysfunctions in psychopaths, and do not necessarily always lead to psychopathy. Blair et al makes it clear that there are many factors in the development of psychopathy, and more research must be done. The cognitive dysfunctions associated with psychopathy are also discussed. This article was quite detailed and informative; however, it used many scientific words that made it difficult to understand.

Lalumiere M, Harris GT, Rice ME- *Psychopathy and Developmental Instability*. 2001. Evolution and Human behavior 22: 75-92.

According to Lalumiere et. al. there are two models for the development of psychopathy, one, that psychopathy comes from a "defective or perturbed development," or, two, that psychopathy is a genetic strategy which evolved because it is 'reproductively viable'. At the end of three studies Lalumiere et. al. conclude that developmental perturbations and psychopathy were not related, and the evolutionary psychopathy was supported. Although Lalumiere warns that very early developmental perturbations might still be related to psychopathy. This article gives a clear model on the development of psychopathy.

James R.P. Ogloff (2006), *Psychopathy/antisocial personality disorder conundrum* The Author (2006) Journal compilation (2006) The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

Ogloff's (2006) study explains how different studies have created unique theories to

the causes of psychopathy, but there is still no definite answer. Ogloff says that recent studies have shown that those suffering from psychopathy do not have significant brain dysfunctions, while other researchers have showed that dysfunctions in the frontal lobes of the brain may be a factor in causing psychopathy. Furthermore, Ogloff explains the theories that psychopathy is created from environmental or developmental factors. Ogloff suggests that psychopathy is probably the result of environmental, developmental and biological factors. Ogloff goes on to describe the methods and limitations associated with using the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, Revised, which is a type of test which is used to classify whether or not someone suffers from psychopathy. Although this article is primarily concerned with the methods used to classify cases of psychopathy, it does provide useful information about the current theories of the cause of psychopathy, and it helps to give a better understanding about the disorder.

Hare, R. *Psychopathy and Antisocial Personality Disorder: A Case of Diagnostic Confusion.*

1996 Psychiatry times 13. 2.

Dr. Hare points out that the distinction between psychopathy and APSD antisocial personality disorder (sociopathy) one of considerable significance. However the distinction between them has been blurred. Dr. Hare says that most psychopaths meet the criterion for APSD but most with APSD are not psychopaths. Dr. Hare then goes further to highlight the difference between those with APSD and psychopathy, those with psychopathy, he states, citing Larbig and others; Patrick; Williamson and others, that compared with normal individuals psychopaths are less able to process deep semantic meanings of language or understand the "emotional significance of events or experiences," while this is not the case with

ASPD. This article clearly showed the confusion between the psychopathy and sociopathy, and some aspects of their differences

Blair, R. J. R., Cipolotti, L. (2000), *Impaired Social Response Reversal A Case of "Acquired Sociopathy"*, Oxford Journals Brain, Vol. 123, No. 6, 1122-1141.

Blair and Cipolotti describe the behaviour of a victim (J.S.) of damage to his frontal lobe (which is linked to changes in emotion/personality) who presented with 'acquired sociopathy.' J.S.'s behaviour was compared to behavior of another patient (C.L.A.) suffering from frontal lobe damage who had not demonstrated 'acquired sociopathy.' After many studies, J.S. showed impairments in many areas such as the recognition and response to anger and negative expressions, expressing emotions such as fear and anger, and identifying abnormal social behaviour. C.L.A. showed no such impairments. This article outlines the differences between acquired and developmental psychopathy. For example, as cited in Hare (1993), developmental psychopathy results in motiveless aggression and violence, while aggression due to frustration or entertainment are results of acquired psychopathy. This article is a very helpful guide to understanding the biological causes of antisocial behaviour disorders, however it does not touch base on any environmental causes of the disease.

R. JAMES R. Blair, PhD (2003), *Neurobiological Basis of Psychopathy* The British Journal of Psychiatry (2003) 182: 5-7 [The Royal College of Psychiatrists](#)

James R Blair's (2003) study, describes the neurobiological basis of psychopathy as a possible cause for the disorder. Defining psychopathy as "a diminished capacity for remorse and poor behavioral controls" (Hare 1991, cited in Blair, 5) and an

“emotional impairment such as the lack of guilt,” (Blair 2003, in Blair 5) Blair explains that psychopathy is a type of antisocial personality disorder, but is not a synonym for it. Blair describes how psychopathy can be rooted to neurological damage as people suffering from the disorder have difficulty learning how to socialize. Recent studies have shown that amygdale dysfunction (the area of the brain responsible for memory and emotion), is linked to psychopathy (Tiihonen et al, 2000; Kiehl et al, 2001, in Blair 5). Another study has come up with the idea that impairment to the orbitofrontal cortex (the area of the brain responsible for thinking and decision-making) is associated with psychopathy (Lapierre et al, 1995 cited in Blair 6). Blair makes the final point that “The lifestyle of the individual with psychopathy may exacerbate any neurobiological impairments.” (6) Blair also explains that more research on this topic is needed, and that the causes for such neurological dysfunctions are still unknown. This article is useful because it describes neurobiological theories associated with the causes of psychopathy. It was also not too confusing to understand, and it was able to explain the complicated ideas quite well.

Damasio, A. *A Neural Basis for sociopathy*. Arch Gen. Psychiatry. 2000 57: 128-129.

Damasio discusses the idea that the Pre-Frontal lobe "play[s] a critical role in normal social behavior," and that damage to these regions leads to sociopathy. He says that this idea came first from a case study of Phineas Gage, where damage to "unspecified frontal regions" lead to changes in personality marked by anti-social behavior. To give more evidence Damasio cites Rain et. al. (2000) reporting that Rain et. al. "men with a diagnosis of antisocial personality

disorder," have, "significantly reduced amount of prefrontal gray matter."

Damasio concludes by pointing out that it isn't prudent to conclude that prefrontal dysfunction is the sole cause of sociopathy, however, it can be concluded that malfunctioning prefrontal lobes can cause anti-social behaviors. This was a commentary article focusing on one specific topic, the link between sociopathy and prefrontal lobe damage, giving credence to the idea that sociopathy is rooted in genetically adaptive changes to the environment.

Kim-Cohen, Julia, Moffitt, Terrie E., Taylor, Alan, Pawlby, Susan J., Caspi, Avshalom (2005), *Maternal Depression and Children's Antisocial Behavior. Nature and Nurture Effects, Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2005;62: 173-181

Kim-Cohen et. al. (2005) claim that children of depressed mothers are more vulnerable to antisocial behaviour (ASB) for several both genetic and environmental reasons. The links between 'nurture' (the environmental causes of antisocial behaviour) include inadequate parenting, the lack of proper interactions and a stressful environment. Alternately, this article proposes the hypothesis that there are other explanations associating maternal depression with children's antisocial behaviour. For example, depressed women are more likely to mate with antisocial men, and therefore increase the risk of genetic transmission. Though Kim-Cohen et. al.'s studies found a strong relationship between genetics and children's ASB, the study established an even stronger link between the 'nurture' aspect of mothers suffering from depression and their children with ASB. This article gives a thorough analysis of their study with a lot of empirical evidence.

Vaillant G. Natural *History of Male Alcoholism V: Is Alcoholism the Cart or the Horse to Sociopathy?* (1983) *British Journal of Addiction* 78: 317-326.

Vaillant states that most psychopathy in alcoholics is the result and not the cause of Alcoholism, however with Sociopathy the relationship is not so clear. Vaillant's study looks at Mark Shuckit's three etiological possibilities that might link

Sociopathy and Alcoholism. His study support two of Shuckit's possibilities, that alcohol abuse leads to sociopathy, and anti-social individuals are more likely to be alcoholics. However no support was garnered for Shuckit's third possibility that there are common etiological factors which underline sociopathy and alcoholism. This study shows how an external substance can create sociopathy in individuals.

Hasler, G., Spine, D., Gamma, A., Milos, G., Ajdacic, V., Eich, D., Rössler, W., Angst, J. (2004) *The associations between psychopathology and being overweight : A 20-year prospective study*, Psychological Medicine, 2004, 34, 1047–1057

Hasler, et. al. investigate the relationship between obesity (a health problem with increasing prevalence) with psychopathology and/or other depressive disorders that cause aggression. Hasler et. al. explain that recent studies suggest biological explanations for the above relationship, though there are evidently many psychological associations for this relationship as well. Hasler et. al.'s study, which took nearly 20 years, showed that obesity was a stable characteristic for the over-weight subjects over the many years. Hasler et. al.'a results show that no level of depression is associated with being over-weight, however, a relationship between aggressive characteristics was evident. More importantly, a strong relationship appeared between obesity and sociopathy for both men and women. This study is an example how sociopathy can be associated with different conditions, however this study only produces a correlation, Hasler et. al. made no mention of how obesity may be a *cause* of sociopathy.

Ellis, B. B., Penner, L. A., (1983) *Individual Differences in Reactions to Inequitable Exchanges*, Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied, Vol 114(1), May 1983. pp. 91-98.

This study shows the relationship between sociopaths, which is a term used by Ellis et. al. to describe a person who is egocentric and selfish, and their inequitable exchanges. Ellis et. al. investigate this relationship regarding two

aspects. The first is one's grief towards inequity, and the second is the extent to which one attempts to resolve the inequity. Subjects (both sociopathic and non-sociopathic) were given scenarios of injustice and judged on their reactions to each one. This experiment resulted with little differences in distress expressed by both types of subjects. Explanations provided by Ellis et. al. include the fact that neither of the subjects were actually put in these situations, and did not produce real-life emotions towards them. This article is also relevant for those interested in the differences in sociopathic reactions between male and female subjects.

Discussion

Throughout our research, differences and similarities between sociopathy and psychopathy were explored. Several different scholars expressed different positions on the matter. Patrick (1997) explains Lykken's (1995) understanding that psychopaths' impulsiveness and antisocial behaviour is by nature, while sociopaths are less temperamental and are more likely to be influenced by their environment. However, Lykken, like many other experts in this field, suggests that there is always an overlap in descriptions of both disorders (Patrick, C.J., (1997), Deconstructing Psychopathy). Mealey (1995) notes the distinction between the two in a different manner. According to Mealey, the term 'psychopath' is used by some authors in order to describe antisocial individuals who demonstrate a relatively higher level of intelligence and socio-economic status, while when referring to 'sociopaths', authors are describing individuals who are also antisocial, but fall lower on the socio-economic scale and have a relatively lower level of intelligence (Mealey, L., (1995), The Sociobiology of Sociopathy: An Integrated Evolutionary Model).

To address the question of whether sociopathy and psychopathy are acquired by nature or through nurture, through our research we noted that both factors may be a cause for the above disorders. According to Patrick (1997), Lykken (1995) proposes that one's environment does play a major role in developing antisocial behaviours (of which psychopathy and sociopathy are subtypes), however, the inability to experience fear is associated with neurological dysfunctions (Patrick, C.J., (1997), Deconstructing Psychopathy). Blair et. al. (2006) suggests that genetics and neurological dysfunctions are key factors in psychopathy, though environmental factors can certainly magnify these dysfunctions, but may not necessarily be the causing factors. Blair et. al. (2006) believe that more research is required to fully address this issue (Blair, R.J.R., Peschardt, K.S., Budhani, S., Mitchell, D.G.V., Pine, D.S., (2006), The Development of Psychopathy). Other articles by scholars such as Lalumiere et. al. (2001) and Ogloff (2006) agree with the above scholars.

Further interesting findings appeared in Hasler et. al's (2004) article which reported that a strong relationship may be associated between obesity and sociopathy for

both men and women. Also, Kim-Cohen, et. al.'s (2005) study on the relationship between mothers suffering from depression and signs of antisocial behaviour in their children affirmed that both genetics and the nurturing provided by the mothers are both influential in a child's antisocial behaviour.

Assessment 15

Team Assessment

Research Question: Compose an annotated bibliography that begins by broadly examining the historical and current status of the constructs of psychopathy and sociopathy. In your review, try to answer the question: Are these overlapping categories or are they distinct? Your review should also consider the evidence and theoretical discussions that support or refute the idea that psychopathy and/or sociopathy are adaptive characteristic in many societies.

Shayda Sabet: Shayda Sabet contributed towards the research aspect of the project by providing 5 annotated bibliographies. Also, she revised all of the group's findings and formed discussion/conclusions which summarized our results.

Enrico: Enrico contributed by writing the introduction, and proof reading the paper. He also researched and wrote 5 annotated bibliographies based on that research.

Tim Luo: Tim contributed by ordering the annotated bibliographies and formatted and also proof read, He also provided 5 annotated bibliographies.

Although obviously the different group members contributed a different share, it is impossible to determine with any real accuracy the relative importance and time commitment contributed by any individual group member. Seeing as all 3 of us worked with eagerness, we choose to split the marks evenly.