



The Overt and Covert Psychopaths

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Abstract

The covert psychopath is a compensatory mode of psychopathy, reactive to a state of collapse (inefficacy in obtaining goals). An avalanche of misinformation online by self-styled "experts" muddied the waters and the differential diagnoses between Narcissistic and Antisocial Personality Disorders. Though both types are possessed only of cold empathy, the psychopath is goal-oriented: money, sex, power, social positioning, celebrity. He is relentless, scheming, calculated, ruthless, and callous in his pursuit of his agenda. In contrast, the narcissist wants only one thing: narcissistic supply to buttress the grandiose fantasies that underlie his false self. Psychopaths do not fantasize - they act. The narcissist is pro-social: he works with others because people are the only sources of narcissistic supply. The psychopath is anti-social: his world is a Darwinian, dog eat dog, zero sum game (he wins, everyone else loses) Psychopaths do not hesitate to break the law: many of them are career criminals. Narcissists work within social institutions and subvert them, leverage existing laws in their favor, and create networks of affiliated patronage. Psychopaths like to inflict gratuitous pain and discomfort. They revel in other people's pain and embarrassment, even find these hilarious. Not so narcissists who cause harm off-handedly and only if they have to. As opposed to most narcissists, psychopaths are either unable or unwilling to control their impulses or to delay gratification. They use their rage to control people and manipulate them into submission. Psychopaths are far less able to form interpersonal relationships, even the twisted and tragic relationships that are the staple of the narcissist. They are mostly lone wolves.

Keywords: Psychopathy; Gratification; Hereditary; Procrastinate

Introduction

Roots of the Disorder

Are the psychopath, sociopath, and someone with Antisocial Personality Disorder one and the same? The DSM says "yes". Scholars such as Robert Hare and Theodore Millon beg to differ [1-5].

The psychopath has antisocial traits for sure but they are coupled with and enhanced by callousness, ruthlessness,

extreme lack of empathy, deficient impulse control, deceitfulness, and sadism.

Like other personality disorders, psychopathy becomes evident in early adolescence and is considered to be chronic. But unlike most other personality disorders [6], it is frequently ameliorated with age and tends to disappear altogether in by the fourth or fifth decade of life. This is because criminal behavior and substance abuse are both determinants of the disorders and behaviors more typical of young adults [7].



Psychopathy may be hereditary [8,9]. The psychopath's immediate family usually suffer from a variety of personality disorders.

Cultural and Social Considerations

Antisocial Personality Disorder is a controversial mental health diagnosis. The psychopath refuses to conform to social norms and obey the law. He often inflicts pain and damage on his victims. But does that make this pattern of conduct a mental illness? [10-15].

The psychopath has no conscience or empathy. But is this necessarily pathological? Culture-bound diagnoses are often abused as tools of social control. They allow the establishment, ruling elites, and groups with vested interests to label and restrain dissidents and troublemakers [16]. Such diagnoses are frequently employed by totalitarian states to harness or even eliminate eccentrics, criminals, and deviants.

Moreover, certain social contexts or activities and even some technologies foster and engender antisocial behaviors [17]. Consider the common practice of abstraction: abstract, intangible money, represented as computer bits, seems to encourage criminal financial malfeasance. The culprits act as though the money were not "real". Similarly, aggressive behavior is far easier and more common online, where people are reduced to mere avatars and handles, than it is offline.

Characteristics and Traits

Like narcissists, psychopaths lack empathy and regard other people as mere instruments of gratification and utility or as objects to be manipulated [18-25]. Psychopaths and narcissists have no problem to grasp ideas and to formulate choices, needs, preferences, courses of action, and priorities. But they are shocked when other people do the very same [26].

Most people accept that others have rights and obligations. The psychopath rejects this quid pro quo. As far as he is concerned, only might is right. People have no rights and he, the psychopath, has no obligations that derive from the "social contract". The psychopath holds himself to be above conventional morality and the law.

The psychopath cannot delay gratification. He wants everything and wants it now. His whims, urges, catering to his needs, and the satisfaction of his drives take precedence over the needs, preferences, and emotions of even his nearest and dearest.

Consequently, psychopaths feel no remorse when they hurt or defraud others. They don't possess even the most rudimentary conscience.

They rationalize their (often criminal) behavior and intellectualize it. Psychopaths fall prey to their own primitive defense mechanisms (such as narcissism, splitting, and projection). The psychopath firmly believes that the world is a hostile, merciless place, prone to the survival of the fittest and that people are either "all good" or "all evil".

The psychopath projects his own vulnerabilities, weaknesses, and shortcomings unto others and forces them to behave the way he expects them to (this defense mechanism is known as "projective identification"). Like narcissists, psychopaths are abusively exploitative and incapable of true love or intimacy.

Narcissistic psychopaths are particularly ill-suited to participate in the give and take of civilized society. Many of them are misfits or criminals. White collar psychopaths are likely to be deceitful and engage in rampant identity theft, the use of aliases, constant lying, fraud, and con-artistry for gain or pleasure.

Psychopaths are irresponsible and unreliable. They do not honor contracts, undertakings, and obligations. They are unstable and unpredictable and rarely hold a job for long, repay their debts, or maintain long-term intimate relationships.

Psychopaths are vindictive and hold grudges. They never regret or forget a thing. They are driven, and dangerous.

I wrote this in the Open Site Encyclopedia:

"Always in conflict with authority and frequently on the run, psychopaths possess a limited time horizon and seldom make medium or long term plans. They are impulsive and reckless, aggressive, violent, irritable, and, sometimes, the captives of magical thinking, believing themselves to be immune to the consequences of their own actions."

Thus, psychopaths often end up in jail, having repeatedly flouted social norms and codified laws. Partly to avoid this fate and evade the law and partly to extract material benefits from unsuspecting victims, psychopaths habitually lie, steal others' identities, deceive, use aliases, and con for "personal profit or pleasure" as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual puts it."

The Anxious Psychopath

Psychopaths are said to be fearless and sang-froid. Their pain tolerance is very high. Still, contrary to popular

perceptions and psychiatric orthodoxy, some psychopaths are actually anxious and fearful. Their psychopathy is a defense against an underlying and all-pervasive anxiety, either hereditary, or brought on by early childhood abuse [27].

Psychopaths nurture and cultivate an image of themselves as free-spirited, daring, non-conformist geniuses who are grievously misunderstood and mistreated by Lilliputian society and its mindless cohorts.

This grandiose and romantic self-narrative legitimizes three classes of antisocial behaviors:

- **Defiance**

In your face, devil may care, f*ck it all, f*ck you all, I need no one, obey no one, make my own rules, take no shit from anyone, happy go lucky, there's no tomorrow, carpe diem kind of guy (or, more rarely, gal).

- **Passive-aggression (Negativism)**

I am going to undermine and sabotage your hopes, expectations, and demands because you are mistreating and disrespecting me. I am going to act stupid (pseudo-stupidity), procrastinate, evade, forget, neglect, and be ornery. This is your punishment for failing to realize my innate superiority and do it justice.

- **Reactance**

"You won't tell me what to do or how to behave or what to choose or decide. You will not restrict my freedom to say what I please and act as I see fit. I will do exactly the opposite of what you tell me to do (contrarianism). By trying to control me, my space, my time, my thought processes, my opinions, choices, speech, or actions - you make me hate you and be furious at you.

So, you have only yourself to blame if I abuse and traumatize you" (alloplastic defenses).

Total reactance characterizes Psychopaths, Borderlines, trauma victims (PTSD and CPTSD), and people with mood disorders and impulse control issues [28].

They escalate every conflict, however minor or imaginary, to the level of nuclear, apocalyptic, all-annihilating warfare and make disproportionate use of every weapon in their arsenal simultaneously. Defiance, posturing, hostility, aggression, recklessness, and abuse are part and parcel of these recurrent pitched battles with one and sundry: all bridges are burnt and relationships are shattered hurtfully and irrevocably.

In contrast, the reactions of healthy people are differential, in kind, and proportional, weighing the consequences and

correcting course every step of the confrontation.

Psychopaths and narcissists rationalize their extreme misconduct in order to reduce dissonance; ameliorate anxiety; bury incipient, dimly felt stirrings of guilt; and legitimize such misbehaviours in the future. Healthy people also rationalize but usually only in order to account for an irrational or ill-conceived decision or choice.

Narcopaths create artificial moral hierarchies or exclude certain activities from the ethical or social calculus. For instance: "Kissing is not as serious as having sex; killing Jews is OK because they are evil; I cheated on my husband but I didn't climax, so it's not as sinful." This is cognitive dissonance resolved via reframing.

Reframing involves a group of defense mechanisms, the most notable of which is rationalization. People with cluster B personality disorders use these defense mechanisms to justify even the most extreme misbehavior or to render it more acceptable and "just". Examples: "I stole the money but I lost it; I fucked my husband's best friend but I did not enjoy it; I had to do it, my wife left me no choice; a blowjob is not as sinful as fucking; I cheated with him only once, I will never see him again, what's the big deal; I was drunk, I didn't know what I was doing" [29].

As opposed to healthy people, rationalization in narcopaths is coupled with alloplastic defenses (blaming others for one's egregious violations) and an external locus of control: It just happened; I was made to do it; the circumstances were unique; I was not myself (on auto-pilot) [28].

What narcopaths call "guilt" is not what people experience typically. It is more basic - atavistic and animalistic - and less social. Their "guilt" has to do with the FEAR of getting caught, harming themselves and losing "loved" ones (read: sources of narcissistic supply and services) [1,8].

Covert Psychopath

Self-Concept and Emotional Regulation

Like the classic psychopath, the covert variant possesses a sense of delusional grandiosity, an undue sense of uniqueness, feelings of entitlement, and alloplastic defenses disguised as prosocial, moral, spiritual, or communal [29].

The covert psychopath is high-functioning and the personality is organized, not disorganized or chaotic.

The covert psychopath is a psychopathic personality who has been exposed to highly mortifying (shaming) and

humiliating recurrent defeats. The collapse consists of persistent failure to attain goals.

The covert psychopath possesses an internal locus of control. But his/her seeming self-sufficiency and resilience mask collapse, anxiety, insecurity, an internalized bad object (harsh, sadistic, punitive superego or inner critic), avoidance, and dependency [30,31].

The covert psychopath regulates his moods and affects internally via daydreaming, the acquisition of goals, and the planning of accomplishments in order to conform to an ego ideal. But s/he frequently suffers from mood lability, being mostly depressive [32,33].

Covert psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity and the rationalization of reactance, defiance, externalized aggression, and contumaciousness.

Like its overt kin, the covert psychopath has a low threshold and tolerance of boredom. S/he does not seek thrills or provoke drama in order to allay it, though [35].

There is no suicidal ideation in covert psychopathy. All violence is other-directed. But the syndrome is characterized by hypochondriasis and addictive behaviors [1].

Unlike in Borderline Personality Disorder and in pathological narcissism, covert psychopathy involves no dissociative self-states, no selective attention, confabulation, repression or denial. There is a primary psychopathic protector façade or self-state in reaction to stressors, tension, threat real or perceived, and anxiety.

Interpersonal Relationships

The interpersonal interactions of the covert psychopath are characterized by paranoid ideation and persecutory delusions.

The covert psychopath goes through numerous but shallow pseudo-relationships, redolent of a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, with no real bonding, commitment, or investment (within peremptory and perfunctory albeit at times stable ersatz liaisons) [7].

The covert psychopath's cold (reflexive and cognitive) empathy is replete with minimal emotional empathy and access to positive as well as negative emotions (owing to the F2 element).

Even so, the covert psychopath is incapable of genuinely participating in group or team activities. Sh/e is always a

disruptive presence.

Not unlike the covert narcissist, the covert psychopath is passive-aggressive, sullen, surly, self-denying, cunning, vengeful, and steeped in envious, premeditated malevolence [9].

Like all other cluster B personalities, the covert psychopath engages in intermittent reinforcement. He holds others in contempt and disdain, though this deeply felt scorn is often masked by pseudo-humility (false modesty).

A psychodynamic feature unique to the covert psychopath is comprised of schizoid or avoidant phases which alternate with bursts of histrionic attention seeking, but without sustained impression management or need for narcissistic supply [13].

The covert psychopath's recklessness is rare and aimed at controlling, hurting, or affecting others, not at self-gratification. There are no novelty, thrill, and risk seeking behaviors only purposeful attempts to modify other people's behaviors.

When s/he triangulates, the covert psychopath is sadistic-punitive or goal-focused.

Unlike the narcissist and the borderline, the covert psychopath is typified by stable object and introject permanences (constancy).

Social Adaptation

The covert psychopath is socially awkward and inept.

His/her labor is desultory. S/he is a slacker (pseudo-sublimation), devoid of an overall ambition or vision of life goals or plan and with a constricted emphasis on narrow, short-term, limited aims.

The covert psychopath is not preoccupied with appearances. He often fails, is a loser, but not self-defeating or self-destructive. The recurrent foundering is an outcome of indolence, entitlement, preference for shortcuts, inability to commit, invest, or delay gratification, impulsivity, defiance, contumaciousness, counterdependency, and recklessness.

Ethics, Standards, and Ideals

The covert psychopath is idiosyncratically and unevenly moral, exhibits a caricatured modesty (pseudo-humility), and is engaged in activism and apparent enthusiasm for sociopolitical affairs as a form of virtue signaling despite his/

her inordinate ethnic and moral relativism.

The covert psychopath pretends contempt for money and power in real life and feigns spirituality and “guru” status. These are Machiavellian stratagems. In reality, the covert narcissist is irreverent or even hostile toward authority and, more generally, others.

Love and Sexuality

Typically, the covert psychopath’s marriage and other relationships are characterized by instability, cold and greedy seductiveness coupled with aggressive entitlement to sex. Extramarital and extradyadic affairs and promiscuity as well as an uninhibited, often kinky, sexual life are common.

Cognitive Style

The covert psychopath’s thinking is dichotomous and involves primitive splitting: external objects and circumstances are either helpful or they are obstacles; others are either devoted friends or implacable foes (“Either with me or against me”).

The covert psychopath sometimes appears to be impressively knowledgeable, especially on esoteric or arcane topics. S/he harbors a love of language and is often strikingly articulate.

The covert psychopath’s perception of reality is egocentric, egotistic, exploitative, and predatory (“what’s in it for me”). S/he has a fondness for shortcuts to acquisitions (of knowledge, possessions, relationships, status, access, etc.).

Despite all the above, the covert psychopath is indecisive and rarely truly opinionated. This is commonly mistaken for openness.

Four Red Flags of Psychopathy

Psychopaths are “too good to be true”. They besiege their interlocutors with a relentless charm offensive, flaunting their accomplishments, skills, talents, brilliance, acuity, and good fortune.

Information asymmetry: The psychopath may flood you with unwanted and unwarranted information – and disinformation – about himself while conspicuously being incurious about you. Alternatively, he keeps mum about his life while intrusively “milking” you for the most intimate details of yours.

Belaboured normalcy and effortless deviance: Actions that are reflexive, or effortless with normal, healthy

people require an inordinate amount of premeditation, concentration, planning, and laborious investment by the psychopath. Acts that normal folk would find abhorrent come naturally and effortlessly to the psychopath.

Alloplastic Defenses: The psychopath blames others, the authorities, institutions, or the world at large for his failures, defeats, and mishaps. It is never his fault. He has an external locus of control: his life is ruled from the outside, the collected sad outcomes of injustice, discrimination, and conspiracy.

The Childhood Antecedents of Psychopathy: Conduct Disorder

Children and adolescents with conduct disorder are budding psychopaths. They repeatedly and deliberately (and joyfully) violate the rights of others and breach age-appropriate social norms and rules.

Some of them gleefully hurt and torture people or, more frequently, animals. Others damage property. Yet others habitually deceive, lie, and steal. These behaviors inevitably render them socially, occupationally, and academically dysfunctional. They are poor performers at home, in school, and in the community.

As such adolescents grow up, and beyond the age of 18, the diagnosis automatically changes from Conduct Disorder to the Antisocial Personality Disorder.

Children with Conduct Disorder are in denial. They tend to minimize their problems and blame others for their misbehavior and failures.

This shifting of guilt justifies, as far as they are concerned, their invariably and pervasively aggressive, bullying, intimidating, and menacing gestures and tantrums.

Adolescents with Conduct Disorder are often embroiled in fights, both verbal and physical. They frequently use weapons, purchased or improvised (e.g., broken glass) and they are cruel. Many underage muggers, extortionists, purse-snatchers, rapists, robbers, shoplifters, burglars, arsonists, vandals, and animal torturers are diagnosed with Conduct Disorder.

Conduct Disorder comes in many shapes and forms. Some adolescents are “cerebral” rather than physical. These are likely to act as con-artists, lie their way out of awkward situations, swindle everyone, their parents and teachers included, and forge documents to erase debts or obtain material benefits.

Conduct-disordered children and adolescent find it difficult to abide by any rules and to honor agreements. They regard societal norms as onerous impositions. They stay late at night, run from home, are truant from school, or absent from work without good cause. Some adolescents with Conduct Disorder have been also diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder and at least one personality disorder.

Online Bibliography

A lecture in McGill University about this standards model:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP-qtcDcCGA>

Biography



Sam Vaknin is the author of “Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited” and other books about personality disorders. His work is cited in hundreds of books and 2000 academic papers:

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He is Professor of Clinical Psychology and Management Studies in CIAPS (Commonwealth Institute of Advanced Professional Studies), Cambridge and Birmingham, UK; Ontario, Canada; Lagos, Nigeria; Visiting Professor in South East University (SEEU); and former Visiting Professor of Psychology, Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

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