

“I’m Sorry I did it . . . but He Started it”: A Comparison of The Official and Self-Reported Homicide Descriptions of Psychopaths and Non-Psychopaths

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Abstract This study concurrently examined the characteristics of violent actions (homicides) and the manner in which the violent acts are described by the perpetrators. $N = 50$ offenders incarcerated for homicide were classified as psychopathic or non-psychopathic, according to the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (Hare, 1991, 2003). The instrumentality/reactivity and major details of their violence were coded from the official files. Further, the offenders’ own accounts were coded on the same variables by independent raters. Results indicated that whereas psychopaths were far more likely than their counterparts to have perpetrated primarily instrumental homicides, this difference disappeared when examining the self-report descriptions. Overall, although psychopaths and non-psychopaths both tended to exaggerate the reactivity of their homicides, psychopaths did so to a greater degree. Psychopaths also were more likely to omit major details of their offenses.

Keywords Psychopathy · Deception · Credibility assessment · Homicide · Violence · Minimization

Psychopathy has become a major focus of research in psychology and law in recent years. As defined by the well-validated Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991, 2003), psychopaths are manipulative, callous, remorseless, impulsive, irresponsible individuals. Research shows that they persistently violate the rights of others across the lifespan (Harpur & Hare, 1994; Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001). Precursors to psychopathy emerge early in childhood as “callous/unemotional” traits (Frick & Ellis, 1999; Frick, Bodin, & Barry, 2000; Lynam, 2002), which map closely onto adult psychopathic traits (especially Factor 1 features on the PCL-R). Such traits are associated with a pattern of persistent aggression and antisocial behavior (Dodge, 1991;

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Frick, 1998; Lynam, 2002; Waschbusch, Porter, Carrey, Kazmi, Roach, & D'Amico, 2004). In adulthood, psychopathy is associated with violence and crime in general, see (Hart & Hare, 1997; Porter & Porter, *in press*).

In addition to their aggression and violence, psychopaths are thought to be chronic deceivers, often lying for instrumental reasons such as to escape punishment. They are “users” of others in their attempts to obtain money, drugs, sex, or power (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Many psychopaths are con artists with a long history of frauds and scams; some even become cult leaders, corrupt politicians, or successful corporate leaders, before their frequent downfall (Babiak, 2000). Characterized as “successful” by Raine et al. (Raine, Ishikawa, Arce, Lencz, Knuth, Bihrlé, et al., 2004), some psychopaths may maintain control over people chiefly by deceiving and manipulating them. Such exploitation by these “human predators” (Hare, 1993) is believed to be facilitated by a superficially engaging personality and the prodigious use of deception (Hare, 1993; Porter & Woodworth, 2006).

Despite a long tradition of clinical observations linking psychopathy and deceptive behavior (Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1993; Hare, Forth, & Hart, 1989; Lykken, 1995; Porter, Birt, Yuille, & Hervé, 2001), there has been little research addressing the relationship. In particular, no research has examined the manner in which psychopathic individuals alter the details of their own antisocial or criminal actions in their spoken narratives. The present study was designed to investigate the manner in which psychopaths and non-psychopaths describe their violent crimes relative to the official file descriptions.

Psychopathy and violent behavior

Much research has established that psychopaths commit an inordinate amount of violence in society (Monahan et al., 2001; Porter & Woodworth, 2006; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1996). However, a more recent focus of research has been on the characteristics of their violent actions. One approach to investigating psychopathic violence has been to consider the instrumental or reactive nature of the acts (Cornell, Warren, Hawk, Stafford, Oram, & Pine, 1996; Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Was the perpetrator reacting aggressively to a desperate, provocative situation or, instead, was the aggressive action more volitional and instrumental? While one long-standing view holds that aggression is founded in frustration and provocation (Berkowitz, 1983), a second view posits that aggression involves goal driven behavior with specific intended consequences (Bandura, 1983). As such, in order to understand the violent act, it is necessary to consider the external goals of the perpetrator. There appears to be validity in both of these perspectives (Stanford, Houston, Villemarette-Pittman, & Greve, 2003); a consideration of both reactive and instrumental elements is important in understanding motivations (Brown, Atkins, Osborne, & Milnamow, 1996; Dodge, 1991) and individual differences in aggressors (Stanford, Houston, Villemarette-Pittman, & Greve, 2003). Although, some research suggests that violent behavior can be reliably classified into these two distinct subtypes (Salfatti, 2000; Stanford, Houston, Villemarette-Pittman, & Greve, 2003), it has been observed that many violent actions contain both elements (Bushman & Anderson, 2001).

Given the concurrent attributes of callous premeditation and poor behavioral controls associated with the actions of psychopaths, predicting whether their violence will be primarily reactive or instrumental is not obvious. However, there is good reason to predict that at least some violence committed by psychopaths will be predatory. Cleckley (1976) observed that their violence often is motivated by an external goal, and not characterized by the powerful emotions associated with “crimes of passion.” He hypothesized that the psychopath’s affective deficits made it less likely that he/she would engage in reactive violence. Following Cleckley’s pre-

diction, a handful of studies have addressed the nature of psychopathic violence. Williamson, Hare, and Wong (1987) found that psychopaths' violent crimes were significantly more likely to have been motivated by material gain (45.2%) than were those of non-psychopaths (14.6%). Further, non-psychopaths (31.7%) were more likely to have experienced high levels of emotion prior to committing their offenses than were psychopaths (2.4%). Cornell et al. (1996) found that offenders who had committed at least one previous act of instrumental violence had higher PCL-R scores than offenders who had only committed acts of reactive violence. From these studies, it became clear that violence by psychopaths was far more likely than violence by others to have an instrumental component. Nonetheless, interestingly, for many of their documented acts of violence, there is no evidence of an external goal. For example, Williamson et al. (1987) study, most violent acts by psychopaths in the sample were not instrumental. Overall, these data established that (for violence in general) psychopaths engage in both major forms of aggression, whereas non-psychopathic offenders are far less likely to engage in instrumental violence.

In a third study, Woodworth and Porter (2002) examined the relationship between psychopathy and homicide specifically. They reasoned that if the pattern for general violence held true, psychopathic murderers would perpetrate both types of homicides, but would show a greater propensity than non-psychopaths to committing instrumental homicides. From a Canadian sample of 125 incarcerated homicide offenders, it was found that the psychopaths indeed were more likely to have engaged in instrumental, predatory homicides (93.3%) than were non-psychopathic offenders (48.4%). Unlike violence in general, and despite our prediction that they would engage in both types of homicide, psychopaths rarely committed reactive homicidal violence.

Psychopathy and deception

Psychopaths long have been characterized as persistent liars to the extent that duplicity is regarded as a defining characteristic of psychopathy. For example, Cleckley (1976) viewed untruthfulness and insincerity as being important features of the disorder. The PCL-R (Hare, 1991, 2003) contains two items that consider deception: "pathological lying" and "conning/manipulative" (Hare, 2003). Further, one of the three main factors identified in Cooke and Michie's (2001) model of psychopathy is an arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style. Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain psychopathic deception. Affective factors have been implicated; anxiety and guilt which may inhibit or interfere with deception in most people are largely missing in the psychopath (Ekman, 2002; Lykken, 1995). Lykken (1995) proposed that because psychopaths experience less anxiety than non-psychopaths, they are able to deceive more adeptly than others. In fact, it has been suggested that psychopaths may even experience "duping delight" from successfully deceiving others (Ekman, 1991; Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001; Raskin & Hare, 1978). Evolutionary factors also have been implicated; psychopaths exhibit a reproductive strategy intended to maximize the number of reproductive partners but invest few resources into caring for the offspring (MacMillan & Kofoed, 1984; Mealey, 1995; Wiebe, 2004). In order for such a strategy to be effective, prodigious deception (i.e., infidelity, denial, false promises) may be required, referred to by Mealey (1995) as a "cheater strategy."

As mentioned, despite these observations, only a few empirical studies have addressed deception in psychopaths. Raskin and Hare (1978) examined the ability of 48 incarcerated criminals (24 psychopathic and 24 non-psychopathic) to lie successfully during a polygraph examination about a mock crime. Results indicated that psychopaths were no better than non-psychopaths at lying, perhaps because of physiological arousal due to duping delight rather than anxiety. Further, a study by Poythress, Edens, and Watkins (2001) failed to support the clinical intuition

that individuals with higher levels of psychopathic traits are proficient at malingering. Seto et al. (1997) investigated the use of self-reported deceptive tactics to obtain sexual partners and psychopathy in 47 males from the community. They found that higher scores on the PCL-R were related to measures of both general deceptiveness and sexual deception. Studies addressing response to rehabilitation programs provide indirect evidence for psychopathic deception in the treatment context. Seto and Barbaree (1999) found that offenders in a Correctional Service of Canada sex offender treatment program who had received the most positive evaluations during treatment also had high PCL-R scores and subsequently showed the highest re-offense rates. It is likely that psychopaths had “put on a good show” during the program through the use of deception. On the other hand, given the research described above, Hare (2003) has suggested that while psychopaths may be no better than other offenders at deception, they are more likely to use deception. That is, they may simply be more likely to lie whether they are good actors or not.

Adding to the problem of the sheer number of lies used by psychopaths, it is becoming clear that professionals in forensic settings experience difficulty in detecting whether an offender is being honest. Numerous studies over the past few decades have demonstrated that both professionals and laypersons typically detect lies at around the level of chance (Vrij, 2000), or even worse. For example, a sample of federal parole officers performed below chance at detecting deception with videotaped speakers (Porter, Woodworth, & Birt, 2000). Vrij and colleagues have examined the ability of professionals to detect deception in an interviewed murderer. For example, Vrij and Mann (2001) examined the ability of 65 police officers to detect deception in the videotaped statement of a murderer. Results indicated that the officers had an accuracy rate of only 64%. Obviously, then, research which could lead to improved credibility assessment approaches is important.

No research to date has examined the *manner* in which psychopaths deceive during interviews in forensic settings. Here, we focused on the qualities of the narratives of psychopaths and non-psychopaths concerning their violent crimes, relative to the official reports.

Examining the credibility of self-reported crime narratives

One focus of the current study was the nature of homicidal violence perpetrated by psychopathic and non-psychopathic offenders. Offering a possible replication of Woodworth and Porter's (2002) results, this study investigated the instrumentality/reactivity of the homicides of psychopathic and non-psychopathic offenders according to the official file descriptions of the offenses. Additionally, this approach served as a foundation for a novel investigation of the credibility of psychopaths' own narratives in describing their crimes. Specifically, we compared the official and self-reported descriptions of the crimes to determine whether psychopaths are more likely than their counterparts to minimize the instrumentality (i.e., exaggerate the reactivity) of their crimes in a self-exculpating fashion.

Prior to this study, no research has examined the manner in which offenders describe their violence relative to the official file report. An important aspect of the evaluation of a suspect's or an offender's credibility is his/her self-reported description of the crime (Rogers & Cruise, 2000). Some have argued that the interview with a suspect or perpetrator is one of the most important evidence gathering tools available during an investigation (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002). Additionally, reactive, spontaneous offenses are often accompanied by a relatively light sentence (e.g., manslaughter versus first or second degree murder), providing a motivation for some offenders to lie about the offense. Further, the manner in which an accused person discusses his/her crime and what he/she purports to remember about the incident have relevance

when considering treatment and release options (Byrne, 2003). Following incarceration for an offense, offenders may still be motivated to provide non-credible accounts concerning the crime in attempts to obtain early release appeal their sentence, or simply deny their role in the crime. In the case of homicide, the stakes for successful deception are higher than for perhaps any other type of crime.

In the present study, potential differences in the self-report and official descriptions of crimes by homicide offenders were examined by using a coding scheme recently developed to examine the instrumentality/reactivity of an aggressive action (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). This coding scheme was devised as a reliable measure of the level of instrumentality evidenced during a violent act by using a detailed official file-based description. However, here the scheme was not only used to measure instrumentality from the official description, but to examine the instrumentality evidenced in the offender's own description. We hypothesized that psychopaths would be more likely than other offenders to "re-frame" the level of instrumentality that had been involved, in terms of minimizing the degree of premeditation and exaggerating the victim's role in, and the spontaneity of, the offense. We also focused on another strategy that offenders may use to avoid acknowledging criminal culpability—leaving out important details of a crime, or "deception by omission" (Ekman, 2002). Here, it was predicted that psychopaths would be more likely than non-psychopaths to omit or alter the facts of their offense. For example, they may minimize or be reluctant to discuss sexual elements of the homicide (Warren, Hazelwood, & Dietz, 1996). On the other hand, it is possible that psychopaths would be more likely than non-psychopaths to boast about their involvement in the offense, even to the point of exaggerating its instrumentality. Since all offenders in the sample had already been convicted (and were describing the offense in a confidential research interview), they would have nothing to gain by exaggerating the reactivity of the homicide.

In summary, this study was the first to compare the self-reported and official descriptions of violent actions. We investigated whether there would be larger discrepancies between official and file reports in the case of psychopathic offenders than for other offenders. Specifically, the possibility that psychopaths may minimize the instrumentality of their violent crimes and omit major details in their accounts was investigated.

Method

Participants

Fifty participants ($N = 50$) were recruited from the population of federal male offenders incarcerated for homicide (i.e., manslaughter, first or second-degree murder) in three federal correctional institutions in the Atlantic region of Canada. Offenders were recruited from Springhill Institution (medium security) in Nova Scotia ($n = 18$), and Dorchester Penitentiary (medium security) ($n = 21$) and Atlantic Institution (maximum security) ($n = 11$) in New Brunswick. Homicide offenders in these institutions were made aware of the study and given the opportunity to participate unless they were denying the offense and/or appealing their conviction. Potential participants were asked whether they would be interested in participating in a study of the manner in which homicide offenders recall their offenses. Participation was strictly voluntary with no monetary compensation or other incentives. Their mean age at data collection was 39.5 years ($SD = 9.2$; range of 22–55 years); the mean age at the time of the homicide commission was 28.9 years ($SD = 9.2$; range of 14–50 years). Eight offenders had been convicted of

1st degree murder, 32 had been convicted of 2nd degree murder, and 10 had been convicted of manslaughter.¹

Procedure

The interviewers were two psychology doctoral students and a Sc. level research assistant. All had been thoroughly trained in the interview format and in security measures.

The interview approach was based on the Step-Wise Interview (see Yuille, Hunter, Joffe, & Zaparniuk, 1993; Yuille, Marxsen, & Cooper, 1999). This approach was used to ensure that all three interviewers followed a standard protocol and that all offenders were given the same opportunity to provide their self-report. In the first stage of the interview, the participant was asked to describe the homicide in a free recall format with no interruption from the interviewer. Each offender was asked to provide as much information about the incident as possible, from start to finish, leaving nothing out. After the free narrative, the interviewer asked open-ended questions (“Tell me more about ___”) to clarify and elaborate details provided earlier. Each interview took approximately 1–1.5 hr. Finally, the offenders were asked to complete a brief questionnaire containing a series of specific questions pertaining to the quality of their recollections for the homicide: (How vivid and clear is your memory for the event? (1–7); Compared with other memories, what is the quality of this memory? (1–7); How much has your memory for the murder changed over time (1–7); In your memory can you [see, hear, feel, smell, taste] things? (1–5). The interview was audio-taped (with the consent of the participant) for subsequent transcription. At the end of the interview, each offender was thanked and a correctional officer escorted the offender back to his cellblock.

Materials

PCL-R (Hare, 2003)

The PCL-R has been widely adopted in the assessment of psychopathy in forensic populations (Hemphill & Hare, 2004). Psychopathy, as measured by the PCL-R, is characterized by 20 criteria scored from 0 to 2 for a maximum score of 40. As recommended in the manual, a score of ≥ 30 was the cutoff for classifying psychopathy. The PCL-R score is highly reliable over time and has a high level of validity, according to several indices (Fulero, 1995; Hare, 2003; Stone, 1995). There is an ongoing debate over whether psychopathy represents a discrete or a continuous variable (Harris, Rice, & Quinsey, 1994), with some research suggesting that psychopathy is a distinct clinical entity or taxon (Hart & Hare, 1997; Hemphill & Hare, 2004), and others indicating that it is best conceptualized as a continuum (Marcus, John, & Edens, 2005). Given this conceptual disagreement, we opted to consider both approaches in the analyses. A file search yielded the PCL-R scores and corresponding factor scores as assessed by institutional psychologists trained in PCL-R administration and scoring. In general, only the total and two factors scores were available in the assessment reports (not item scores).

Inter-rater reliability for the PCL-R assessments was examined in two ways. First, a group (16%) of cases was randomly selected for dual coding. In these cases, all file information available

¹ Similar proportions of psychopaths and non-psychopaths had been convicted of the three types of homicide. Due to small cell sizes a chi-square analysis was not possible. The proportions of psychopaths and non-psychopaths convicted of the three homicide types were (respectively): 1st degree: 22.2 and 14.6%; 2nd degree: 55.6 and 65.9%; manslaughter: 22.2 and 19.5%.

on the offender—with the exception of the psychological assessment report documenting the original PCL-R score—was made available to a trained coder. This check ensured that the original PCL-R scores from the institutional files were reliable. For a second reliability check, another 16% of the files were randomly selected for dual coding. However, for these cases, all details pertaining to the current homicide offense were removed prior to coding. As outlined in Woodworth and Porter (2002), the rationale for this second test of reliability was that coding in the absence of the murder description would circumvent the possibility of “circularity” or contamination in scoring the PCL- Just as it was necessary for homicide coding to be done without knowledge of whether the offender was psychopathic, it was important to ensure that PCL-R scores were not unduly influenced by knowledge of the homicide details (even though this problem should not arise with proper PCL-R scoring; see (Hare, 2003).

It should be noted that standard PCL-R assessments and file-review-only assessments may yield different results. For example, file-review-only assessments produce Factor scores that are slightly lower than assessments with an interview component. As such, it was possible that scores could differ depending on the assessment procedure. We considered this possibility by examining whether the mean scores obtained in our reliability check differed from the mean institutional file scores.

File documentation concerning the homicide

The crime information was coded directly from the official Criminal Profile Report (CPR) included in the institutional file. This document is considered to be an objective, detailed “gold standard” of what occurred during a serious offense. The CPR is based on the official police reports, crime scene information, autopsy reports, witness reports, and court transcripts. Only offense details are included (no clinical observations or information concerning the personality or attitude of the offender is included).

Coding scheme: type of homicide

The offense information was coded with the instrumental-reactive coding scheme described in Woodworth and Porter (2002). Each homicide was rated as a continuum on a Likert type scale from 1 to 4 as follows:

1. *Purely instrumental*: For a homicide to receive this rating, the offense had to have been strictly goal-oriented in nature with no evidence of any immediate emotional or situational provocation. The homicide had to have been committed for a clearly identifiable purpose other than “hot blooded,” spontaneous anger or as a response to an immediate frustration. The homicide received this rating if there was strong evidence that the homicide had been intentional, premeditated (non-impulsive), motivated by a clear external goal such as drugs, money, or sex, and not immediately following a potent affective reaction. For example, an offender may have carefully planned, carried out, and concealed a homicide in order to steal drugs from the victim or to receive insurance money.
2. *Instrumental/reactive*: To receive this rating, the homicide had to show evidence for both instrumental and reactive violence. However, the primary quality of the violence leading to death had to be instrumental. For example, an instrumental/reactive rating would be appropriate if the offender initiated a bank robbery, but proceeded to murder a bank teller after becoming agitated when the teller picked up a telephone. In this case, a crime

occurred for an obvious external gain and the homicide was part of this instrumental act. However, the homicide occurred as a reaction to unplanned events within the context of the crime.

3. *Reactive/instrumental*: To receive this rating, the homicide had to contain both reactive and instrumental violence. However, the primary quality of the fatal violence had to be reactivity. For example, the reactive/instrumental rating would apply if after or during an unplanned fight (and murder), the perpetrator decided to rob the victim as well. Thus, the homicide was unplanned/reactive but there was also a secondary instrumental, opportunistic component.
4. *Purely reactive*: To receive this rating, there had to be evidence for a high level of spontaneity/impulsivity during and a lack of planning preceding the homicide. Reactive violence was coded if there was evidence for spontaneity or impulsivity, a rapid and powerful affective reaction prior to the act, and no apparent external goal other than to harm the victim immediately following a provocation/conflict. As an example, a victim might have verbally insulted the perpetrator, who, in a rage, reacted by starting a fight and stabbing the victim to death with a weapon of convenience (e.g., a broken bottle in a bar).

The inter-rater reliability of this coding scheme was first established in Woodworth and Porter (2002) ($K(21) = .81, p < .001$). For the current study, two highly trained coders coded either the official or the self-report version of the homicide. To avoid possible rating bias, both coders were kept unaware of the PCL-R score and all other information. The only information provided to each coder was either the offender's self-reported offense description or the official crime description. To assess inter-rater reliability, 20% of the instrumental-reactive coding schemes for the official report and the self-report were dual coded.

For each offender, a difference score was calculated to assess discrepancies between the official report and self-report for each offender's type of homicide. Each participant's score (1–4) on the self-report was subtracted from his score (1–4) on the official report to create a difference score that would indicate the degree of concordance between the two reports. For example, if the participant's official report was coded as purely instrumental (1), while his self-report was coded as being purely reactive (4), his difference score was -3 . After all difference scores had been calculated, it was found that no participant had exaggerated the instrumentality of his offense; therefore, the difference scores were changed to reflect an absolute difference (indicating the degree of exaggerated reactivity in the self-report). As such, while perfect agreement between the official and self-report was coded as a 0, numbers larger than 0 indicated a degree of exaggerated reactivity in the self-report.

Main details of the homicide offense

Main details were defined as information that was important to understanding what had occurred during the homicide offense. Because of the diversity of the homicide descriptions, the categories of main details necessarily were kept broad. Potential types of main details would be characteristics the identity of victim, the manner in which the victim was murdered (including whether there was a sexual component to or robbery during the crime), concealment of the crime, the location of the homicide, and the nature of the murder weapon. To code the main details, there was a comparison of the official file version of the homicide and the self-report version of the homicide by a trained senior undergraduate volunteer (0: no main details missing, 1: at least one main detail missing).

Results

Preliminary analyses

PCL-R scores and inter-rater reliability check

For the sample, the mean PCL-R total score was 20.6 ($SD = 7.9$; range 3–33). The mean Factor 1 score for the sample was 7.24 ($SD = 4.18$), while the mean Factor 2 score was 10.74 ($SD = 4.2$). Using the diagnostic cutoff score of ≥ 30 , nine (18%) offenders scored within the psychopathic range, while 41 (82%) were non-psychopaths. The mean total, Factor 1, and Factor 2 scores for psychopaths were 31.3, 12.56, and 14.56, respectively. The mean total, Factor 1, and Factor 2 scores for non-psychopaths were 18.22, 6.07, and 9.9, respectively.

An inter-rater reliability check established that the PCL-Rs were coded reliably. The total PCL-R scores for Rater 1 and 2 were positively correlated, $r(10) = .94$, $p < .001$, and the mean score for the original PCL-R scores (20.6, $SD = 7.9$) did not differ from the mean for the re-coded files (19.1, $SD = 4.9$), $t(9) = 1.65$, $p > .05$. Similarly, the second inter-rater reliability check (in which the raters were kept blind to the homicide description) indicated that the PCL-R scores for Rater 1 and 2 were positively correlated, $r(10) = .98$, $p < .001$, and the mean score for the original PCL-R scores did not differ from the mean for the re-coded files, $t(9) = 1.3$, $p > .05$. Using a dichotomous approach (cutoff of 30), there was 100% agreement between the raters for the reliability check on whether offenders were or were not psychopathic.

Major coding scheme reliability

An inter-rater reliability check was conducted on the instrumentality/reactivity coding scheme. The reliability check on the official reports indicated that the scoring was acceptably reliable ($K(10) = .86$, $p < .001$). The reliability check on the self-reported narratives also indicated that the scoring was reliable ($K(10) = .82$, $p < .001$).

Main details reliability

Scoring for the main details for Rater 1 and Rater 2 was significantly correlated, $r(10) = .78$, $p < .01$. The mean scores of .30 ($SD = .48$) for the original main details variable and .50 ($SD = .52$) for the reliability check scores did not differ, $t(10) = 20$, $p > .05$.

Descriptive statistics

Victim characteristics

The victims' mean age at time of death was 37.8 years ($SD = 22.9$; range of 1–86 years). Thirty-two percent of the victims were female and 68% were male. The victims of the psychopaths were four males (44.4%) and five females. The victims of the non-psychopaths were 30 males (73.17%) and 11 females (one cell size with fewer than five precluded a chi-square analysis).

Offender-victim relationship

An examination of the offender-victim relationships revealed the following breakdown of cases: 12 (24%) friends; 11 (22%) co-workers or casual acquaintances; 10 (20%) male strangers; seven (14%) common-law spouse or girlfriend (or estranged partner); six (12%) spouses or other family

members; and four (8%) female strangers. Using a victim classification of “stranger” versus “known”, psychopaths had killed two strangers (22.2%) and seven (77.8%) known victims, while non-psychopaths had killed 12 strangers (29.3%) and 29 known victims (one cell size with fewer than five precluded a chi-square analysis). Interestingly, 4/9 (44.4%) victims of psychopaths were current or past co-workers/business partners, while only 7/41 (17.1%) victims of non-psychopaths were in this category.

Weapon use

Fifteen (30%) offenders had used a knife, nine (18%) offenders had used a firearm, nine (18%) used objects that are not normally thought of as a weapon, nine (18%) used a combination, seven (14%) used their bare hands, and one (2%) used no “weapon” (cut the car brakes).

Sexual violence

In five (10%) cases (two psychopaths, three non-psychopaths) there was evidence of sexual activity with the victim.

Instrumentality ratings for psychopaths and non-psychopaths according to official reports

Examining PCL-R scores dichotomously, there was a significant difference in the instrumentality of the violence by the two groups, $F(1, 46) = 4.19, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$. Murders committed by psychopaths were more instrumental ($M = 1.9, SD = .30$) than those by non-psychopaths ($M = 2.8, SD = .20$). Specifically, 88.9% of the psychopaths in the sample had committed primarily instrumental homicides, compared to 42.1% of the non-psychopaths. Examining PCL-R scores as a continuous variable, higher scores on the PCL-R were associated with lower levels of reactive violence (i.e., higher levels of instrumental violence), $r(47) = -.33, p < .05$.

To examine the relative contributions of Factors 1 and 2 on the PCL-R in predicting the instrumentality scores, a regression model consisting of Factor 1 and Factor 2 was formulated. The model was significant, $R = .41, F(2, 44) = 4.3, p < .05$. While the partial correlation for Factor 1 (controlling for Factor 2) was significant, $r(47) = -.41, p < .001$, the partial correlation for Factor 2 (controlling for Factor 1) was not, $r(47) = -.001, p > .05$, indicating that Factor 1 played a more important role in predicting the instrumentality of the crime.

Self-reported phenomenological features of the memories

Psychopaths and non-psychopaths did not differ ($F_s < .081-.39, p_s > .05$) on their response ratings to any of the inquiries about the qualities of the memories (vividness, overall quality, change over time, sensory components).

Type of homicide: official report versus self-report

To examine the influence of both psychopathy and report type on instrumentality ratings, a 2×2 mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, with psychopathy as the between-subjects independent variable and report type (official versus self-report) as the within-subjects independent variable. The analysis revealed a main effect of report type, $F(1, 41) = 34.4, p < .001$. Scores on the instrumental/reactive scale were significantly lower for the official report ($M = 2.44, SD = .35$) than for the self-report ($M = 3.0, SD = .18$), $\eta^2 = .46$. Thus, overall, offenders described their crimes as being more reactive than the official reports indicated. Specifically,

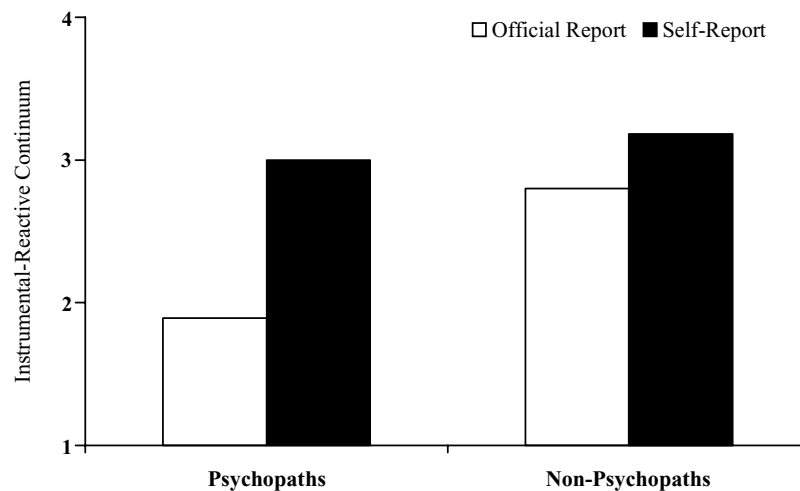


Fig. 1 Level of reactivity involved in the homicide as a function of psychopathy and report type

62.2% of the offenders described their offense as more reactive, while 37.8% of the offenders' self-reports were consistent with the official version. Although there was no main effect of psychopathy, $F(1, 41) = 1.86, p = > .05$, a significant interaction between psychopathy and report type was observed, $F(1, 41) = 8.2, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$. There was a significant difference across levels of psychopathy for the official report, $t(41) = 2.09, p < .05$; in the official reports, crimes by psychopaths were rated as more instrumental ($M = 1.89, SD = .31$) than crimes by non-psychopaths ($M = 2.8, SD = .21$). This difference, however, disappeared for the self-reports, $t(41) = .44, p > .05$. Psychopaths construed their offenses as being as reactive ($M = 3.0, SD = .37$) as those of the non-psychopaths ($M = 3.18, SD = .18$) (see Figs. 1 and 2).

A similar 2×2 mixed ANOVA was conducted with all of the primarily reactive homicides removed from the dataset. This allowed a direct comparison of the manner in which psychopaths and non-psychopaths who have committed instrumental violence describe it. The sub-sample for this analysis was only eight psychopaths and 14 non-psychopaths. With this limited sample size, the interaction between psychopathy and report type was only marginally significant, $F(1, 20) = 2.4, p = .14, \eta^2 = .11$. Specifically, whereas the official reports for both psychopaths ($M = 1.6, SD = .18$) and non-psychopaths ($M = 1.5, SD = .14$) were rated at a similar level of instrumentality, both groups exaggerated the reactivity of their offense in their self-reports, with a trend for psychopaths to exaggerate the reactivity of their offense ($M = 2.9, SD = .36$) more than the non-psychopaths ($M = 2.2, SD = .27$). Overall, 6/8 (75%) psychopaths and 8/14 (57.1%) non-psychopaths who had committed a primarily instrumental offense exaggerated its reactivity.

Examining PCL-R scores as a continuous variable, total scores, $r(43) = .36, p < .05$, and Factor 1 scores, $r(43) = .51, p < .01$, significantly predicted a higher level of self-reported reactivity, whereas Factor 2 scores did not, $r(43) = .11, p > .05$.

Analysis of difference scores

The relation between PCL-R continuous scores and self-reported versus official reports of instrumentality difference scores was examined (higher difference scores would reflect higher levels of exaggerated reactivity in the self-reports). Results indicated that total PCL-R scores,

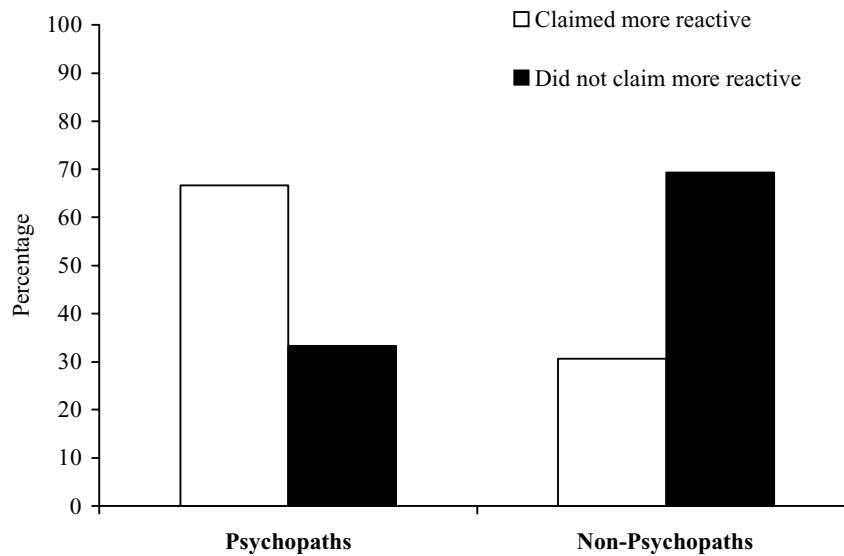


Fig. 2 Percentage of psychopaths and non-psychopaths who claimed that their offense was more reactive than indicated by the official report

$r(43) = .36, p < .05$, and Factor 1 scores, $r(43) = .51, p < .01$, significantly predicted higher difference scores, while Factor 2 did not, $r(43) = .11, p > .05$. When the same analysis was conducted with only the eight psychopaths and 14 non-psychopaths who had committed an instrumental homicide, PCL-R total scores were marginally related to higher difference scores, $r(22) = .39, p = .07$, Factor 1 significantly predicted higher scores, $r(22) = .57, p < .01$, while Factor 2 was unrelated to difference scores, $r(22) = .11, p > .05$. There was no relation between years since the offense and the magnitude of the difference scores ($r(44) = .045, p > .05$), suggesting that the incongruence between official and self-reports persisted for long periods of time.

Main details

No offender omitted more than one major detail. However, psychopaths were significantly more likely than non-psychopaths to leave out a single major detail of the homicide offense, $\chi^2(1) = 4.0, p < .05$. Specifically, 66.7% of the psychopaths omitted a major details compared to 30.6% of the non-psychopaths.

Discussion

Psychopathic individuals exploit others through the prodigious use of violence, manipulation, and deception (Hare, 2003; Porter & Woodworth, 2006). This study concurrently examined the nature of psychopathic violence and deceit in the context of an interview about the violence. The findings from this new approach provided important basic information about psychopathic violence and knowledge about how offenders employ deception—often subtly—in their self-reports, long after the commission of the violent act.

The results provided further evidence that violence by psychopaths is more predatory than that of other offenders. The findings from Woodworth and Porter's (2002) were replicated showing that psychopaths were significantly more likely to have committed instrumental, cold-blooded homicides than non-psychopaths. In fact, psychopaths had almost always perpetrated premeditated homicides (89% of the time) that did not contain any substantial reactive, impulsive component. Instrumental murders were more than twice as common among psychopaths as other offenders (42.1%). Despite their general impulsivity, psychopaths were more likely to plan and execute an instrumental murder, perhaps with a belief that an arrest for a carefully perpetrated homicide is less likely (Cleckley, 1941; Porter & Woodworth, 2006). Alternatively, they may derive satisfaction from the process of planning and committing predatory violence (Porter & Porter, *in press*). Supporting this explanation, previous research has indicated an association between psychopathy and sadistic interests (Hart & Hare, 1997; Porter, Woodworth, Earle, Drugge, & Boer, 2003).

A novel focus of this study was the manner in which psychopaths and non-psychopaths described their homicidal violence. It was predicted that psychopaths would be more prone than others to alter details of the offense in a self-exculpatory fashion. The results partially supported this hypothesis. Whereas psychopaths were more likely than their counterparts to have perpetrated primarily instrumental homicides, this difference disappeared when examining the self-report descriptions. That is, overall, although psychopaths and non-psychopaths both exaggerated the reactivity of their homicides, psychopaths exaggerated to a greater degree. On the other hand, when the analysis was limited to offenders who committed primarily instrumental homicides, psychopaths did not exaggerate the reactivity of their homicides significantly more than non-psychopaths (although there was a trend in this direction and a larger sample size may have yielded significant results). Overall, 6/8 (75%) psychopaths and 8/14 (57.1%) non-psychopaths who had committed a primarily instrumental offense exaggerated its reactivity. Based on this work, there is an interesting limitation to studying the relations between official and self-reported violence homicidal behavior in psychopaths. Because they hardly ever commit reactive homicides (only one here and very few in Woodworth and Porter's (2002) sample), it is not possible to address the manner in which psychopaths who commit reactive homicides alter the details of their offenses.

It was also found that the tendency to exaggerate the reactivity of the violence was related to Factor 1 but not to Factor 2 scores. Thus, the interpersonal/affective features of psychopathy are related not only to the type of violence committed, but the manner in which it is construed by the perpetrator. In general, an interviewer relying only on information about an offense based on the self-reports of many offenders, especially psychopaths, would get the impression that the homicide had been relatively reactive.

There are a number of potential explanations for the current findings. The most parsimonious is that psychopaths (proportionally) are far more prone to commit instrumental homicides than non-offenders, and almost always claim that their crimes were reactive "crimes of passion", even years after the crime. However, when non-psychopaths had committed instrumental homicides they too sometimes exaggerate the reactivity of the offense. On the other hand, unlike psychopaths, many of the non-psychopathic offenders in this sample gave frank and accurate depictions of what had occurred. Psychopaths are more likely than non-psychopaths to deceive in general, and particularly when deception serves a self-exculpating function. Another possibility is that some offenders were exhibiting a duping delight motivation (Ekman, 1991; Hare, 2003). Here, offenders who had committed instrumental murders were not forthcoming about their true level of criminal responsibility even when there were no positive consequences for successful deceit (all offenders in this sample were already convicted and were aware that these data would remain anonymous).

One consideration in interpreting these results (while we think it to be unlikely) is the possibility that the offenders' self-reports could, for some reason, be a more accurate indicator of reactivity than the official reports. This could explain why an exaggerated reactivity was observed in the self-reports across the sample. Another possibility is that the pattern of results observed is based in memory differences between psychopaths and non-psychopaths rather than intentional deception. That is, as one reviewer pointed out, it is possible that psychopaths could have less insight into their motives and planning of their offending, and are more likely to infer or recall that their violence was reactive in nature. Further, the profound emotional deficit (i.e., callousness, lack of remorse, lack of empathy, lack of anxiety) seen in psychopaths could influence the nature of their recall for their crimes. Research by Christianson, Forth, Hare, Strachan, Lidberg, and Thorell (1996) indicated that psychopaths recalled both peripheral and central details from highly emotional scenes in a similar manner, while non-psychopaths were better able to recall the central details from the emotional scene. On the other hand, there was no difference in recall for the stimuli overall (psychopaths did not show a memory deficit per se). Although it was not possible for us to examine this hypothesis directly, we did find that psychopaths and non-psychopaths did not differ in their responses to inquiries about the vividness, overall quality, changes over time, or sensory components of their memories for homicide.

Another potential limitation of this study was that the institutional psychologists scoring the PCL-Rs may have been unduly influenced by the offense descriptions. However, proper PCL-R scoring requires the rater to consider lifespan functioning and not to place too much weight on a single incident. Further, when a subset of the PCL-Rs was recoded with no information concerning the homicide, high inter-rater reliability was obtained. Another interpretive consideration concerns the details of the crimes. We relied on the Criminal Profile Reports as the best estimate of the ground truth in the absence of a video recording of the incident. Further, although we believe that psychopaths had intentionally exaggerated the reactivity of their violence, another possibility is that this pattern reflected an unintentional, perhaps "unconscious" process of self-exculpation.

Conclusions based on the results of this study should be tempered by the small sample size of psychopaths. As we discovered, it is difficult to obtain large sample of violent offenders who are willing to be interviewed about their offense for research purposes (only nine psychopaths out of the 50 offenders). It is hoped that our group and/or other researchers can obtain larger samples of psychopaths for deception research in the future. In particular, we suspect that the statistical trend for psychopaths who have committed instrumental homicides to exaggerate their reactivity more so than non-psychopaths may have been significant with a larger sample. Further, the source files contained only the PCL-R total and factor scores but not the item scores. In the future, we hope to gain access to item scores in order to explore the contribution of Facet 1 (the interpersonal component of the traditional PCL-R) versus Facet 2 (affective component) scores in self-report distortions. While we have interpreted deception by psychopaths primarily as resulting from an "affective" factors (callousness, lack of remorse), it is possible that some cases of self-exculpation could derive from internal concerns such as guilt or shame, not the absence of such features. Alternatively, an interpersonal style typified by ingratiating gestures and making oneself appear attractive to others (glibness, superficial charm) or manipulating (lying, conning) would be served by creating a more self-exculpating approach. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine the relation between the offenders' impulsivity item scores on the PCL-R and the nature of their violence.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that psychopaths view both aggression and deception as useful tools with which to promote their own interests. They appear to view violence "cognitively" as a means to an end, attach little emotion to such behavior, and as hardly different

from other instrumental actions Porter and Woodworth (2006). Most psychopaths in our sample construed their cold-blooded actions as more reactive and less premeditated than indicated in the official file. (Interestingly, some non-psychopaths who had committed a primarily instrumental homicide showed a similar pattern.) Additionally, psychopaths were more likely than other offenders to omit main details of the offense. Some examples of omitted details included the desecration of the victim's body, stealing money from the victim, stalking the victim prior to the homicide, and elements of the sexual assault. Such failures to report significant (and incriminating) details are manifestations of deception by omission (Ekman, 2002). Indeed, denial of the full extent of the criminality involved in the offense and externalization of responsibility have both been associated with antisocial personality characteristics in general. However, it must be noted that there appeared to be little blatant lying about the offense by either psychopaths or non-psychopaths. It might be argued that offenders were attempting to appear credible in some ways while using subtle deception in others.

These findings reinforce the need to do a thorough review of the offender's file prior to an interview for a forensic assessment. While it might be argued that the veracity of the self-report of offenders should be questioned in general, even less weight should be afforded to psychopathic offenders' accounts. This should be an important consideration at all levels of the criminal justice system. For example, if an offender's claim that the homicide was reactive is seen as credible by the courts, a lower level of criminal responsibility (and sentence) may be attached to the court's decision-making than would have been the case with a determination of predatory violence. Further, these results may be relevant in the institutional treatment context. Examining potential changes (i.e., increasing correspondence to the official report) in the offender's self-report during the course of treatment could be beneficial as a gauge of treatment progress. That is, as the offender assumes increasing responsibility for the crime one would expect that his/her account would become more consistent with the official report.

This study was the first to examine the relationship between the self-report and official report of violent acts using an innovative approach to examine subtle indicators of deception. We demonstrated that a consideration of the instrumentality of the offense can provide useful information about an offender's credibility. We were permitted to interview a relatively large number of homicide offenders (considering the challenges in obtaining this type of sample) and had access to their correctional files. We have established the need for researchers to study the quality of both the violent behavior and crime narratives of psychopathic offenders. These and future findings will increase our basic understanding of their predatory violence and deception in forensic contexts.

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