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Author's Note

Psychopathy is a personality disorder defined by a distinctive cluster of behaviors and inferred personality traits, most of which society views as pejorative. It is therefore no light matter to diagnose an individual as a psychopath. Like any psychiatric disorder, diagnosis is based on the accumulation of evidence that an individual satisfies at least the minimal criteria for the disorder. In cases based on my own files the individuals have been carefully diagnosed on the basis of extensive interview and file information. However, I have disguised these individuals by altering details and removing identifying information, without compromising the point I was trying to make.

Although the topic of this book is psychopathy, not everyone described herein is a psychopath. Many of the examples I use are taken from published reports, the news media, and personal communications, and I cannot be sure that the individuals in question are psychopaths, even though they may have been given the label by others. In each case, however, the documented evidence concerning some aspect of the person's behavior is either consistent with the concept of psychopathy or illustrates a key trait or behavior that is typical of the disorder. These individuals may or may not be psychopaths. But their reported behavior provides a useful vehicle for elaborating the various traits and behaviors that define psychopathy. The reader should not assume that an individual is a psychopath simply because of the context in which he or she is portrayed in this book.
Several years ago two graduate students and I submitted a paper to a scientific journal. The paper described an experiment in which we had used a biomedical recorder to monitor electrical activity in the brains of several groups of adult men while they performed a language task. This activity was traced on chart paper as a series of waves, referred to as an electroencephalogram (EEG). The editor returned our paper with his apologies. His reason, he told us: "Frankly, we found some of the brain wave patterns depicted in the paper very odd. Those EEGs couldn’t have come from real people."

Some of the brain wave recordings were indeed odd, but we hadn’t gathered them from aliens and we certainly hadn’t made them up. We had obtained them from a class of individuals found in every race, culture, society, and walk of life. Everybody has met these people, been deceived and manipulated by them, and forced to live with or repair the damage they have wrought. These often charming—but always deadly—individuals have a clinical name: psychopaths. Their hallmark is a stunning lack of conscience; their game is self-gratification at the other person’s expense. Many spend time in prison, but many do not. All take far more than they give.
This book confronts psychopathy head-on and presents the disturbing topic for what it is—a dark mystery with staggering implications for society; a mystery that finally is beginning to reveal itself after centuries of speculation and decades of empirical psychological research.

To give you some idea of the enormity of the problem that faces us, consider that there are at least 2 million psychopaths in North America; the citizens of New York City have as many as 100,000 psychopaths among them. And these are conservative estimates. Far from being an esoteric, isolated problem that affects only a few people, psychopathy touches virtually every one of us.

Consider also that the prevalence of psychopathy in our society is about the same as that of schizophrenia, a devastating mental disorder that brings heart-wrenching distress to patient and family alike. However, the scope of the personal pain and distress associated with schizophrenia is small compared to the extensive personal, social, and economic carnage wrought by psychopaths. They cast a wide net, and nearly everyone is caught in it one way or another.

The most obvious expressions of psychopathy—but by no means the only ones—involve flagrant criminal violation of society’s rules. Not surprisingly, many psychopaths are criminals, but many others remain out of prison, using their charm and chameleonic abilities to cut a wide swath through society and leaving a wake of ruined lives behind them.

Together, these pieces of the puzzle form an image of a self-centered, callous, and remorseless person profoundly lacking in empathy and the ability to form warm emotional relationships with others, a person who functions without the restraints of conscience. If you think about it, you will realize that what is missing in this picture are the very qualities that allow human beings to live in social harmony.

It is not a pretty picture, and some express doubt that such people exist. To dispel this doubt you need only consider the more dramatic examples of psychopathy that have been increasing in our society in recent years. Dozens of books, movies, and television programs, and hundreds of newspaper articles and headlines, tell the story: Psychopaths make up a significant por-
tion of the people the media describe—serial killers, rapists, thieves, swindlers, con men, wife beaters, white-collar criminals, hype-prone stock promoters and "boiler-room" operators, child abusers, gang members, disbarred lawyers, drug barons, professional gamblers, members of organized crime, doctors who've lost their licenses, terrorists, cult leaders, mercenaries, and unscrupulous businesspeople.

Read the newspaper in this light, and the clues to the extent of the problem virtually jump off the page. Most dramatic are the cold-blooded, conscienceless killers who both repel and fascinate the public. Consider this small sampling from the hundreds of accounts available, many of which have been made into movies:

- John Gacy, a Des Plaines, Illinois, contractor and Junior Chamber of Commerce "Man of the Year" who entertained children as "Pogo the Clown," had his picture taken with President Carter's wife, Rosalynn, and murdered thirty-two young men in the 1970s, burying most of the bodies in the crawl space under his house.

- Charles Sobhraj, a French citizen born in Saigon who was described by his father as a "destructor," became an international confidence man, smuggler, gambler, and murderer who left a trail of empty wallets, bewildered women, drugged tourists, and dead bodies across much of Southeast Asia in the 1970s.

- Jeffrey MacDonald, a physician with the Green Berets who murdered his wife and two children in 1970, claimed that "acid heads" had committed the crimes, became the focus of a great deal of media attention, and was the subject of the book and movie Fatal Vision.

- Gary Tison, a convicted murderer who masterfully manipulated the criminal justice system, used his three sons to help him escape from an Arizona prison in 1978, and went on a vicious killing spree that took the lives of six people.

- Kenneth Bianchi, one of the "Hillside Stranglers" who raped, tortured, and murdered a dozen women in the Los
WITHOUT CONSCIENCE

Angeles area in the late 1970s, turned in his cousin and accomplice (Angelo Buono), and fooled some experts into believing that he was a multiple personality and that the crimes had been committed by "Steve."  

• Richard Ramirez, a Satan-worshipping serial killer known as the "Night Stalker," who proudly described himself as "evil," was convicted in 1987 of thirteen murders and thirty other felonies, including robbery, burglary, rape, sodomy, oral copulation, and attempted murder. 

• Diane Downs, who shot her own children to attract a man who didn't want children, and portrayed herself as the real victim. 

• Ted Bundy, the "All-American" serial killer who was responsible for the murders of several dozen young women in the mid-1970s, claimed that he had read too much pornography and that a "malignant entity" had taken over his consciousness, and was recently executed in Florida. 

• Clifford Olson, a Canadian serial murderer who persuaded the government to pay him $100,000 to show the authorities where he buried his young victims, does everything he can to remain in the spotlight. 

• Joe Hunt, a fast-talking manipulator who masterminded a rich-kids' phony investment scheme (popularly known as the Billionaire Boys Club) in Los Angeles in the early 1980s, conned wealthy people into parting with their money, and was involved in two murders. 

• William Bradfield, a smooth-talking classics teacher convicted of killing a colleague and her two children. 

• Ken McElroy, who for years "robbed, raped, burned, shot ... and maimed the citizens of Skidmore, Missouri, without conscience or remorse" until he was finally shot dead in 1981 as forty-five people watched. 

• Colin Pitchfork, an English "flasher," rapist, and murderer, was the first killer to be convicted on the basis of DNA evidence.
• Kenneth Taylor, a philandering New Jersey dentist who abandoned his first wife, tried to kill his second wife, savagely beat his third wife on their honeymoon in 1983, battered her to death the next year, hid her body in the trunk of his car while he visited his parents and his second wife, and later claimed he had killed his wife in self-defense when she attacked him following his “discovery” that she was sexually abusing their infant child.  

• Constantine Paspalakis and Deidre Hunt, who videotaped their torture and murder of a young man, are now on death row.

Individuals of this sort, and the terrifying crimes they commit, certainly grab our attention. Sometimes they share the spotlight with a mixed bag of killers and mass murderers whose crimes, often unbelievably horrific, appear to be related to serious mental problems—for example, Ed Gein, a psychotic killer who skinned and ate his victims; Edmund Kemper, the “co-ed killer,” sexual sadist, and necrophiliac who mutilated and dismembered his victims; David Berkowitz, the “Son of Sam” killer who preyed on young couples in parked cars; and Jeffrey Dahmer, the “Milwaukee monster” who pleaded guilty to torturing, killing, and mutilating fifteen men and boys, and was sentenced to fifteen consecutive life terms. Although these killers often judged sane—as were Kemper, Berkowitz, and Dahmer—their unspeakable acts, their grotesque sexual fantasies, and their fascination with power, torture, and death severely test the bounds of sanity.

Psychopathic killers, however, are not mad, according to accepted legal and psychiatric standards. Their acts result not from a deranged mind but from a cold, calculating rationality combined with a chilling inability to treat others as thinking, feeling human beings. Such morally incomprehensible behavior, exhibited by a seemingly normal person, leaves us feeling bewildered and helpless.

As disturbing as this is, we must be careful to keep some perspective here, for the fact is that the majority of psychopaths manage to ply their trade without murdering people. By focus-
ing too much on the most brutal and newsworthy examples of their behavior, we run the risk of remaining blind to the larger picture: psychopaths who don’t kill but who have a personal impact on our daily lives. We are far more likely to lose our life savings to an oily-tongued swindler than our lives to a steely-eyed killer.

Nevertheless, high-profile cases have considerable value. Typically they are well documented, alerting us to the fact that such people exist, and that before being caught they were relatives, neighbors, or co-workers of people just like us. These examples also illustrate a frightful and perplexing theme that runs through the case histories of all psychopaths: a deeply disturbing inability to care about the pain and suffering experienced by others—in short, a complete lack of empathy, the prerequisite for love.

In a desperate attempt to explain this lack, we turn first to family background, but there is little to help us there. It is true that the childhoods of some psychopaths were characterized by material and emotional deprivation and physical abuse, but for every adult psychopath from a troubled background there is another whose family life apparently was warm and nurturing, and whose siblings are normal, conscientious people with the ability to care deeply for others. Furthermore, most people who had horrible childhoods do not become psychopaths or callous killers. Illuminating as they may be in other areas of human development, the arguments that children subjected to abuse and violence become abusive and violent adults are of limited value here. There are deeper, more elusive explanations of why and how psychopathy emerges. This book represents my quarter-century search for those answers.

A major part of this quest has been a concerted effort to develop an accurate means by which to identify psychopaths among us. For, if we can’t spot them, we are doomed to be their victims, both as individuals and as a society. To give just one, all-too-common example, most people are perplexed whenever a convicted killer, paroled from prison, promptly commits another violent offense. They ask incredulously, “Why was such a person released?” Their puzzlement would no doubt turn to outrage if they knew that in many cases the offender was a psychopath whose violent recidivism could have been predicted
Introduction: The Problem

if the authorities—including the parole board—had only done their homework. It is my hope that this book will help the general public and the criminal justice system to become more aware of the nature of psychopathy, the enormity of the problems it poses, and the steps that can be taken to reduce its devastating impact on our lives.
Chapter 1

“Experiencing”
the Psychopath

I could see the dark blood from Halmea’s mouth trickling down the sheet toward the part of her that was under Hud. I didn’t move or blink, but then Hud was standing up grinning at me; he was buckling his ruby belt buckle. “Ain’t she a sweet patootie?” he said. He whistled and began to tuck his pant legs into the tops of his red suede boots. Halmea had curled toward the wall.

—Larry McMurty, Horseman, Pass By

Over the years I’ve become accustomed to the following experience. In response to a courteous question by a dinner acquaintance about my work, I briefly sketch the distinguishing characteristics of a psychopath. Invariably, someone at the table suddenly looks thoughtful and then exclaims, “Good lord—I think So-and-So must have been . . .” or, “You know, I never realized it before, but the person you’re describing is my brother-in-law.”

These thoughtful, troubled responses aren’t limited to the social realm. Routinely, people who have read of my work call my laboratory to describe a husband, a child, an employer, or an acquaintance whose inexplicable behavior has been causing them grief and pain for years.
Nothing is more convincing of the need for clarity and reflection on psychopathy than these real-life stories of disappointment and despair. The three that make up this chapter provide a way of easing into this strange and fascinating subject by conveying that characteristic sense that "something's wrong here but I can't quite put my finger on it."

One of the accounts is drawn from a prison population, where most of the studies of psychopathy take place (for the practical reasons that there are a lot of psychopaths in prisons and the information needed to diagnose them is readily available).

The two other accounts are drawn from everyday life, for psychopaths are found not only in prison populations. Parents, children, spouses, lovers, co-workers, and unlucky victims everywhere are at this moment attempting to cope with the personal chaos and confusion psychopaths cause and to understand what drives them. Many of you will find an uneasy resemblance between the individuals in these examples and people who have made you think you were living in hell.

Ray

After I received my master's degree in psychology in the early 1960s, I looked for a job to help support my wife and infant daughter and to pay for the next stage of my education. Without having been inside a prison before, I found myself employed as the sole psychologist at the British Columbia Penitentiary.

I had no practical work experience as a psychologist and no particular interest in clinical psychology or criminological issues. The maximum-security penitentiary near Vancouver was a formidable institution housing the kinds of criminals I had only heard about through the media. To say I was on unfamiliar ground is an understatement.

I started work completely cold—with no training program or sage mentor to hint at how one went about being a prison psychologist. On the first day I met the warden and his administrative staff, all of whom wore uniforms and some of whom wore sidearms. The prison was run along military lines, and accordingly I was expected to wear a "uniform" consisting of a blue
blazer, gray flannel trousers, and black shoes. I convinced the warden that the outfit was unnecessary, but he nevertheless insisted that one at least be made for me by the prison shop, and I was sent down to be measured.

The result was an early sign that all was not as orderly as the place appeared: The jacket sleeves were far too short, the trousers legs were of hilariously discrepant length, and the shoes differed from each other by two sizes. I found the latter particularly perplexing, because the inmate who had measured my feet had been extremely meticulous in tracing them out on a sheet of brown paper. How he could have produced two entirely different-sized shoes, even after several complaints on my part, was difficult to imagine. I could only assume that he was giving me a message of some sort.

My first workday was quite eventful. I was shown to my office, an immense area on the top floor of the prison, far different from the intimate, trust-inspiring burrow I had hoped for. I was isolated from the rest of the institution and had to pass through several sets of locked doors to reach my office. On the wall above my desk was a highly conspicuous red button. A guard who had no idea what a psychologist was supposed to do in a prison—an ignorance I shared—told me that the button was for an emergency, but that if I ever need to press it, I should not expect help to arrive immediately.

The psychologist who was my predecessor had left a small library in the office. It consisted mainly of books on psychological tests, such as the Rorschach Ink Blot Test and the Thematic Apperception Test. I knew something about such tests but had never used them, so the books—among the few objects in the prison that seemed familiar—only reinforced my sense that I was in for a difficult time.

I wasn’t in my office for more than an hour when my first “client” arrived. He was a tall, slim, dark-haired man in his thirties. The air around him seemed to buzz, and the eye contact he made with me was so direct and intense that I wondered if I had ever really looked anybody in the eye before. That stare was unrelenting—he didn’t indulge in the brief glances away that most people use to soften the force of their gaze.

Without waiting for an introduction, the inmate—I’ll call him
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Ray—opened the conversation: "Hey, Doc, how's it going? Look, I've got a problem. I need your help. I'd really like to talk to you about this."

Eager to begin work as a genuine psychotherapist, I asked him to tell me about it. In response, he pulled out a knife and waved it in front of my nose, all the while smiling and maintaining that intense eye contact. My first thought was to push the red button behind me, which was in Ray's plain view and the purpose of which was unmistakable. Perhaps because I sensed that he was only testing me, or perhaps because I knew that pushing the button would do no good if he really intended to harm me, I refrained.

Once he determined that I wasn't going to push the button, he explained that he intended to use the knife not on me but on another inmate who had been making overtures to his "protégé," a prison term for the more passive member of a homosexual pairing. Just why he was telling me this was not immediately clear, but I soon suspected that he was checking me out, trying to determine what sort of a prison employee I was. If I said nothing about the incident to the administration, I would be violating a strict prison rule that required staff to report possession of a weapon of any sort. On the other hand, I knew that if I did report him, word would get around that I was not an inmate-oriented psychologist, and my job would be even more difficult than it was promising to be. Following our session, in which he described his "problem" not once or twice but many times, I kept quiet about the knife. To my relief, he didn't stab the other inmate, but it soon became evident that Ray had caught me in his trap: I had shown myself to be a soft touch who would overlook clear violations of fundamental prison rules in order to develop "professional" rapport with the inmates.

From that first meeting on, Ray managed to make my eight-month stint at the prison miserable. His constant demands on my time and his attempts to manipulate me into doing things for him were unending. On one occasion, he convinced me that he would make a good cook—he felt he had a natural bent for cooking, he thought he would become a chef when he was released, this was a great opportunity to try out some of his ideas to make institutional food preparation more efficient,
etc.—and I supported his request for a transfer from the machine shop (where he had apparently made the knife). What I didn’t consider was that the kitchen was a source of sugar, potatoes, fruit, and other ingredients that could be turned into alcohol. Several months after I had recommended the transfer, there was a mighty eruption below the floorboards directly under the warden’s table. When the commotion died down, we found an elaborate system for distilling alcohol below the floor. Something had gone wrong and one of the pots had exploded. There was nothing unusual about the presence of a still in a maximum-security prison, but the audacity of placing one under the warden’s seat shook up a lot of people. When it was discovered that Ray was brains behind the bootleg operation, he spent some time in solitary confinement.

Once out of “the hole,” Ray appeared in my office as if nothing had happened and asked for a transfer from the kitchen to the auto shop—he really felt he had a knack, he saw the need to prepare himself for the outside world, if he only had the time to practice he could have his own body shop on the outside . . . . I was still feeling the sting of having arranged the first transfer, but eventually he wore me down.

Soon afterward I decided to leave the prison to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology, and about a month before I left Ray almost persuaded me to ask my father, a roofing contractor, to offer him a job as part of an application for parole. When I mentioned this to some of the prison staff, they found it hard to stop laughing. They knew Ray well, they’d all been taken in by his schemes and plans for reform, and one by one they had resolved to adopt a skeptical approach to him. Jaded? I thought so at the time. But the fact was that their picture of Ray was clearer than mine—despite my job description. Theirs had been brought into focus by years of experience with people like him.

Ray had an incredible ability to con not just me but everybody. He could talk, and lie, with a smoothness and a directness that sometimes momentarily disarmed even the most experienced and cynical of the prison staff. When I met him he had a long criminal record behind him (and, as it turned out, ahead of him); about half his adult life had been spent in prison, and many of his crimes had been violent. Yet he convinced me, and
others more experienced than I, of his readiness to reform, that his interest in crime had been completely overshadowed by a driving passion in—well, cooking, mechanics, you name it. He lied endlessly, lazily, about everything, and it disturbed him not a whit whenever I pointed out something in his file that contradicted one of his lies. He would simply change the subject and spin off in a different direction. Finally convinced that he might not make the perfect job candidate in my father’s firm, I turned down Ray’s request—and was shaken by his nastiness at my refusal.

Before I left the prison for the university, I was still making payments on a 1958 Ford that I could not really afford. One of the officers there, later to become warden, offered to trade his 1950 Morris Minor for my Ford and to take over my payments. I agreed, and because the Morris wasn’t in very good shape I took advantage of the prison policy of letting staff have their cars repaired in the institution’s auto shop—where Ray still worked, thanks (he would have said no thanks) to me. The car received a beautiful paint job and the motor and drivetrain were reconditioned.

With all our possessions on top of the car and our baby in a plywood bed in the backseat, my wife and I headed for Ontario. The first problems appeared soon after we left Vancouver, when the motor seemed a bit rough. Later, when we encountered some moderate inclines, the radiator boiled over. A garage mechanic discovered ball bearings in the carburetor’s float chamber; he also pointed out where one of the hoses to the radiator had clearly been tampered with. These problems were repaired easily enough, but the next one, which arose while we were going down a long hill, was more serious. The brake pedal became very spongy and then simply dropped to the floor—no brakes, and it was a long hill. Fortunately, we made it to a service station, where we found that the brake line had been cut so that a slow leak would occur. Perhaps it was a coincidence that Ray was working in the auto shop when the car was being tuned up, but I had no doubt that the prison “telegraph” had informed him of the new owner of the car.

At the university, I prepared to write my dissertation on the effects of punishment on human learning and performance. In
my research for the project I encountered for the first time the literature on psychopathy. I'm not sure I thought of Ray at the time, but circumstances conspired to bring him to mind.

My first job after receiving my Ph.D. was at the University of British Columbia, not far from the penitentiary where I had worked several years before. During registration week in that precomputer age, I sat behind a table with several colleagues to register long lines of students for their fall classes. As I was dealing with a student my ears pricked up at the mention of my name. "Yes, I worked as Dr. Hare's assistant at the penitentiary the whole time he was there, a year or so, I would say it was. Did all his paperwork for him, filled him in on prison life. Sure, he used to talk over hard cases with me. We worked great together." It was Ray, standing at the head of the next line.

My assistant! I broke into the easy flow of his remarks with, "Oh, really?" expecting to disconcert him. "Hey, Doc, how's it going?" he called without losing a beat. Then he simply jumped back into his conversation and took off in another direction. Later, when I checked his application forms, it became apparent that his transcript of previous university courses was fraudulent. To his credit, he had not attempted to register in one of my courses.

Perhaps what fascinated me most was that Ray remained absolutely unflappable even after his deceit was revealed—and that my colleague was clearly going along for the ride. What, in his psychological makeup, gave Ray the power to override reality, apparently without compunction or concern? As it turned out, I would spend the next twenty-five years doing empirical research to answer that question.

The story of Ray has its amusing side now, after so many years. Less amusing are the case studies of the hundreds of psychopaths that I have studied since then.

I HAD BEEN at the prison for a few months when the administration sent an inmate to me for psychological testing prior to a parole hearing. He was serving a six-year sentence for manslaughter. When I realized that the complete report of the offense was missing from my files, I asked him to fill me in on the details. The inmate said that his girlfriend's infant daughter
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had been crying nonstop for hours and because she smelled he reluctantly decided to change her diapers. "She shit all over my hand and I lost my temper," he said, a grisly euphemism for what he really did. "I picked her up by the feet and smashed her against the wall," he said with—unbelievably—a smile on his face. I was stunned by the casual description of his appalling behavior, and, thinking about my own infant daughter, I unprofessionally kicked him out of my office and refused to see him again.

Curious about what subsequently happened to this man, I recently tracked down his prison files. I learned that he had received parole a year after I had left the prison, and that he had been killed during a high-speed police chase following a bungled bank robbery. The prison psychiatrist had diagnosed this man as a psychopath and had recommended against parole. The parole board could not really be faulted for having ignored this professional advice. At the time, the procedures for the diagnosis of psychopathy were vague and unreliable, and the implications of such a diagnosis for the prediction of behavior were not yet known. As we will see, the situation is quite different now, and any parole board whose decision does not take into account current knowledge about psychopathy and recidivism runs the risk of making a potentially disastrous mistake.

Elsa and Dan

She met him in a laundromat in London, where she was taking a year off from teaching after a stormy and exhausting divorce. She’d seen him around the neighborhood, and when they finally started to talk she felt as if she knew him. He was open and friendly and they hit it off right away. From the start she thought he was hilarious.

She’d been lonely. The weather was grim and sleety, she’d already seen every movie and play in the city, and she didn’t know a soul east of the Atlantic.

"Ah, traveler’s loneliness," Dan crooned sympathetically over dinner. "It’s the worst."
After dessert he was embarrassed to discover he’d come out without his wallet. Elsa was more than happy to pay for dinner, more than happy to sit through the double feature she had seen earlier in the week. At the pub, over drinks, he told her he was a translator for the United Nations. He traveled the globe. He was, at the moment, between assignments.

They saw each other four times that week, five the week after. Dan lived in a flat at the top of a house somewhere in Hampstead, he told her, but it wasn’t long before he had all but moved in with Elsa. To her amazement, she loved the arrangement. It was against her nature, she wasn’t even sure how it had happened, but after her long stint of loneliness she was having the time of her life.

Still, there were details, unexplained, undiscussed, that she shoved out of her mind. He never invited her to his home; she never met his friends. One night he brought over a carton filled with tape recorders—plastic-wrapped straight from the factory, unopened; a few days later they were gone. Once Elsa came home to find three televisions stacked in the corner. “Storing them for a friend,” was all he told her. When she pressed for more, he merely shrugged.

The first time Dan failed to show up at a prearranged place, she was frantic that he’d been hurt in traffic—he was always darting across the street in the middle of the block.

He stayed away for three days and was asleep on the bed when she came home in midmorning. The odor of rancid perfume and stale beer nearly made her sick, and her fear for his life was replaced with something new for her: awful, wild, uncontrollable jealousy. “Where have you been?” she cried. “I’ve been so worried. Where were you?”

He looked sour as he woke up. “Don’t ever ask me that,” he snapped. “I won’t have it.”

“What—?”

“Where I go, what I do, who I do it with—it doesn’t concern you, Elsa. Don’t ask.”

He was like a different person. But then he seemed to pull himself together, shook the sleep off, and reached out to her. “I know it hurts you,” he said in his old gentle way, “but think of jealousy as a flu, and wait to get over it. And you will, baby,
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you will." Like a mother cat licking her kitten, he groomed her back into trusting him. And yet she thought what he’d said about jealousy was so odd. It made her sure that he had never felt anything like the pain of a broken trust.

One night she asked him lightly if he felt like stepping out to the corner and bringing her an ice cream. He didn’t reply, and when she glanced up she found him glaring at her furiously. “Always got everything you wanted, didn’t you,” he said in a strange, snide way. “Any little thing little Elsa wanted, somebody always jumped up and ran out and bought it for her, didn’t they?"

“Are you kidding? I’m not like that. What are you talking about?”

He got up from the chair and walked out. She never saw him again.

The Twins

On their twin daughters’ thirtieth birthday, Helen and Steve looked back with mixed feelings. Every burst of pride in Ariel’s accomplishments was cut short by an awful memory of Alice’s unpredictable, usually destructive, and often expensive behavior. They were fraternal twins but had always borne a striking physical resemblance to each other; however, in personality they differed like day and night—perhaps the more appropriate metaphor was heaven and hell.

If anything, the contrast had grown starker over three decades. Ariel had called last week to share great news—the senior partners had made it clear to her that if she continued as she was, she surely would be invited to join their ranks in four or five years. The call from Alice—or rather Alice’s floor counselor—was not so cheerful. Alice and another resident at the halfway house had left in the middle of the night and hadn’t been seen in two days. The last time this had happened, Alice had surfaced in Alaska, hungry and penniless. By then, her parents had lost count of how many times they had wired money and arranged for Alice to fly home.

While Ariel had had her share of problems growing up, they
had always been more or less normal. She had been moody and sullen when she didn’t get her way, even more so during adolescence. She had tried cigarettes and marijuana in her junior year in high school; she had dropped out of college in her sophomore year, fearing that her lack of direction meant that she lacked potential. During that year in the work force, though, Ariel decided on law school, and from that point on nothing could stop her. She was focused, fascinated, and ambitious. She made Law Review in school, graduated with honors, and landed the job she went after in her first interview.

With Alice, there had always been “something a little off.” Both girls were little beauties, but Helen was amazed to see that even at age three or four Alice knew how to use her looks and her little-girl cuteness to get her way. Helen even felt that somehow Alice knew how to flirt—she put on all her airs when there were men around—even though having such thoughts about her young daughter made her feel terribly guilty. Helen felt even guiltier when a small kitten given to the girls by a cousin was found dead, strangled, in the yard. Ariel clearly was heartbroken; Alice’s tears seemed a little forced. Much as she tried to banish the thought, Helen felt that Alice had had something to do with the kitten’s death.

Sisters fight, but again, “something was off,” in the way these twins went at it. Ariel was always on the defensive; Alice was always the aggressor, and she seemed to take special pleasure in ruining her sister’s things. It was a great relief to everybody when Alice left home at age seventeen—at least Ariel could now live in peace. It soon became clear, however, that upon moving out of the house Alice had discovered drugs. Now she was not only unpredictable, impulsive, and liable to throw fierce tantrums to get her way—she had become an addict, and she supported her habit any way she could, including theft and prostitution. Bail and treatment programs—$10,000 for three weeks at one pricey clinic in New Hampshire—became a continual financial drain for Helen and Steve. “I’m glad somebody in this family is going to be solvent,” Steve said when he heard Ariel’s good news. He had been wondering for some time just how much longer he could afford to clean up after Alice. In fact, he had seriously been reconsidering the wisdom of trying
to keep her out of prison. After all, wasn’t it she, not he and Helen, who should face the consequences of her actions?

Helen was adamant on the subject: No child of hers would spend a single night in prison (Alice had already spent quite a number of them, but Helen chose to forget) as long as she was there to pay bail. It became a question of responsibility: Helen fully believed that she and Steve had done something wrong in bringing up Alice, although in thirty years of intense self-scrutiny she honestly couldn’t identify their mistake. Perhaps it was subconscious, though—maybe she hadn’t been as enthusiastic as she might have been when the doctor told her he suspected she would have twins. Maybe she had unknowingly slighted Alice, who was heartier than Ariel at birth. Maybe somehow she and Steve had set off the Jekyll and Hyde syndrome by insisting that the girls never dress as twins and go to separate dance schools and summer camps.

Maybe ... but Helen doubted it. Didn’t all parents make mistakes? Didn’t all parents inadvertently favor one child over the other, if only temporarily? Didn’t all parents feel their delight in their children ebb and flow with the contingencies of life? Yes indeed—but not all parents wound up with an Alice. In her search for answers during the girls’ childhood, Helen had observed other families intensely, and she had seen some very careless, very unfair parents blessed with stable, well-adjusted children. She knew that blatantly abusive parents generally produced troubled if not disturbed children, but Helen was sure that for all their mistakes, she and Steve hardly fell into that category.

So, the girls’ thirtieth birthday brought Helen and Steve mixed feelings—gratitude that their twins were physically healthy, happiness that Ariel had found security and fulfillment in her work, and the old, familiar anxiety as to Alice’s whereabouts and welfare. But perhaps the overriding feeling as this long-married couple drank a toast to their absent daughters’ birthday was dismay that after all this time nothing had changed. This was the twentieth century—they were supposed to know how to fix things. There were pills you could take to recover from depression, treatments to control phobias, but not one of the
myriad doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, treatment counselors, and social workers who had seen Alice over the years had come up with an explanation or an antidote for her problem. Nobody was even sure whether she was mentally ill. After thirty years, Helen and Steve looked across the table and asked sadly, “Is she crazy? Or just plain bad?”
He will choose you, disarm you with his words, and control you with this presence. He will delight you with his wit and his plans. He will show you a good time, but you will always get the bill. He will smile and deceive you, and he will scare you with his eyes. And when he is through with you, and he will be through with you, he will desert you and take with him your innocence and your pride. You will be left much sadder but not a lot wiser, and for a long time you will wonder what happened and what you did wrong. And if another of his kind comes knocking at your door, will you open it?

—From an essay signed, “A psychopath in prison.”

The question remains: “Is Alice mad or bad?”

It’s a question that has long troubled not just psychologists and psychiatrists but philosophers and theologians. Formally stated, is the psychopath mentally ill or simply a rule breaker who is perfectly aware of what he or she is doing?

This question is not just a semantic one; posed another way, it has immeasurable practical significance: Does the treatment or control of the psychopath rightly fall to mental health professionals or to the correctional system? Everywhere in the world, judges, social workers, lawyers, schoolteachers, mental health workers, doctors, correctional staff, and members of the general public need—whether they know it or not—the answer.
Without Conscience

The Ramifications of the Question

For most people, the confusion and uncertainty surrounding this subject begin with the word psychopathy itself. Literally it means "mental illness" (from psyche, "mind"; and pathos, "disease"), and this is the meaning of the term still found in some dictionaries. The confusion is compounded by the media use of the term as the equivalent of "insane" or "crazy": "The police say a 'psycho' is on the loose," or, "The guy who killed her must be a 'psycho.'"

Most clinicians and researchers don't use the term in this way; they know that psychopathy cannot be understood in terms of traditional views of mental illness. Psychopaths are not disoriented or out of touch with reality, nor do they experience the delusions, hallucinations, or intense subjective distress that characterize most other mental disorders. Unlike psychotic individuals, psychopaths are rational and aware of what they are doing and why. Their behavior is the result of choice, freely exercised.

So, if a person with a diagnosis of schizophrenia breaks society's rules—say, by killing the next passerby in response to orders "received from Martian in a spaceship"—we deem that person not responsible "by reason of insanity." When a person diagnosed as a psychopath breaks the same rules, he or she is judged sane and is sent to prison.

Still, a common response to reports of brutal crimes, particularly serial torture and killing, is: "Anyone would have to be crazy to do that." Perhaps so, but not always in the legal or the psychiatric sense of the term.

As I mentioned earlier, some serial killers are insane. For example, consider Edward Gein, whose horrific and bizarre crimes became the basis for characters in a number of movies and books, including Psycho, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, and The Silence of the Lambs. Gein killed, mutilated, and sometimes ate his victims, and he made grotesque objects—lampshades, clothes, masks—from their body parts and skin. At his trial both prosecution and defense psychiatrists agreed that he was psy-
chotic; the diagnosis was chronic schizophrenia, and the judge committed him to a hospital for the criminally insane.

Most serial killers are not like Gein, however. They may torture, kill, and mutilate their victims—appalling behavior that sorely tests our ideas of what "sanity" means—but in most cases there is no evidence that they are deranged, mentally confused, or psychotic. Many of these killers—Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, Henry Lee Lucas, to name but a few—have been diagnosed as psychopaths, which means they were sane by current psychiatric and legal standards. They were sent to prison and, in some cases, executed. But the distinction between mentally ill killers and sane but psychopathic murderers was by no means easy to come by. It resulted from a centuries-long scientific debate that at times bordered on the metaphysical.

**Some Terminology**

Many researchers, clinicians, and writers use the terms psychopath and sociopath interchangeably. For example, in his book *The Silence of the Lambs*, Thomas Harris described Hannibal Lecter as a "pure sociopath," whereas the writer of the movie version called him a "pure psychopath."

Sometimes the term sociopathy is used because it is less likely than is psychopathy to be confused with psychoticism or insanity. In his book *The Blooding*, Joseph Wambaugh says of Colin Pitchfork, an English rapist-murderer, "... it was a pity that the psychiatrist didn’t choose to describe him as a ‘sociopath’ instead of a ‘psychopath’ in his report, because of the misunderstanding that accompanies the latter. Everyone connected with the case seemed to confuse the word [psychopath] with ‘psychotic.’"

In many cases the choice of term reflects the user's views on the origins and determinants of the clinical syndrome or disorder described in this book. Thus, some clinicians and researchers—as well as most sociologists and criminologists—who believe that the syndrome is forged entirely by social forces and early experiences prefer the term sociopath, whereas those—including this writer—who feel that psychological, biological, and genetic fac-
tors also contribute to development of the syndrome generally use the term *psychopath*. The same individual therefore could be diagnosed as a sociopath by one expert and as a psychopath by another.

Consider the following exchange between an offender (O) and one of my graduate students (S):

s: “Did you get any feedback from the prison psychiatrist who assessed you?”

O: “She told me I was a . . . not a sociopath . . . a psychopath. This was comical. She said not to worry about it because you can have a doctor or lawyer who is a psychopath. I said, ‘Yeah, I understand that. If you were sitting on a plane that was hijacked would you rather be sitting next to me or some sociopath or neurotic who shits his pants and gets us all killed?’ She just about fell off her chair. If someone wants to diagnose me I’d rather be a psychopath than a sociopath.’”

s: “Aren’t they the same thing?”

O: “No, they’re not. You see, a sociopath misbehaves because he’s been brought up wrong. Maybe he’s got a beef with society. I’ve got no beef with society. I’m not harboring hostility. It’s just the way I am. Yeah, I guess I’d be a psychopath.”

A term that was supposed to have much the same meaning as “psychopath” or “sociopath” is *antisocial personality disorder*, described in the third edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III; 1980) and its revision (DSM-III-R; 1987), widely used as the “diagnostic bible” for mental illness. The diagnostic criteria for antisocial personality disorder consist primarily of a long list of antisocial and criminal behaviors. When the list first appeared it was felt that the average clinician could not reliably assess personality traits such as empathy, egocentricity, guilt, and so forth. Diagnosis therefore was based on what clinicians presum-
Focusing the Picture

ably could assess without difficulty, namely objective, socially deviant behaviors.

The result has been confusion during the past decade, with many clinicians mistakenly assuming that antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy are synonymous terms. As diagnosed by the DSM-III and the DSM-III-R, as well as by the recently published DSM-IV (1994), “antisocial personality disorder” refers primarily to a cluster of criminal and antisocial behaviors. The majority of criminals easily meet the criteria for such a diagnosis. “Psychopathy,” on the other hand, is defined by a cluster of both personality traits and socially deviant behaviors. Most criminals are not psychopaths, and many of the individuals who manage to operate on the shady side of the law and remain out of prison are psychopaths. Keep this in mind if you have occasion to consult a clinician or counselor about a psychopath in your life. Make sure that he or she knows the difference between antisocial personality disorder and psychopathy.³

A Historical View

One of the first clinicians to write about psychopaths was Philippe Pinel, an early nineteenth-century French psychiatrist. He used the term insanity without delirium to describe a pattern of behavior marked by utter remorselessness and a complete lack of restraint, a pattern he considered distinct from the ordinary “evil that men do.”⁴

Pinel regarded this condition morally neutral, but other writers considered these patients “morally insane,” the very embodiment of evil. So began an argument that spanned generations and that seesawed between the view that psychopaths were “mad” and that they were “bad” or even diabolical.

THE DIRTY DOZEN is a classic movie that glorifies a long-standing Hollywood myth: Turn a psychopath inside out and you find a hero. The plot of the movie concerns a choice given to a handful of the roughest, toughest criminals: volunteer for what amounts to a suicide mission, or stay in prison. The task involves the capture of a castle in which the elite command of
the German army is ensconced. Needless to say, the Dirty Dozen succeed in the capture. And needless to say, they are honored as heroes, to the apparent gratification of several generations of audiences.

Psychiatrist James Weiss, author of *All But Me and Thee*, tells a very different tale. His book recounts an investigation conducted during World War II by Brigadier General Elliot D. Cook and his assistant, Colonel Ralph Bing. They started at the end point—the Army East Coast Processing (Detention) Center at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod—and worked backward to company level to determine how the more than two thousand inmates had wound up there.

The story, as Weiss remarks, was "the same sad tale" told over and over again. Knowing the company was going into a fight, the soldier volunteered to go back for supplies and was never heard from again. Or the soldier went from stealing food to stealing a truck, and totaling it on a joyride. Completely unresponsive to interests of their fellow GIs and more attuned to instant gratification than to the fundamental rules of caution in combat, these fellows had a much greater chance of getting shot—"Peterson ... stuck his head up when everyone else had theirs down and a German sniper put a bullet through the middle of it"—than of accomplishing an act of heroism that involved planning, cunning, and actions rooted in conscience.

The Dirty Dozen might look squeaky clean by the time Hollywood gets through with them, but in real life, as Weiss concludes, "conversion by combat seldom if ever happens." (James Weiss, *Journal of Operational Psychiatry* 5, 1974, 119.)

World War II gave the debate a new, practical urgency—more than speculation was necessary. First, with the military draft, the need became pressing to identify, diagnose, and if possible treat individuals who could disrupt or even destroy strict military control, and this issue drew lively public attention. But an even more ominous significance arose with the revelation of the Nazis' machinery of destruction and their cold-blooded program of extermination. What were the dynamics of such a development? How and why could individuals—even, terrifyingly, one individual in command of a nation—operate outside the rules
that most people accepted as restraints on their basest impulses and fantasies?

Many writers took up the challenge, but none had as great an impact as Hervey Cleckley. In his now classic book, *The Mask of Sanity*, first published in 1941, Cleckley pleaded for attention to what he recognized as a dire but ignored social problem. He wrote dramatically about his patients and provided the general public with the first detailed view of psychopathy. For example, in his book he included his case notes on Gregory, a young man with a yards-long arrest sheet who had failed to kill his mother only because of a malfunctioning gun.

It would be impossible to describe adequately this young man’s career without writing hundreds of pages. His repeated antisocial acts and the triviality of his apparent motivation as well as his inability to learn by experience to make a better adjustment and avoid serious trouble that can be readily foreseen, all make me feel that he is a classic example of psychopathic personality. I think it very likely that he will continue to behave as he has behaved in the past, and I do not know of any psychiatric treatment that is likely to influence this behavior appreciably or to help him make a better adjustment. (pp. 173–74)

Phrases such as “shrewdness and agility of mind,” “talks entertainingly,” and “exceptional charm” dot Cleckley’s case histories. He noted that a psychopath in jail or prison would use his considerable social skills to persuade a judge that he actually belonged in a mental hospital. Once in the hospital, where nobody wanted him—because he was too disruptive—he would apply his skills to obtaining a release.

Interspersed in his vivid clinical descriptions are Cleckley’s own meditations on the meaning of the psychopath’s behavior.

The [psychopath] is unfamiliar with the primary facts or data of what might be called personal values and is altogether incapable of understanding such matters. It is impossible for him to take even a slight interest in the tragedy or joy or the striving of humanity as presented in serious liter-
The Mask of Sanity greatly influenced researchers in the United States and Canada and is the clinical framework for much of the scientific research on psychopathy conducted in the past quarter-century. For the most part, the goal of this research has been to find out what makes the psychopath "tick." We now have some important clues, which are described throughout this book. But as our knowledge of the devastation caused by psychopaths at large in society increases, modern research has an even more vital goal—the development of reliable ways to identify these individuals in order to minimize the risk they pose to others. This task is of immense importance to the general public and individuals alike. My role in the search began in the 1960s at the psychology department of the University of British Columbia. There, my growing interest in psychopathy merged with my prison experience to form what was to become my life work. Where once I had worked I managed to continue my research.
Focusing the Picture

even be of some use in understanding criminal behavior. This inmate, a professional bank robber, became my spokesman, endorsing my work and spreading the word that he himself was a willing participant. The result was a great surge of volunteers, an embarrassment of riches that brought with it its own problem: How was I to distinguish the “true” psychopaths from the rest of the volunteers?

In the 1960s psychologists and psychiatrists were by no means in complete agreement on what distinguished the psychopath. The problem of classification was a major stumbling block. We were attempting to sort human beings, not apples and oranges, and the distinguishing features we were concerned with were psychological phenomena, well hidden from the probing eye of science.

When Gall learned that the California police were on his trail, he had his lawyer write a letter to police in Florida saying that he was willing to turn himself in in exchange for a guarantee that he could do his time in a Canadian prison.

"Since the story was made public," wrote reporter Dale Brazao, California police phones were "ringing constantly with calls from people saying they think Gall may have also been involved with their mother or an aunt. 'He’s got that I-think-I-know-that-guy kind of a face.... Who knows how many more victims will come forward.'"

Now serving a ten-year sentence in a Florida prison, Gall
portrays himself as a humanitarian. "Sure I took their money, but they got their money's worth out of me," he said. "I fulfilled their need. They got attention, affection, companionship, and, in some cases, they got love . . . . There were times we didn't even get out of bed." (Based on articles by Dale Brazao, Toronto Star, May 19, 1990, and April 20, 1992.)

I might have used standard psychological tests to identify psychopathic inmates, but most of those tests depended on self-reporting—for example, "I lie (1) easily; (2) with some difficulty; (3) never." The inmate population I was working with was quite adept at figuring out what psychiatrists and psychologists were trying to get at when they used tests and interviews. Generally, they saw no reason to reveal anything of real significance to prison staff members but every reason to show themselves to the best advantage with respect to possible parole, change of work assignment, admission to some program or other, and so forth. Moreover, the psychopaths among them were expert at distorting and molding the truth to suit their purposes. Impression management was definitely one of their strong suits.

As a result, the prison records were often filled with carefully written personality profiles that seemed embarrassingly at odds with what everyone else in the prison knew about the inmates in question. I recall one file in which the psychologist had used a battery of self-report tests to conclude that a callous killer was actually a sensitive, caring individual who needed only the psychological equivalent of a warm hug! Because of the uncritical use of personality tests, the literature was (and still is) cluttered with studies that purported to be about psychopathy but actually had very little to do with it.

One inmate provided a great example of why I was reluctant to rely on psychological tests. During the course of an interview with him in one of my research projects, the topic of psychological tests came up. He told me that he knew all about them, particularly about the self-report inventory most popular with prison psychologists, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, or MMPI. As it turned out, this fellow had in his cell a complete set of question booklets, scoring sheets, scoring templates, and interpretive manuals for the MMPI. He used this
material, and the expertise it gave him, to provide a consulting service for other inmates—for a fee, of course. He would determine what sort of profile his client should have, given his circumstances and objectives, and then coach him on how to answer the questions.

"Just arrived in the prison? What you want to show is that you’re a bit disturbed, perhaps depressed and anxious, but not disturbed in such a way that you can’t be treated. When you’re close to a parole date come and see me again, and we’ll arrange for you to show significant improvement."

Even without such "professional" help, many criminals are able to fake the results of psychological tests without too much difficulty. Recently, an inmate in one of my research projects had an institutional file that contained three completely different MMPI profiles. Obtained about a year apart, the first suggested that the man was psychotic, the second that he was perfectly normal, and the third that he was mildly disturbed. During our interview he offered the opinion that psychologists and psychiatrists were "air heads" who believed anything he told them. He said he had faked mental illness on the first test in order to receive a transfer to the psychiatric unit of the prison, where he thought he could do "easy time." On finding that the unit was not to his liking ("too many buggy cons") he managed to take another MMPI, this time coming out normal, and was moved back to the main prison. Soon afterward, he decided to portray himself as anxious and depressed, and produced an MMPI profile suggestive of mild disturbance, whereupon he was given Valium, which he sold to other inmates. The irony here is that the prison psychologist treated each of the three MMPI profiles as valid indications of the type and degree of psychiatric disturbance suffered by the inmate.

I decided to grapple with the classification problem by not relying solely on self-reporting. To gather my data, I assembled a team of clinicians who were thoroughly familiar with Cleckley’s work. They would identify psychopaths for study in the prison population by means of long, detailed interviews and close study of file information. I provided these "raters" with Cleckley’s list of the characteristics of psychopathy to serve as a guideline. As it turned out, agreement among the clinicians
was generally very high; the few disagreements that arose were resolved by discussion.

Still, other researchers and clinicians were never certain about just how we made our diagnoses. Therefore, my students and I spent more than ten years improving and refining our procedures for ferreting the psychopaths out of the general prison population. The result was a highly reliable diagnostic tool that any clinician or researcher could use and that yielded a richly detailed profile of the personality disorder called psychopathy. We named this instrument the *Psychopathy Checklist*.* For the first time, a generally accepted, scientifically sound means of measuring and diagnosing psychopathy became available. The *Psychopathy Checklist* is now used worldwide to help clinicians and researchers distinguish with reasonable certainty true psychopaths from those who merely break the rules.
Chapter 3

The Profile: Feelings and Relationships

Do I care about other people? That’s a tough one. But, yeah, I guess I really do ... but I don’t let my feelings get in the way.... I mean, I’m as warm and caring as the next guy, but let’s face it, everyone’s trying to screw you.... You’ve got to look out for yourself, park your feelings. Say you need something, or someonemesses with you ... maybe tries to rip you off ... you take care of it ... do whatever needs to be done.... Do I feel bad if I have to hurt someone? Yeah, sometimes. But mostly it’s like ... uh ... [laughs] ... how did you feel the last time you squashed a bug?

—A psychopath doing time for kidnapping, rape, and extortion

The Psychopathy Checklist lets us discuss psychopaths with little risk that we are describing simple social deviance or criminality, or that we are mislabeling people who have nothing more in common than that they have broken the law. But it also provides a detailed picture of the disordered personalities of the psychopaths among us. In this chapter and the next I bring that
picture into focus by describing the more salient features one by one. This chapter looks at the emotional and interpersonal traits of this complex personality disorder; chapter 4 examines the unstable, characteristically antisocial lifestyle of the psychopath.

### Key Symptoms of Psychopathy

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional/Interpersonal</th>
<th>Social Deviance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• glib and superficial</td>
<td>• impulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• egocentric and grandiose</td>
<td>• poor behavior controls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of remorse or guilt</td>
<td>• need for excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• lack of empathy</td>
<td>• lack of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• deceitful and manipulative</td>
<td>• early behavior problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shallow emotions</td>
<td>• adult antisocial behavior</td>
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### A Cautionary Note

The *Psychopathy Checklist* is a complex clinical tool for professional use. What follows is a general summary of the key traits and behaviors of psychopaths. **Do not use these symptoms to diagnose yourself or others.** A diagnosis requires explicit training and access to the formal scoring manual. If you suspect that someone you know conforms to the profile described here and in the next chapter, and if it is important to you to obtain an expert opinion, seek the services of a qualified (registered) forensic psychologist or psychiatrist.

Also, be aware that people who are *not* psychopaths may have *some* of the symptoms described here. Many people are impulsive, or glib, or cold and unfeeling, or antisocial, but this does not mean they are psychopaths. Psychopathy is a *syndrome*—a cluster of related symptoms.

### Glib and Superficial

Psychopaths are often witty and articulate. They can be amusing and entertaining conversationalists, ready with a quick and
clever comeback, and can tell unlikely but convincing stories that cast themselves in a good light. They can be very effective in presenting themselves well and are often very likable and charming. To some people, however, they seem too slick and smooth, too obviously insincere and superficial. Astute observers often get the impression that psychopaths are play-acting, mechanically “reading their lines.”

One of my raters described an interview she did with a prisoner: “I sat down and took out my clipboard, and the first thing this guy told me was what beautiful eyes I had. He managed to work quite a few compliments on my appearance into the interview—couldn’t get over my hair. So by the time I wrapped things up I was feeling unusually . . . well, pretty. I’m a wary person, especially on the job, and can usually spot a phony. When I got back outside, I couldn’t believe I’d fallen for a line like that.”

Psychopaths may ramble and tell stories that seem unlikely in light of what is known about them. Typically, they attempt to appear familiar with sociology, psychiatry, medicine, psychology, philosophy, poetry, literature, art, or law. A signpost to this trait is often a smooth lack of concern at being found out. One of our prison files describes a psychopathic inmate claiming to have advanced degrees in sociology and psychology, when in fact he did not even complete high school. He maintained the fiction during an interview with one of my students, a Ph.D. candidate in psychology; she commented that the inmate was so confident in his use of technical jargon and concepts that those not familiar with the field of psychology might well have been impressed. Variations on this sort of “expert” theme are common among psychopaths.

DICK! SMOOTH. SMART. Yes, you had to hand it to him. Christ, it was incredible how he could “con a guy.” Like the clerk in the Kansas City, Missouri, clothing store, the first of the places Dick had decided to “hit.” . . . Dick told him, “All I want you to do is stand there. Don’t laugh, and don’t be surprised at anything I say. You’ve got to play these things by ear.” For the task proposed, it seemed, Dick had the perfect pitch. He breezed in, breezily introduced Perry to the clerk as
"a friend of mine about to get married," and went on, "I'm his best man. Helping kind of shop around for the clothes he'll want. . . ." The salesman ate it up, and soon Perry, stripped of his denim trousers, was trying on a gloomy suit the clerk considered "ideal for an informal ceremony." . . . They then selected a gaudy array of jackets and slacks regarded as appropriate for what was to be, according to Dick, a Florida honeymoon. . . . "How about that? An ugly runt like him, he's making it with a honey she's not only built but loaded. While guys like you and me, good-looking guys . . ." The clerk presented the bill. Dick reached in his hip pocket, frowned, snapped his fingers, and said, "Hot damn! I forgot my wallet." Which to his partner seemed a ploy so feeble that it couldn't possibly fool [anybody]. The clerk, apparently, was not of that opinion, for he produced a blank check, and when Dick had made it out for eighty dollars more than the bill totaled, instantly paid over the difference in cash.

—Truman Capote, In Cold Blood

In his book Echoes in the Darkness, Joseph Wambaugh skillfully describes a psychopathic teacher, William Bradfield, who was able to bamboozle everyone around him with his apparent erudition. Almost everyone, that is. Those familiar with the disciplines in which Bradfield claimed expertise were quickly able to spot his superficial knowledge of the topics. One noted that he had "a good two-line opening on any subject, but nothing more."

Of course it's not always easy to tell whether an individual is being glib or sincere, particularly when we know little about the speaker. For example, suppose a woman meets an attractive man in a bar and, while sipping a glass of wine, he says the following:

I've wasted a lot of my life. You can't get back the time. I've tried that before, to make up the time by doing more things. But things just went faster, not better. I intend to live a much more slowed-down life, and give a lot to people that I never had myself. Put some enjoyment in their lives. I don't mean thrills, I mean some substance into somebody
The Profile: Feelings and Relationships

else’s life. It will probably be a woman, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be a woman. Maybe a woman’s kids, or maybe someone in an old folks’ home. I think ... no, I don’t think ... I know, it would give me a great deal of pleasure, make me feel a whole lot better about my life.

Is this individual sincere? Were the words spoken with conviction? They came from a forty-five-year-old inmate with a horrendous criminal record, a man with the highest possible score on the Psychopathy Checklist and who had brutalized his wife and abandoned his children.

In his book Fatal Vision, Joe McGinniss described his relationship with Jeffrey MacDonald, a psychopathic physician convicted of killing his wife and children:

For six months following his conviction, maybe seven or eight, finding myself confronted by the most awful set of circumstances I’d ever known as a writer, and all the while being beseeched by this charming and persuasive man to believe in him, I wrestled with not only the question of his guilt but with another that was in some ways more disturbing: if he could have done this, how could I have liked him? [p. 668]

Jeffrey MacDonald sued McGinniss for several things, including “intentional infliction of emotional distress.” Author Joseph Wambaugh testified at the trial, and said the following about MacDonald, whom he considered a psychopath:

I found him to be extremely glib . . . I had never met anyone quite as glib I don’t think, and I was astonished by the manner in which [his] story was delivered. He was describing events of consummate horror, but he could describe the murders in quite graphic detail . . . in a very detached and glib and easy manner . . . I have interviewed dozens of people who were survivors of horrible crimes, some immediately after the events and some many years after, including the parents of murdered children, and I have never in all of my experience encountered someone who could de-
scribe an event like that in the almost cavalier manner that Dr. MacDonald described it. [p. 678]

**Egocentric and Grandiose**

"I. I. I. . . . The world continued to revolve around her as she shone—not the brightest star but the only star," said Ann Rule of Diane Downs, who in 1984 was convicted of shooting her three small children, killing one and permanently injuring the two others.

Psychopaths have a narcissistic and grossly inflated view of their self-worth and importance, a truly astounding egocentricity and sense of entitlement, and see themselves as the center of the universe, as superior beings who are justified in living according to their own rules. "It's not that I don't follow the law," said one of our subjects. "I follow my own laws. I never violate my own rules." She then described these rules in terms of "looking out for number one."

When another psychopath, in prison for a variety of crimes including robbery, rape, and fraud, was asked if he had any weaknesses, he replied, "I don't have any weaknesses, except maybe I'm too caring." On a 10-point scale he rated himself "an all-round 10. I would have said 12, but that would be bragging. If I had a better education I'd be brilliant."

The grandiosity and pomposity of some psychopaths often emerges in dramatic fashion in the courtroom. For example, it is not unusual for them to criticize or fire their lawyers and to take over their own defense, usually with disastrous results. "My partner got a year. I got two because of a shithead lawyer," said one of our subjects. He later handled his own appeal and saw his sentence increased to three years.

Psychopaths often come across as arrogant, shameless brag-garts—self-assured, opinionated, domineering, and cocky. They love to have power and control over others and seem unable to believe that other people have valid opinions different from theirs. They appear charismatic or "electrifying" to some people.

Psychopaths are seldom embarrassed about their legal, financial, or personal problems. Rather, they see them as temporary
setbacks, the results of bad luck, unfaithful friends, or an unfair and incompetent system.

Although psychopaths often claim to have specific goals, they show little understanding of the qualifications required—they have no idea how to achieve their goals and little or no chance of attaining them, given their track record and lack of sustained interest in education. The psychopathic inmate thinking about parole might outline vague plans to become a property tycoon or a lawyer for the poor. One inmate, not particularly literate, managed to copyright the title of a book he was planning to write about himself and was already counting the fortune his bestseller would bring.

Psychopaths feel that their abilities will enable them to become anything they want to be. Given the right circumstances—opportunity, luck, willing victims—their grandiosity can pay off spectacularly. For example, the psychopathic entrepreneur “thinks big,” but it’s usually with someone else’s money.

Incarcerated for breaking and entering, one in a string of crimes dating back to early adolescence, Jack received the highest possible score on the Psychopathy Checklist. Typically, he began the interview with an inordinate interest in the video camera. “When do we get to see the tape? I want to see how I look, how I did.” Jack then launched into a detailed lengthy account—four hours long—of his criminal history, punctuating it with constant reminders to himself that, “Oh, yeah, I’ve given all that up.” The story that unfolded was one of constant petty thefts and con jobs—“the more people you meet the more money you can make off ‘em, and they’re not really victims. Hell, they always get back more than they lost in insurance anyway.”

Along with the petty theft, which eventually led to burglary and armed robbery, was a history of fighting. “Oh, yeah, I’ve been fag-bashing since I was fourteen—but I don’t do anything bad, like beating women or children. In fact, I love women. I think they should all stay home. I’d like all the men in the world to just die, and I’d be the only man left.

“When I get out this time, I want to have a son,” Jack told our interviewer. “When he’s five, I’d get the woman to completely pull out so I could raise the kid my way.”
Asked how he had begun his career in crime, he said, "It had
to do with my mother, the most beautiful person in the world. She
was strong, worked hard to take care of four kids. A beautiful
person. I started stealing her jewelry when I was in the fifth
grade. You know, I never really knew the bitch—we went our
separate ways."

Jack made a token effort to justify his life of crime—"I had to
steal sometimes to get out of town, yeah, but I'm not a fucking
criminal." Later in the interview, however, he recalled, "I did
sixteen B & Es [break and enters] in ten days. It was good, it
really felt good. Felt like I was addicted and getting my fix."

"Ever tell lies?" asked the interviewer.

"Are you kidding? I lie like I breathe, one as much as the other."

Jack's interviewer, a psychologist experienced in adminis­tering
the *Psychopathy Checklist*, described the interview as not only
the lengthiest but most entertaining she had ever conducted.
Jack was, she said, one of the most theatrical inmates she'd
encountered. Although he expressed zero empathy for his vic­tims, he clearly *loved* his crimes and seemed to be trying to
impress the interviewer with his amazing feats of irresponsibil­
ity. Jack was a mile-a-minute talker, with the psychopath's char­
acteristic ability to contradict himself from one sentence to the
next. His long conviction record reflected not only his criminal
versatility but his clear inability to learn from past experience.

Equally dazzling was Jack's distinct lack of realistic planning.
Although he was considerably out of shape and overweight
from years of prison food and cheap fast food on the outside,
he told our interviewer with the confidence of a young athlete
in training that he planned to become a professional swimmer
when he left prison this time. He would go straight, live off his
winnings, and travel on them when he retired at an early age.

Jack was thirty-eight years old at the time of the interview.
Whether he had ever been a swimmer in his life was not known.

A Lack of Remorse or Guilt

Psychopaths show a stunning lack of concern for the devastat­ing
effects their actions have on others. Often they are com-
pletely forthright about the matter, calmly stating that they have no sense of guilt, are not sorry for the pain and destruction they have caused, and that there is no reason for them to be concerned.

When asked if he had any regrets about stabbing a robbery victim who subsequently spent three months in the hospital as a result of his wounds, one of our subjects replied, "Get real! He spends a few months in a hospital and I rot here. I cut him up a bit, but if I wanted to kill him I would have slit his throat. That's the kind of guy I am; I gave him a break." Asked if he regretted any of his crimes, he said, "I don't regret nothing. What's done is done. There must have been a reason why I did it at the time, and that is why it was done."

Before his execution, serial killer Ted Bundy spoke directly of guilt in several interviews with Stephen Michaud and Hugh Aynesworth. "[Whatever] I've done in the past," he said, "you know—the emotions of omissions or commissions—doesn't bother me. Try to touch the past! Try to deal with the past. It's not real. It's just a dream!" [p. 284] Bundy's "dream" contained his murders of as many as a hundred young women—not only had he walked away from his past, but he extinguished the future of each of his young victims, one by one. "Guilt?" he remarked in prison. "It's this mechanism we use to control people. It's an illusion. It's a kind of social control mechanism—and it's very unhealthy. It does terrible things to our bodies. And there are much better ways to control our behavior than that rather extraordinary use of guilt." [p. 288]

On the other hand, psychopaths sometimes verbalize remorse but then contradict themselves in words or actions. Criminals in prison quickly learn that remorse is an important word. When asked if he experienced remorse over a murder he'd committed, one young inmate told us, "Yeah, sure, I feel remorse." Pressed further, he said that he didn't "feel bad inside about it."

I was once dumbfounded by the logic of an inmate who described his murder victim as having benefited from the crime by learning "a hard lesson about life."

"The guy only had himself to blame," another inmate said of the man he'd murdered in an argument about paying a bar tab. "Anybody could have seen I was in a rotten mood that night."
What did he want to go and bother me for?” He continued, “Anyway, the guy never suffered. Knife wounds to an artery are the easiest way to go.”

Psychopaths’ lack of remorse or guilt is associated with a remarkable ability to rationalize their behavior and to shrug off personal responsibility for actions that cause shock and disappointment to family, friends, associates, and others who have played by the rules. Usually they have handy excuses for their behavior, and in some cases they deny that it happened at all.

**JACK ABBOTT** gained prominence in the news when writer Norman Mailer helped the inmate with the publication of his book, *In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison*. Abbott gained not only fame from his association with the well-known novelist and political figure; he gained his freedom as well. Shortly after his parole, Abbott got into an altercation with a waiter in a New York restaurant who had asked Abbott to leave. Abbott balked, and the two wound up behind the restaurant, where Abbott slipped a knife into the unarmed waiter, Richard Adan, wounding him fatally.

Interviewed on *A Current Affair*, a network “news magazine” television program, Abbott was asked if he felt remorse. “I don’t think that’s the proper word.... Remorse implies you did something wrong.... If I’m the one who stabbed him, it was an accident.”

Abbott was convicted of the crime and sent back to prison. Some years later, Adan’s wife sued him in civil court for the wrongful death of her husband, and Abbott served as his own attorney. Ricci Adan, the victim’s wife, described Abbott’s treatment of her on the stand: “He would say I’m sorry and then all of a sudden he would insult me.”

“Everybody in that courtroom knew I was railroaded,” Abbott told the TV interviewer. Regarding the depth of his conscious feelings about the death, we must draw our conclusions from these remarks: “There was no pain, it was a clean wound.” Then he focused on Richard Adan himself: “He had no future as an actor—chances are he would have gone into another line of work.”

*The N.Y. Times News Service* (June 16, 1990) reported that
Abbott had told Ricci Adan that her husband’s life was “not worth a dime.” Nevertheless, she was awarded more than $7 million.

Memory loss, amnesia, blackouts, multiple personality, and temporary insanity crop up constantly in interrogations of psychopaths. For example, a well-publicized film clip from a PBS special shows Kenneth Bianchi, one of the infamous “Hillside Stranglers” of Los Angeles, in a pathetic and transparent pantomime of a case of multiple personality.⁶

Although sometimes a psychopath will admit to having performed the actions, he will greatly minimize or even deny the consequences to others. An inmate with a very high score on the Psychopathy Checklist said that his crimes actually had a positive effect on the victims. "The next day I’d get the newspaper and read about a caper I’d pulled—a robbery or a rape. There’d be interviews with the victims. They’d get their names in the paper. Women, for example, would say nice things about me—that I was really polite and considerate, very meticulous. I wasn’t abusive to them, you understand. Some of them thanked me.”

Another subject, up for breaking and entering for the twentieth time, said, “Sure I stole the stuff. But, hey! Those folks were insured up the kazoo—nobody got hurt, nobody suffered. What’s the big deal? In fact, I’m doing them a favor by giving them a chance to collect insurance. They’ll put in for more than that junk was worth, you know. They always do.”

In an ironic twist, psychopaths frequently see themselves as the real victims.

“I was made an asshole and a scapegoat . . . when I look back I see myself more as a victim than a perpetrator.” So said John Wayne Gacy, a psychopathic serial killer who tortured and murdered thirty-three young men and boys and buried their bodies in the basement of his house.⁷

While discussing these murders Gacy portrayed himself as the thirty-fourth victim. “I was the victim, I was cheated out of my childhood.” He wondered to himself if “there would be someone, somewhere who would understand how badly it had hurt to be John Wayne Gacy.”
In his book about Kenneth Taylor, the dentist who severely beat his wife on their honeymoon, cheated on her, and later battered her to death, Peter Maas quoted him as saying, “I loved her so deeply. I miss her so much. What happened was a tragedy. I lost my best lover and my best friend. . . . Why doesn’t anybody understand what I’ve been going through?”

**Lack of Empathy**

Many of the characteristics displayed by psychopaths—especially their egocentricity, lack of remorse, shallow emotions, and deceitfulness—are closely associated with a profound lack of empathy (an inability to construct a mental and emotional “facsimile” of another person). They seem unable to “get into the skin” or to “walk in the shoes” of others, except in a purely intellectual sense. The feelings of other people are of no concern to psychopaths.

In some respects they are like the emotionless androids depicted in science fiction, unable to imagine what real humans experience. One rapist, high on the *Psychopathy Checklist*, commented that he found it hard to empathize with his victims. “They are frightened, right? But, you see, I don’t really understand it. I’ve been scared myself, and it wasn’t unpleasant.”

Psychopaths view people as little more than objects to be used for their own gratification. The weak and the vulnerable—whom they mock, rather than pity—are favorite targets. “There is no such thing, in the psychopathic universe, as the merely weak,” wrote psychologist Robert Rieber. “Whoever is weak is also a sucker; that is, someone who demands to be exploited.”

“Oh, terrible, very unfortunate,” snapped a young inmate when told of the death of a boy he had stabbed in a gang clash. “Don’t try to soften me up with that crap. The little puke got what he deserved and I can’t worry about it. As you can see”—he gestured toward the interrogating officers—“I’ve got my own problems here.”

In order to survive both physically and psychologically, some normal individuals develop a degree of insensitivity to the feelings and plight of specific groups of people. For example, doc-
tors who are too empathic toward their patients would soon become emotionally overwhelmed, and their effectiveness as physicians would be reduced. For them, insensitivity is circumscribed, confined to a specific target group. Similarly, soldiers, gang members, and terrorists may be trained—very effectively, as history has proved over and over again—to view the enemy as less-than-human, as an object without an inner life.

Psychopaths, however, display a general lack of empathy. They are indifferent to the rights and suffering of family members and strangers alike. If they do maintain ties with their spouses or children it is only because they see their family members as possessions, much like their stereos or automobiles. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some psychopaths are more concerned with the inner workings of their cars than with the inner worlds of their “loved” ones. One of our subjects allowed her boyfriend to sexually molest her five-year-old daughter because “he wore me out. I wasn’t ready for more sex that night.” The woman found it difficult to understand why the authorities took her child into care. “She belongs to me. Her welfare is my business.” She didn’t protest very much, however—certainly not as much as she did when her car was impounded, during the custody hearing, for nonpayment of traffic tickets.

Because of their inability to appreciate the feelings of others, some psychopaths are capable of behavior that normal people find not only horrific but baffling. For example, they can torture and mutilate their victims with about the same sense of concern that we feel when we carve a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner.

However, except in movies and books, very few psychopaths commit crimes of this sort. Their callousness typically emerges in less dramatic, though still devastating, ways: parasitically bleeding other people of their possessions, savings, and dignity; aggressively doing and taking what they want; shamefully neglecting the physical and emotional welfare of their families; engaging in an unending series of casual, impersonal, and trivial sexual relationships; and so forth.

**CONNIE IS FIFTEEN,** hovering between childhood and womanhood, sometimes darting from one to another in a single day. She is a virgin but attuned to her burgeoning sexuality like one
WITHOUT CONSCIENCE

listening intently to a song inside her head. But on a hot sultry
day when her family has left her to herself, a stranger comes
to her house—a stranger who says he’s been watching her.

“I’m your lover, honey,” [he tells her]. “You don’t know what
that is but you will. . . . I know all about you. . . . I’ll tell you how
it is, I’m always nice at first, the first time. I’ll hold you so tight
you won’t think you have to try to get away or pretend anything
because you’ll know you can’t. And I’ll come inside you where
it’s all secret and you’ll give in to me and you’ll love me—” . . .
“I’m going to call the police—”. . . [Out] of his mouth came
a fast spat curse, an aside not meant for her to hear. But even
this “Christ!” sounded forced. Then he began to smile again.
She watched his smile come, awkward as if he were smiling
from inside a mask. His whole face was a mask, she thought
wildly, tanned down to his throat. “This is how it is, honey: you
come out and we’ll drive away, have a nice ride. But if you
do n’t come out we’re gonna wait till your people come home
and then they’re all going to get it. . . . “My sweet little blue-
eyed girl,” he said in a half-sung sigh that had nothing to do
with her brown eyes. . . . [Joyce Carol Oates, “Where Are You
Going, Where Have You Been?”]

Deceitful and Manipulative

Lying, deceiving, and manipulation are natural talents for
psychopaths.

With their powers of imagination in gear and focused on
themselves, psychopaths appear amazingly unfazed by the pos­
sibility—or even by the certainty—of being found out. When
captured in a lie or challenged with the truth, they are seldom
perplexed or embarrassed—they simply change their stories or
attempt to rework the facts so that they appear to be consistent
with the lie. The results are a series of contradictory statements
and a thoroughly confused listener. Much of the lying seems to
have no motivation other than what psychologist Paul Ekman
refers to as a “duping delight.”10
"I'M A VERY feeling person. You can't help but fall in love with these kids," said Genene Jones, convicted of murdering two infants and suspected of killing more than a dozen others. A San Antonio practical nurse, she administered life-threatening drugs to neonates in an intensive care unit in order to put herself in the role of hero by bringing them back from the "brink of death." Her "bewitching presence," air of supreme confidence, and convincing demeanor, along with a shocking medical cover-up, allowed her to ply her trade in spite of widespread suspicions about her role in many infant deaths and near-fatal emergencies. In conversation with author Peter Elkind, Jones complained that she was "being made a scapegoat because [I] was so abrasive. 'My mouth got me into this,' Genene said with a grin. 'And my mouth's going to get me out of it.' " Like all psychopaths, she showed a remarkable ability to manipulate the truth to suit her own purposes. "By the end of our conversation," wrote Elkind, "Genene had completed an account of her life that was astonishingly different from what I had gathered from dozens of those who had known her. It clashed with reality not merely on the basis of her guilt . . . but on a thousand details, small and unimportant, except as they loomed in Genene's image of herself. Genene was contradicting not only during recollections of others and a voluminous written record, but facts she had told me herself four years earlier. . . . For her, the lines between truth and fiction, between good and evil, between right and wrong, did not matter." [Peter Elkind, The Death Shift]

Psychopaths seem proud of their ability to lie. When asked if she lied easily, one woman with a high score on the Psychopathy Checklist laughed and replied, "I'm the best. I'm really good at it, I think because I sometimes admit to something bad about myself. They’d think, well, if she’s admitting to that she must be telling the truth about the rest." She also said that she sometimes "salts the mine" with a nugget of truth. "If they think some of what you say is true, they usually think it’s all true."

Many observers get the impression that psychopaths sometimes are unaware that they’re lying; it is as if the words take on a life of their own, unfettered by the speaker’s knowledge

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that the observer is aware of the facts. The psychopath’s indifference to being identified as a liar is truly extraordinary; it causes the listener to wonder about the speaker’s sanity. More often, though, the listener is taken in.

At the workshops we conduct for mental health and forensic workers, the members of the audience often express surprise when they learn the conviction history of the subject in one of our videotaped interviews. The subject is a good-looking, fast-talking twenty-four-year-old man with a million post release plans and a seemingly inexhaustible supply of untapped talents. In rapid succession he convincingly described having done the following:

- left home at age eight
- started flying at age eleven; pilot’s license at age fifteen
- was a commercial pilot with twin-engine and full instrumentation experience
- lived in nine different countries in four continents
- managed an apartment building
- had his own roofing company
- ran a ranch for a year
- worked as a forest-fire fighter for six months
- spent two years in the coast guard
- was a captain on an eighty-foot charter boat
- was a deep-sea diver for four months

Presently serving time for murder, he has been denied parole four times but still has lots of plans: to get into property development, to sell time-share vacation condos, to get a commercial pilot’s license, and so on. He also plans to live with his parents, whom he hasn’t seen in seventeen years. Referring to psychological tests he had taken, he said, “I IQ’d out, passed all the tests with flying colors. They rated me as superior intelligence.”

For obvious reasons, we’ve nicknamed him “motor-mouth.”
His philosophy? "If you throw enough shit, some of it will stick." It seems to work, because he leaves even sophisticated observers convinced of his sincerity. For example, one interviewer's notes contained statements such as: "very impressive"; "sincere and forthright"; possesses good interpersonal skills"; "intelligent and articulate." What the interviewer learned after reading his files, however, was that virtually none of what the inmate had told him was true. Needless to say, this man's score on the *Psychopathy Checklist* was very high.

Given their glibness and the facility with which they lie, it is not surprising that psychopaths successfully cheat, bilk, defraud, con, and manipulate people and have not the slightest compunction about doing so. They are often forthright in describing themselves as con men, hustlers, or fraud artists. Their statements often reveal their belief that the world is made up of "givers and takers," predators and prey, and that it would be very foolish not to exploit the weaknesses of others. In addition, they can be very astute at determining what those weaknesses are and at using them for their own benefit. "I like to con people. I'm conning you now," said one of our subjects, a forty-five-year-old man serving his first prison sentence for stock fraud.

Some of their operations are elaborate and well thought out, whereas others are quite simple: stringing along several women at the same time, or convincing family members and friends that money is needed "to bail me out of a jam." Whatever the scheme, it is carried off in a cool, self-assured, brazen manner.

"Oh, the seventies," reminisced a social activist interviewed for this book. "I ran a halfway house for ex-cons, and split my time between counseling these guys, finding them jobs, and raising money to keep the thing going. One guy acted like my best friend—I really liked him; he could come on like a pussycat. And then he just up and cleaned us out. Not once but twice he completely emptied the place: typewriters, furniture, food, office supplies, everything. After the first time, he somehow managed to convince me he was ashamed and sorry, and I can't believe I fell for that remorse bit, but I did. About a month later he forged a check and all but closed out our bank account. This time he disappeared, and that was the end of that venture. There I was standing in the bank clutching a bunch of overdraft notices
and talking fast. It still galls me, because I was no easy touch. I was used to being around some pretty tough guys, and I thought I knew my way around the block with the likes of them. I never realized I could be conned so thoroughly, but there I was in a few weeks looking for a job for myself.”

The capacity to con friend and foe alike makes it a simple matter for psychopaths to perpetrate fraud, embezzlement, and impersonation, to promote phony stocks and worthless property, and to carry out swindles of all sorts, large and small. One of our subjects told of strolling along a dock when he spied a young couple looking at a large sailboat with a For Sale sign on it. He walked over to the couple, smoothly introduced himself as the boat’s owner—“a complete load of baloney,” he told us—and invited them aboard to look around. After an enjoyable hour on the boat, the couple made an offer to buy. Once the terms had been negotiated, he agreed to meet the couple at the bank the next day and asked for a $1,500 deposit to seal the deal. After a friendly parting, he cashed their deposit check and never saw them again.

“Money grows on trees,” said another psychopath, a woman with a long history of frauds and petty thefts. “They say it doesn’t but it does. I don’t want to do it to people, it’s just so easy!”

In the same vein, psychopaths in prison often learn to use the correctional facilities to their own advantage and to help shape a positive image of themselves for the benefit of the parole board. They take classes and degree courses, enroll in programs for drug and alcohol abuse, join religious and quasi-religious groups, and adopt whatever self-improvement fad is in favor—not to “rehabilitate” themselves but to look as if they are doing so. It’s not unusual, for example, for a particularly adept manipulator to declare himself “born again” in the Christian sense—not only to convince the parole board of his sincere resolve to reform but to exploit the elaborate and well-meaning born-again community for its support . . . not to mention its material resources. And now that “cycle of abuse” theories have become widely accepted, many psychopaths are eager to attribute their faults and problems to childhood abuse. Although their claims
may be difficult to verify, there is never a shortage of well-meaning people ready to take them at face value.

CONSIDER: HOW DO you get people to do what you want them to do? Now add an element: How do you do that when what you want them to do goes against every inclination in their own personalities and everything they grew up knowing was wrong, dangerous, unthinkable—for example, getting into a car with a man you've never seen before, especially if you're a young, pretty woman far from home?

Ted Bundy, perhaps the most visible and widely known serial killer the United States has ever produced—executed in 1989 for the last in a long string of brutal murders of young women—must have pondered that question long and hard from every angle. He must have drawn on all his powers of observation, which were considerable and were sharpened by his study of psychology in college. He must have plumbed the depths of his knowledge and experience of people's problems and vulnerabilities—these were honed by the time he spent as a peer counselor on a crisis hotline. We can't know for sure what went on in Ted Bundy's mind when he began to lure his victims into his car and drive them to the site of their murders. But we can assume that the above suppositions are true based on the solutions he came up with—variations on a theme that he reportedly tried over and over again, to get it right.

Ted Bundy bought himself a pair of crutches and even went so far as to give the appearance of putting his leg in a cast. Thus temporarily "disabled," he asked for assistance from sympathetic young women who might cross the street to avoid a pass but who apparently readily stopped to lend a hand to a man with a broken leg. Bundy varied the theme—sometimes his arm was in a sling and he found his willing victim on a busy street; sometimes, with his leg the problem, he targeted young women at recreational areas and gained their aid in securing his boat—"It's just down the road"—to his car. In a terrible way, the ploy was a stroke of genius. Occasionally it failed and the woman he stopped refused to follow him, but, as recounted in Ann Rule's book The Stranger Beside Me, it worked very often indeed.
Rule’s book is a study of Bundy’s highly refined skill at using his good looks and smooth charm to win the trust of women. In an amazing coincidence, Rule and Bundy worked the same shift on a crisis line for several years before she was called in to write up cases for the police department on a then-unidentified serial killer of young women. As the body count mounted, Rule’s suspicions began to rise. But to surface, they had to worm their way through her memories of Bundy’s sympathetic and—as her prose makes clear—sexually attractive presence at the desk across from hers on the night shift. That Rule left her work as a police writer to become a bestselling crime writer turned this peculiar coincidence into an opportunity for her to show Bundy’s power over others from the inside. The result? A strange and eerie book about a psychopath who said, in answer to a television interviewer who asked whether Bundy thought he deserved to die, “‘Good question. I think society deserves to be protected from me and from people like me.’”

Shallow Emotions

“I’m the most cold-blooded son of a bitch that you’ll ever meet.”¹¹ So Ted Bundy described himself to the police following his final arrest.

Psychopaths seem to suffer a kind of emotional poverty that limits the range and depth of their feelings. While at times they appear cold and unemotional, they are prone to dramatic, shallow, and short-lived displays of feeling. Careful observers are left with the impression that they are play-acting and that little is going on below the surface.

Sometimes they claim to experience strong emotions but are unable to describe the subtleties of various affective states. For example, they equate love with sexual arousal, sadness with frustration, and anger with irritability. “I believe in emotions: hate, anger, lust, and greed,” said Richard Ramirez, the “Night Stalker.”¹²

Remarks like the following from Diane Downs, who shot her three small children, should cause people to ponder their sheer inappropriateness and to wonder at the quality of the underly-
The Profile: Feelings and Relationships

ing feelings. Years after her conviction, Downs still insists that her children, and she herself, were actually shot by a "bushy-haired stranger." About surviving the shooting herself (she sustained an injury to her arm, which the jury concluded was self-inflicted), Downs responded:

Everybody says, "You sure are lucky!" Well, I don't feel very lucky. I couldn't tie my damned shoes for about two months! It is very painful, it is still painful, I have a steel plate in my arm—I will for a year and a half. The scar is going to be there forever. I'm going to remember that night for the rest of my life whether I want to or not. I don't think I was very lucky. I think my kids were lucky. If I had been shot the way they were, we all would have died.\textsuperscript{13}

The apparent lack of normal affect and emotional depth led psychologists J. H. Johns and H. C. Quay to say that the psychopath "knows the words but not the music."\textsuperscript{14} For example, in a rambling book about hate, violence, and rationalizations for his behavior, Jack Abbott made this revealing comment: "There are emotions—a whole spectrum of them—that I know only through words, through reading and in my immature imagination. I can imagine I feel these emotions (know, therefore, what they are), but I do not. At age thirty-seven I am barely a precocious child. My passions are those of a boy."\textsuperscript{15}

Many clinicians have commented that the emotions of psychopaths are so shallow as to be little more than \textit{proto-emotions}: primitive responses to immediate needs. (I'll discuss the most recent research findings on this topic in later chapters.) For example, one of our psychopathic subjects, a twenty-eight-year-old "enforcer" for a loan shark, had this to say about his job: "Say I have to heavy someone who won't pay up. First I make myself angry." When asked if this anger was different from the way he feels when someone insults him or tries to take advantage of him, he replied, "No. It's all the same. It's programmed, all worked out. I could get angry right now. It's easy to turn on and off."

Another psychopath in our research said that he did not really understand what others meant by "fear." However, "When I
rob a bank," he said, "I notice that the teller shakes or becomes tongue-tied. One barfed all over the money. She must have been pretty messed up inside, but I don't know why. If someone pointed a gun at me I guess I'd be afraid, but I wouldn't throw up." When asked to describe how he would feel in such a situation, his reply contained no reference to bodily sensations. He said things such as, "I'd give you the money"; "I'd think of ways to get the drop on you"; "I'd try and get my ass out of there." When asked how he would feel, not what he would think or do, he seemed perplexed. Asked if he ever felt his heart pound or his stomach churn, he replied, "Of course! I'm not a robot. I really get pumped up when I have sex or when I get into a fight."

Laboratory experiments using biomedical recorders have shown that psychopaths lack the physiological responses normally associated with fear. The significance of this finding is that, for most people, the fear produced by threats of pain or punishment is an unpleasant emotion and a powerful motivator of behavior. Fear keeps us from doing some things—"Do it and you'll be sorry"—but it also makes us do other things—"Do it or you'll be sorry." In each case, it is emotional awareness of the consequences that impels us to take a particular course of action. Not so with psychopaths; they merrily plunge on, perhaps knowing what might happen but not really caring.

"His social status notwithstanding, he is truly one of the most dangerous sociopaths I have ever seen," said the Superior Court Judge after sentencing respected 37-year-old San Jose attorney Norman Russell Sjonborg for the brutal slaying of one of his clients from whom he had embezzled money. His third wife, Terry, who initially had provided him with an alibi for the crime, said that when she first met him, "He seemed like a nice guy, soft-spoken and exceedingly charming." But she also noted, "From the start Russell spoke about this emotional void, an inability to feel things like everyone else; to know when to cry, when to feel joy." Terry also commented that he "led a kind of paint-by-numbers emotional life," and that "he read self-help psychology books to learn the appropriate emotional responses to everyday events."
As their marriage began to break down Russell tried to convince his wife that she was going mad. "I would go into counseling sessions a basket case," she said, "and Russell would sit there calm and gracious and rational, and he'd turn to the therapist and say, 'See what I have to put up with?' and I'd shout and scream and say, 'It's not me. He's the crazy one!' But the counselor bought Russell's act and said we could never make progress as a couple if I blamed everything on my husband."

Later Russell worked out several scenarios for handling his problems with his wife and wrote them down on a piece of paper: "Do nothing"; "File for Paternity/Concil iation Court"; "Take girls w/o killing"; "Take girls Killing 4"; "Kill Girls and Justin." His probation officer commented that the list revealed "the mind of a man who could contemplate killing his own children with the detachment of someone considering various auto-insurance policies. It is the laundry list of a man without a soul."

Referring to Russell's murder of Phyllis Wilde, his wife said, "I saw him just hours after he had bludgeoned [her] to death. There was nothing in his behavior to betray him. . . . No fear, no remorse, nothing."

In a statement to the Judge, Terry pleaded, "Please see the animal inside him; do not see the socially acceptable persona that he creates on the outside." She expressed her fear that he would eventually track her down. "I know what will happen. He'll be a model prisoner, endear himself to the other prisoners and the people in charge. Eventually he'll be transferred to a minimum-security facility. And then he'll escape." [From an article by Rider McDowell in the January 26, 1992, edition of Image]

For most of us, fear and apprehension are associated with a variety of unpleasant bodily sensations, such as sweating of the hands, a "pounding" heart, dry mouth, muscle tenseness or weakness, trembles, and "butterflies" in the stomach. Indeed, we often describe fear in terms of the bodily sensations that
accompany them: "I was so terrified my heart leapt into my throat"; "I tried to speak but my mouth went dry"; and so forth.

These bodily sensations do not form part of what psychopaths experience as fear. For them, fear—like most other emotions—is incomplete, shallow, largely cognitive in nature, and without the physiological turmoil or "coloring" that most of us find distinctly unpleasant and wish to avoid or reduce.
Chapter 4

The Profile: Lifestyle

The total pattern of the psychopath’s personality differentiates him from the normal criminal. His aggression is more intense, his impulsivity more pronounced, his emotional reactions more shallow. His guiltlessness, however, is the critical distinguishing trait. The normal criminal has an internalized, albeit warped, set of values. If he violates these standards he feels guilt.


In chapter 3 I described the way psychopaths think and feel about themselves and others—the emotional/interpersonal symptoms noted in my Psychopathy Checklist. But this is only one facet of the syndrome. The other facet, described in this chapter, and comprised of the remaining symptoms in the Psychopathy Checklist, is a chronically unstable and aimless lifestyle marked by casual and flagrant violations of social norms and expectations. Together, these two facets—one depicting feelings and relationships, the other social deviance—provide a comprehensive picture of the psychopathic personality.
Impulsive

Psychopaths are unlikely to spend much time weighing the pros and cons of a course of action or considering the possible consequences. “I did it because I felt like it,” is a common response.

Texas murderer Gary Gilmore gained national attention for legally pursuing his own execution—and for succeeding: In 1977 he was the first person executed in the United States in ten years. In response to the question, “If you hadn’t been caught that night, do you think there would have been a third or fourth murder?” Gilmore answered, “Until I got caught or shot to death by the police or something like that . . . I wasn’t thinkin’, I wasn’t plannin’, I was just doin’. It was a damned shame for those two guys. . . . I’m just saying that murder vents rage. Rage is not reason. The murders were without reason. Don’t try to understand murder by using reason.” [italics mine]²

More than displays of temper, impulsive acts often result from an aim that plays a central role in most of the psychopath’s behavior: to achieve immediate satisfaction, pleasure, or relief. “The psychopath is like an infant, absorbed in his own needs, vehemently demanding satiation,” wrote psychologists William and Joan McCord.³ At an early age most children have already begun to postpone pleasure, compromising with restrictions in the environment. A parent can generally use a promise to put off satisfying a two-year-old’s desires, at least temporarily, but psychopaths never seem to learn this lesson—they do not modify their desires; they ignore the needs of others.

So, family members, employers, and co-workers typically find themselves standing around asking themselves what happened—jobs are quit, relationships broken off, plans changed, houses ransacked, people hurt, often for what appears little more than a whim. As the husband of a psychopath I studied put it: “She got up and left the table, and that was the last I saw of her for two months.”

One of our subjects, who scored high on the Psychopathy Checklist, said that while walking to a party he decided to buy
a case of beer, but realized that he had left his wallet at home six or seven blocks away. Not wanting to walk back, he picked up a heavy piece of wood and robbed the nearest gas station, seriously injuring the attendant.

Psychopaths tend to live day-to-day and to change their plans frequently. They give little serious thought to the future and worry about it even less. Nor do they generally show much concern about how little they have done with their lives. “Look, I’m a drifter, a nomad—I hate being pinned down,” is a typical remark.

One man we interviewed used an analogy to explain why he “lived for the moment.” “We’re always being told to drive defensively, to mentally plan escape routes in case of an emergency, to look well ahead of the car just in front of us. But hey, it’s the car just in front of us that’s the real danger, and if we always look too far ahead we’ll hit it. If I always think about tomorrow I won’t be able to live today.”

**Poor Behavior Controls**

Besides being impulsive—doing things on the spur of the moment—psychopaths are highly reactive to perceived insults or slights. Most of us have powerful inhibitory controls over our behavior; even if we would like to respond aggressively we are usually able to “keep the lid on.” In psychopaths, these inhibitory controls are weak, and the slightest provocation is sufficient to overcome them. As a result, psychopaths are short-tempered or hot-headed and tend to respond to frustration, failure, discipline, and criticism with sudden violence, threats, and verbal abuse. They take offense easily and become angry and aggressive over trivialities, and often in a context that appears inappropriate to others. But their outbursts, extreme as they may be, are generally short-lived, and they quickly resume acting as if nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

Carl, an inmate, made a call to his wife from the prison pay phone and learned that she wouldn’t be able to visit him that weekend and bring him the cigarettes and food he’d requested
because she hadn't been able to find anyone to watch their children. "You fucking bitch," he yelled into the phone. "I'll kill you, you whore." He added a convincing touch to the threat by punching the wall and bloodying his knuckles. Immediately after hanging up, though, he began to laugh and joke with some of his fellow inmates, and seemed genuinely perplexed when a guard, who had heard part of the telephone conversation, charged him with verbal abuse and threatening behavior.

An inmate in line for dinner was accidentally bumped by another inmate, whom he proceeded to beat senseless. The attacker then stepped back into his place in line as if nothing had happened. Despite the fact that he faced solitary confinement as punishment for the infraction, his only comment when asked to explain himself was, "I was pissed off. He stepped into my space. I did what I had to do."

In a classic case of "displacement," one of our subjects had an argument with a very large bouncer at a local pub, lost his temper, and punched a bystander. The victim fell backward, struck his head on the edge of a table, and died two days later. "I saw red and this guy was laughing at me." He blamed the victim for making him mad and accused the hospital of negligence for letting the victim die.

Although psychopaths have a "hair trigger" and readily initiate aggressive displays, their ensuing behavior is not out of control. On the contrary, when psychopaths "blow their stack" it is as if they are having a temper tantrum; they know exactly what they are doing. Their aggressive displays are "cold"; they lack the intense emotional arousal experienced by others when they lose their temper. For example, when asked if he ever lost control when he got mad, an inmate who scored high on the Psychopathy Checklist replied, "No. I keep myself in control. Like, I decide how much I want to hurt the guy."

It's not unusual for psychopaths to inflict serious physical or emotional damage on others, sometimes routinely, and yet refuse to acknowledge that they have a problem controlling their tempers. In most cases, they see their aggressive displays as natural responses to provocation.
The Profile: Lifestyle

Need for Excitement

Psychopaths have an ongoing and excessive need for excitement—they long to live in the fast lane or "on the edge," where the action is. In many cases the action involves breaking the rules.

In The Mask of Sanity (p. 208) Hervey Cleckley describes a psychopathic psychiatrist who never broke the law to any significant extent, but who was unable to tolerate the self-containment required by professional life and went on periodic binges. During these weekend outbursts he would shatter his image as a professional care giver by degrading, insulting, and even physically threatening any woman who found herself in his company.

Some psychopaths use a wide variety of drugs as part of their general search for something new and exciting, and they often move from place to place and job to job searching for a fresh buzz. One adolescent we interviewed had a novel way of keeping his juices flowing: Somehow, weekend after weekend, he persuaded his buddies to play "chicken" with a freight train on a bridge over a river. The group would stand on the bridge facing the train, and the first to jump would have to buy beer for the rest. Our subject, a highly persuasive, machine-gun conversationalist, never once had to buy the beer.

Many psychopaths describe "doing crime" for excitement or thrills. When asked if she ever did crazy or dangerous things just for fun, one of our female subjects replied, "Yeah, lots of things. But what I find most exciting is walking through airports with drugs. Christ! What a high!"

A male psychopath said he enjoyed his job as an "enforcer" for a drug dealer because of "the adrenaline rush. When I'm not on the job I'll go into a bar and walk up to someone and blow smoke in his face, and we'll go outside and fight, and usually he ends up liking me and we'll go back in and have a drink or something."

The television documentary Diabolical Minds contained an interesting segment on G. Daniel Walker, a criminal with a long record of fraud, robbery, rape, and murder, and a penchant for bringing lawsuits against everyone in sight. Interviewed by former FBI agent Robert Ressler, Walker offered this comment: "There is a certain excitement when you have escaped from a
major penitentiary and you know the red lights are behind you and you know the sirens are going. There is a certain excitement that you just . . . it's better than sex. Oh, it's exciting."

The flip side of this yearning for excitement is an inability to tolerate routine or monotony. Psychopaths are easily bored. You are not likely to find them engaged in occupations or activities that are dull, repetitive, or that require intense concentration over long periods. I can imagine that psychopaths might function reasonably well as air-traffic controllers, but only while things are hectic and fast paced. During slow periods they would likely goof off or go to sleep, assuming that they even showed up for work.

ARE PSYCHOPATHS PARTICULARLY well suited for dangerous professions? David Cox, a former student of mine and now a psychology professor at Simon Fraser University, doesn't think so. He studied British bomb-disposal experts in Northern Ireland, beginning the research with the expectation that because psychopaths are "cool under fire" and have a strong need for excitement they would excel at the job. But he found that the soldiers who performed the exacting and dangerous task of defusing or dismantling IRA bombs referred to psychopaths as "cowboys," unreliable and impulsive individuals who lacked the perfectionism and attention to detail needed to stay alive on the job. Most were filtered out during training, and those who slipped through didn't last long.

It is just as unlikely that psychopaths would make good spies, terrorists, or mobsters, simply because their impulsiveness, concern only for the moment, and lack of allegiance to people or causes make them unpredictable, careless, and undependable—likely to be "loose cannons."

Lack of Responsibility

Obligations and commitments mean nothing to psychopaths. Their good intentions—"I'll never cheat on you again"—are promises written on the wind.

Truly horrendous credit histories, for example, reveal the
lightly taken debt, the shrugged-off loan, the empty pledge to contribute to a child’s support. “That little girl means everything to me. . . . I’d do anything to see that she has everything I never had in my childhood.” A social worker and ex-wife would receive such remarks with justifiable skepticism when their efforts to collect court-ordered child support from the psychopath have failed from day 1.

The irresponsibility and unreliability of psychopaths extend to every part of their lives. Their performance on the job is erratic, with frequent absences, misuse of company resources, violations of company policy, and general untrustworthiness. They do not honor formal or implied commitments to people, organizations, or principles.

In her book on Diane Downs, Ann Rule described a pattern of irresponsible parental behavior that is typical of psychopaths. Downs would often leave her young children alone when there was no babysitter available. The children, ranging in age from fifteen months to six years, were described by neighbors as hungry, emotionally starved, and generally neglected (they were seen playing outside in winter without shoes or coats). Downs professed to love her children, but her callous indifference to their physical and emotional welfare argues otherwise.

This indifference to the welfare of children—their own as well as those of the man or woman they happen to be living with at the time—is a common theme in our files of psychopaths. Psychopaths see children as an inconvenience. Some, like Diane Downs, insist that they care a great deal for their children, but their actions belie their words. Typically, they leave children on their own for extended periods or in the care of unreliable sitters. One of our subjects and her husband left their one-month-old infant with an alcoholic friend. The friend became drunk and passed out. When he awoke he forgot that he was babysitting and left. The parents returned some eight hours later to find that their child had been apprehended by the authorities. The mother was outraged by this violation of her parental rights and accused the authorities of depriving the child of her love and affection—a position she maintained even after she was told that the baby was severely malnourished.

Psychopaths do not hesitate to use the resources of family
and friends to bail them out of difficulty. One of our subjects, a woman with a long history of disappointing her parents, induced them to put up their house for her bail following a charge of drug trafficking. She skipped bail, and her parents are now fighting to keep their home.

Psychopaths are not deterred by the possibility that their actions may cause hardship or risk for others. A twenty-five-year-old inmate in one of our studies has received more than twenty convictions for dangerous driving, driving while impaired, leaving the scene of an accident, driving without a license, and criminal negligence causing death. When asked if he would continue to drive following his release from prison, he replied, "Why not? Sure I drive fast, but I'm good at it. It takes two to have an accident."

A physician in a western state recently called to inquire about using the Psychopathy Checklist in a study of patients who tested positive for the HIV virus, a precursor of AIDS. In his experience some patients with the HIV virus continued to have unprotected sex with healthy, unsuspecting partners. He wanted to evaluate his clinical impression that many of these people were psychopaths who cared little about the horrendous implications of their irresponsible behavior.

An industrial psychologist commented to me that nuclear power plants carefully screen prospective employees, for obvious reasons. However, he volunteered, the usual screening procedures—interviews, personality tests, letters of reference—do not always succeed in detecting a class of individuals notorious for their unreliability and irresponsibility—namely, psychopaths.

Psychopaths are frequently successful in talking their way out of trouble—"I've learned my lesson"; "You have my word that it won't happen again"; "It was simply a big misunderstanding"; "Trust me." They are almost as successful in convincing the criminal justice system of their good intentions and their trustworthiness. Although they frequently manage to obtain probation, a suspended sentence, or early release from prison, they simply ignore the conditions imposed by the courts. That is, even when directly under the yoke of the criminal justice system, they do not meet their obligations.
Psychopaths usually don't get along well with one another. The last thing an egocentric, selfish, demanding, callous person wants is someone just like him. Two stars is one too many. Occasionally, however, psychopaths become temporary partners in crime—a grim symbiosis with unfortunate consequences for other people. Generally, one member of the pair is a "talker" who gets his or her way through charm, deceit, and manipulation, whereas the other is a "doer" who prefers direct action—intimidation and force. As long as their interests are complementary, they make a formidable pair.

Some examples from my files illustrate the point. In one case, two young male psychopaths were introduced at a party. One—the talker—was trying to con a minor drug dealer into letting him have some cocaine on credit, without success. The other—the doer—overheard the conversation and, as he put it, "grabbed the pusher by the balls and convinced him to provide a free sample for me and my friend." Thus began a year-long drug-dealing partnership. The talker made the contacts and arranged the deals; the doer broke legs. When the talker was caught, he immediately made a deal with the prosecutor and turned his partner in.

In another case, a young woman, a smooth-talking, parasitic psychopath, constantly complained to her friends that her parents were not contributing enough to her already lavish lifestyle. She met a middle-aged man, an aggressive, hostile psychopath, who said, "Why not do something about it?" Together, they hatched a plot in which the man would break into the woman's house and kill her parents. The woman, meanwhile, would be out of town with friends. The plot fell apart when the woman bragged to her friends that she would soon be rich. Word got to the police, who tapped the woman's telephone line and gathered enough evidence to charge the pair with conspiracy to commit murder. Each tried to plea-bargain by testifying against the other.

Sometimes a psychopath and a borderline psychotic join in a bizarre but deadly partnership, with the former using the latter as a killing tool. A well-known example was provided in Truman Capote's account of Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, executed for murdering four members of the Clutter family in 1959.
(In Cold Blood). Hickock had all the markings of a smooth-talking psychopath, whereas Smith was diagnosed as "nearly . . . a paranoid schizophrenic." As reported by Capote, Hickock viewed Smith as a natural killer and reasoned that "such a gift could, under his supervision, be profitably exploited" [p. 69]. True to form, Hickock put the blame for the murders on his partner: "It was Perry. I couldn't stop him. He killed them all." [p. 260]

Early Behavior Problems

Most psychopaths begin to exhibit serious behavioral problems at an early age. These might include persistent lying, cheating, theft, fire setting, truancy, class disruption, substance abuse, vandalism, violence, bullying, running away, and precocious sexuality. Because many children exhibit some of these behaviors at one time or another, especially children raised in violent neighborhoods or in disrupted or abusive families, it is important to emphasize that the psychopath's history of such behaviors is more extensive and serious than that of most others, even when compared with those of siblings and friends raised in similar settings. An example of the psychopathic child is one who comes from an otherwise well-adjusted family and starts to steal, take drugs, cut school, and have sexual experiences by age ten or twelve.

Early cruelty to animals is usually a sign of serious emotional or behavioral problems. Milwaukee serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, for example, stunned classmates and neighbors by leaving a trail of grim clues to his preoccupations: the head of a dog impaled on a stick, frogs and cats staked to trees, and a group of animal skeletons kept as a collection.⁶

Adult psychopaths usually describe their childhood cruelty to animals as ordinary events, matter-of-fact, even enjoyable. A man who scored high on the Psychopathy Checklist chuckled as he told us that when he was ten or eleven he shot "an irritating mutt" with a pellet gun. "I shot him in the ass and he cried and crawled around awhile and died."

Another subject, serving time for fraud, told us that as a child
he would put a noose around the neck of a cat, tie the other end of the string to the top of a pole, and bat the cat around the pole with a tennis racket. He said that his sister raised puppies and he would kill the ones she didn’t want to keep. “I’d tie them to a rail and use their heads for baseball practice,” he said, smiling slightly.

Cruelty to other children—including siblings—is often part of the young psychopath’s inability to experience the sort of empathy that checks normal people’s impulses to inflict pain, even when enraged. “The shocking things he did to his baby sister’s doll felt like warnings, but we brushed them aside,” one mother told me. “But when he actually tried to smother his sister in her crib and snipped the skin of her neck with a pair of scissors, we realized with horror that we should have trusted our worst intuitions from the start.”

Although not all adult psychopaths exhibited this degree of cruelty in their youth, virtually all routinely got themselves into a wide range of difficulties: lying, theft, vandalism, promiscuity, and so forth.

Interestingly, however, the media frequently report that witnesses and neighbors are taken completely by surprise in reaction to some senseless crime: “I just can’t believe he was capable of doing a thing like that—there was absolutely no hint that he would do it.” Reactions of this sort reflect not only psychopaths’ power to manipulate others’ impressions of themselves but the witnesses’ ignorance of their early history.

### Adult Antisocial Behavior

Psychopaths consider the rules and expectations of society inconvenient and unreasonable, impediments to the behavioral expression of their inclinations and wishes. They make their own rules, both as children and as adults. Impulsive, deceitful children who lack empathy and see the world as their oyster will be much the same as adults. The lifelong continuity of the self-serving, antisocial behavior of psychopaths is truly amazing.
To a large extent, this continuity is responsible for the findings, by many researchers, that the early appearance of antisocial actions is a good predictor of adult behavioral problems and criminality. Many of the antisocial acts of psychopaths lead to criminal convictions. Even within prison populations psychopaths stand out, largely because their antisocial and illegal activities are more varied and frequent than are those of other criminals. Psychopaths tend to have no particular affinity, or "specialty," for any one type of crime but tend to try everything. This criminal versatility is well illustrated in the television program, described earlier in this chapter, in which Robert Ressler interviewed G. Daniel Walker. Following is a brief exchange from that interview:

"How long is your rap sheet?"
"I would think the current one would probably be about twenty-nine or thirty pages."
"Twenty-nine or thirty pages! Charles Manson's is only five."
"But he was only a killer."

What Walker meant was that he himself was not only a killer but a criminal of enormous versatility, a fact of which he seemed very proud. He openly boasted of having committed more than three hundred crimes in which he had not been caught.

Not all psychopaths end up in jail. Many of the things they do escape detection or prosecution, or are on the "shady side of the law." For them, antisocial behavior may consist of phony stock promotions, questionable business and professional practices, spouse or child abuse, and so forth. Many others do things that, although not illegal, are unethical, immoral, or harmful to others: philandering, cheating on a spouse, financial or emotional neglect of family members, irresponsible use of company resources or funds, to name but a few. The problem with behaviors of this sort is that they are difficult to document and evaluate without the active cooperation of family, friends, acquaintances, and business associates.
The Profile: Lifestyle

The Complete Picture

Of course, psychopaths are not the only ones who lead socially deviant lifestyles. For example, many criminals have some of the characteristics described in this chapter, but because they are capable of feeling guilt, remorse, empathy, and strong emotions, they are not considered psychopaths. A diagnosis of psychopathy is made only when there is solid evidence that the individual matches the complete profile—that is, has most of the symptoms described in both this chapter and the preceding one.

Recently, an ex-con offered me his opinion of the Psychopathy Checklist: he wasn’t too impressed! Now middle-aged, he had spent much of his early adult life in prison, where he was once diagnosed as a psychopath. Here are his responses:

- **Glib and superficial**—“What is negative about articulation skills?”
- **Egocentric and grandiose**—“How can I attain something if I don’t reach high?”
- **Lack of empathy**—“Empathy toward an enemy is a sign of weakness.”
- **Deceitful and manipulative**—“Why be truthful to the enemy? All of us are manipulative to some degree. Isn’t positive manipulation common?”
- **Shallow emotions**—“Anger can lead to being labeled a psychopath.”
- **Impulsive**—“Can be associated with creativity, living in the now, being spontaneous and free.”
- **Poor behavioral controls**—“Violent and aggressive outbursts may be a defensive mechanism, a false front, a tool for survival in a jungle.”
- **Need for excitement**—“Courage to reject the routine, monotonous, or uninteresting. Living on the edge, doing things that are risky, exciting, challenging, living life to its fullest, being alive rather than dull, boring, and almost dead.”
- **Lack of responsibility**—“Shouldn’t focus on human weaknesses that are common.”
Early behavior problems and adult antisocial behavior—"Is a criminal record reflective of badness or nonconformity?"

Interestingly, he had nothing to say about Lack of remorse or guilt.

In a recent article for The New York Times, Daniel Goleman wrote, "Data suggest that in general about 2 to 3 percent of people are estimated to be psychopaths—with the rate twice as high among those who live in the fragmented families of the inner cities." However, this statement, and others proclaiming an increase of psychopathy in our society, confuses criminality and social deviance with psychopathy.

While crime—and the socially deviant behavior that helps to but doesn't completely define psychopathy—is already high among the lower class, and is rising in society as a whole, we don't know if the relative number of psychopaths among us is also on the increase. Sociobiologists take the view that behavior development is influenced by genetic factors, and they might argue that the number of psychopaths must be increasing, simply because they are very promiscuous and produce large numbers of children, some of whom may inherit a predisposition for psychopathy.

I'll examine this argument and its chilling implications in later chapters on the roots of psychopathy. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to discuss the known aspects of the enigma. The next step into the heart of the matter brings us to the role of conscience in the regulation of behavior.