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Studying Psychopaths in Modern Day

Abstract

Psychopathy is largely one of the most complex psychological disorders that is studied in present day. Although serial killers typically go hand-in-hand with psychopathy, not every psychopath is a serial killer. Characteristics have been researched and studied by scientists and many traits of a serial killer do not match those of a psychopath. The distinction is important. Too often, people correlate serial killer with psychopath, but there are many other psychological disorders that may be present in a serial killer. Behaviors stemming from early childhood development often lead to psychopathic tendencies later on in life. These traumatic events may play a role in what it is the psychopath is looking for when they try to create stimulation for themselves. In the case of a serial killer that is a psychopath, this stimulation comes from killing animals or other human beings. When psychopaths communicate, they do so with certain attitudes and characteristics that may not appear to ordinary humans as anything out of the ordinary. It is important to note that due to a psychopath's high intelligence, those closest to them, particularly their friends and family, may live their entire lives without knowing how close they were to a psychopath.

Introduction

This research proposal explores the background history and makings of a psychopath, including where behavior stems from and how a psychopath communicates with others.

Behavior and communication have gone hand-in-hand since the beginning of time, even if those in previous time periods did not yet have a word for it. Psychopathic communication tends to be quite charming and impulsive, and for the most part, many mistakes can be made over the duration of a psychopath's life from which they don't learn. For the most part, the image of the psychopath in modern day is that of a heartless one who shows no remorse when doing inhumane actions. In order to better understand how this type of behavior works, we can look at how they communicate to those around them, including friends, family, and strangers, as well as their upbringing and events that may start to develop psychopathic characteristics.

A Brief Background on Psychopaths

A psychopath may not always appear as such. However, telltale signs may linger in which a person may be able to deduce that someone is, in fact, displaying those features. Many of the behaviors present can stem from a series of traumatic events that occur early on in a person's life such as divorce or the death of a loved one. Because of this, a psychopath may begin to feel a deep hole in their heart that can only be filled with the love that they have long since craved. There are many different reasons as to why a person might slowly develop psychopathic tendencies: loneliness, emotional pain, and surprisingly enough, by accident or for fun. The average psychopath lives a lonely and isolated one, trying to stimulate their senses, in which many psychopaths can become serial killers or murders or may also later become a repeated criminal offender, but this is not always the case.

Traumatic events can have severe consequences on anyone. The divorce of two parents, the death of a loved one, a lack of self-esteem, or neglect are all sources for when a psychopath may start to develop their behaviors. As a result of these events, a psychopath may start to desire having someone in their life that will love and care for them. Despite their want for stability, they often do not receive it because "it is obviously not easy for another person to get close to someone with such repellent personality characteristics" (Martens, 2020). They may live their entire life without having a social network or familial and friendly relationships. Family life may also play a factor in their development. Parents that abuse substances or do not pay attention to their children may cause feelings of isolation in the person. Later in life, psychopaths may still try to live up to their parent's expectations, especially if that person was neglected as a child or failed to do what was asked of them.

For the most part, psychopathic behavior emerges in later years, not as an adolescent. However, development does start as a child. As with any ordinary child, parents should aim to reward positive behaviors and punish negative behaviors. However, with a child that may be developing psychopathic tendencies, punishment may not always work and “on the contrary it strengthens undesirable behaviors” (Tsopelas & Armenaka, 2012). Because psychopaths rarely feel emotions, their need for stimulation overwhelms other behaviors. Punishment from a parent may allow them to feel pain, which they otherwise would not be able to feel, and can actually make children repeat their negative behaviors in order to receive more punishment. As a child with psychopathic tendencies begins to mature, they may look for other means of stimulation. Sometimes, but not always, killing living things may become a way for them to receive that stimulation. This is when serial killers or murderers come into play. Jeffrey Dahmer had a fascination with death at a preteen age and later became a serial killer. As a young boy, neighbors stated that they “had found frogs and cats impaled or staked to trees, and knew that young Dahmer kept animal skeletons in a backyard shed, near his pet cemetery” (Goleman, 1991). The stimulation that is received from horrific actions such as these can only be known to the person committing those actions.

When a psychopath communicates, they tend to be charming, talkative, and dominant. They want to be able to feel as though they are in control of what is being said and use lying in order to create their own narrative. Unsurprisingly enough, if the psychopath is an attractive male, their female listener will fall for his charms. When looking at Ted Bundy, his ability to live a double life becomes quite confusing, but we must keep in mind that psychopaths have extremely high intelligence. He attended college and had a long-term relationship, but none of this seems to build into the description of a psychopath; he was successful and had someone in

his life who loved him. However, we must look past the façade he built for himself and examine the situation deeper. In this day and age, anyone can pretend to be anything. We look at Robin Williams, a highly successful comedian, who deep down was depressed. The cover-up of Bundy's actions can be quite clear when we see the definition, that refers to psychopaths as "social predators who charm, manipulate and ruthlessly plow their way through life—completely lacking in conscience and feeling for others" (Piercy, 2019). They are non-genuine beings that rarely show emotion, although, when they do show emotion, it is forced and unreal.

Most serial killers have psychopathic tendencies but not all psychopaths are serial killers. When looking at Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy, their lack of love and support as young children had led into what they later developed. A serial killer is, by definition, someone who has "a minimum of three to four victims with a "cooling off" period in between" (LaBrode, 2007). Serial killers may also be sexual sadists, meaning they incorporate some sort of sex into their murders, including necrophilia. As disgusting as it may be to us, this is sometimes the only way a psychopath may receive emotional stimulation. They simply do not care about human emotions or feelings, but they may receive a twisted façade of emotion when performing sexual acts or killing.

A psychopath is not one to be undermined. They are intelligent, charming, and quite exceptional at spinning a detailed web of lies. They want to control the narrative and are often very dominant, especially in communications. A psychopath may become nervous when discussing topics that involve their vulnerabilities and may try to shift the conversation to other topics. Stimulation is key. The lack of attention shown to a young child may depress their emotions, creating a need for love. This can only be filled by stimulations, that often, but not

always, involve killing animals or other human beings, or living in a fantasy world that only they can control.

Researching a Psychopath

Essentially, a research study on the psychopathic behavior provides critical information on how development and upbringing may develop these characteristics. There are very few explanations as to exactly what a psychopath feels when they are stimulated. Serial killers play a big role in understanding psychopaths. Not every person who displays psychopathic behavior will become a serial killer. However, serial killers often kill or engage in sexual acts with their victims in order to stimulate their senses and emotions, of which they normally lack. To conduct a research study, we can examine past serial killers and notable psychopaths and recreate timelines in which psychopathic behaviors first started to emerge. Creating new experiments on development behavior will provide information that may show us trends in ages and biology that may help us determine if a person will be a psychopath before they have developed any behaviors.

Conducting interviews and surveys will also allow us to consider how many psychopaths live among us that we might not be aware of. In order to create more detailed characteristic charts, these surveys and interviews will provide most useful. We may not always be able to deduce if any singular person is a psychopath without them undergoing brain tests. This is highly due to their exceptional abilities at lying and twisting other stories to better fit into their narratives. Polygraph tests will also provide us critical understanding of when a person lies. Determining the severity of the lie and the context, if given, will allow researchers to better understand how complex lies may become as well as considering aspects like compulsivity.

As I stated previously, a psychopath is highly intelligent. They may be able to view things in a new light, completely separate of how ordinary human beings see things. Quite often, a psychopath appears to be living in a fantasy world where they have the emotional connections that they desire and have been fulfilled. It may sound childish, but their intelligence should not be undermined. Again, we can look at Ted Bundy and see how he was able to live a double life for so many years, without his college peers and significant other knowing. They are able to become highly successful in this aspect because they are constantly calculating what the next step is. Ted Bundy also developed a noticeable pattern of luring women to his car in order to later kill them. Although this pattern was later noticed in trials, he was still able to continue with his murders due to his charismatic good looks and charm.

We can also turn to televised trials of psychopaths, serial killers, and other criminal offenders in order to view their facial and bodily expressions during the entirety of the trial, as well as the levels of which they spoke. Ted Bundy often displayed a smirk, as though he were happy or satisfied, during his trials. Learning from previous cases can strengthen our understanding of characteristics displayed by a psychopath. They often present themselves as very put-together but very few people understand that they are carefully calculating the situation.

Research can, of course, help us understand what has led a psychopath to becoming what they are, but it may also help us determine psychopathic behavior before it has started. We can learn from past experiments and note any issues to improve our own. We may also be able to understand characteristic behavior will be thoroughly through polygraph tests. Sampling DNA may allow us to compare biological differences between a diagnosed psychopath and an ordinary person. Ultimately, this research and experimentation will allow us to further understand the complexity of a psychopath.

Literature Review

According to “Communicating the Neuroscience of Psychopathy and Its Influence on Moral Behavior: Protocol of Two Experimental Studies,” there are certain brain structures and functions that correlate with psychopathic tendencies. Studies performed for this research journal aimed to discuss what theories of psychopathy has the most effect on those involved within the study (Blakey, et al., 2017). This includes traits based on digital footprints and reviewing how moral behavior correlates with online work.

Willem Martens discusses the sources of trauma that may start a psychopath on his developmental path. Traumas are often rooted in childhood and psychopaths later need excessive stimulation, however, “most foolhardy adventures only end in disillusionment because of conflicts with others and unrealistic expectations” (Martens, 2020). Emotional pain and violence are ways for psychopaths to receive stimulation.

One article discusses the distinctions between antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy. Though there are differences in each disorder, “historical and personality similarities were clearly identified” (LaBrode, 2007). It goes into further depth to discuss crimes committed by people with either of these psychological disorders as well as discussing serial killers and tendencies.

Lindsey Piercy next discusses the life and crimes of serial killer Ted Bundy, noting how his mental health played a large role in it. Bundy was deceptive, manipulative, skilled, and fearless, all of which defined Bundy as a successful psychopath, according to Widiger (Piercy, 2019).

This next article discusses individuals with psychopathic personalities that are involved within criminal behaviors and tendencies (Tsopelas & Armenaka, 2012). Neurobiological issues

present within young children may later develop into psychopathic tendencies and they may seek to receive some sort of punishment in order to get stimulation.

From The New York Times, Jeffrey Dahmer's life and crimes is examined. He was a younger boy with a fascination for dark things, including death and animal cruelty (Goleman, 1991). He was angry and focused this attention onto his victims, all of which were men, and he incorporated sex into his murders.

Another article describes psychopathy in criminal offenders. Studies have been found to have limitations that restricts the accuracy of experiments and research. There are four subgroups of offenders, "including primary and secondary psychopaths" (Swogger & Kosson, 2009).

An article from Florida State University describes psychopathy in its entirety, including inventories for assessing psychopathic behavior, the Triarchic model of psychopathy, and theories regarding the causal origins of psychopathy (Patrick, 2020).

In "Can You Identify a Psychopath by How They Talk?" the examination of a psychopath's communication displays a long list of how they are able to communicate and what behaviors might be present (Emamzadeh, 2019).

The last article discusses criminal offenders that have psychopathy and borderline personality disorder. The two are vastly different in terms of emotional response but have some similarities (Herpertz, Werth, & Lukas, 2001).

Infographic

(Shown on page below)



STUDYING PSYCHOPATHS IN MODERN DAY

The development, the desire, and the tendencies.

TENDENCIES



How do they communicate?

Psychopaths are often highly intelligent and display dominant personalities. They want control and often lie in order to create their own narrative.

DEVELOPMENT



How did they get this way?

Early traumas such as divorce and the death of a loved one often hurt the child, who later develops psychopathic tendencies.

SERIAL KILLERS VS PSYCHOPATHS



What is the difference?

Although serial killers often have psychopathic tendencies, this does not mean all psychopaths are serial killers. Sometimes it can be challenging to see the difference but other psychological factors may be present.

DESIRE FOR STIMULATION



Why do they need it?

Because psychopaths often live lonely lives with no close bonds, they turn to other means of stimulation in order to create emotion. In terms of serial killers with psychopathic tendencies, they will turn to killing others to achieve this stimulation.

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