

Psychopathic Personality: Bridging the Gap Between Scientific Evidence and Public Policy

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The word “psychopath” brings to mind diverse and often conflicting images, from the superficially charming and manipulative corporate boss to the coldly violent serial killer. Although the public has a fascination with psychopathy, there are still misconceptions and uncertainty about what it means to be a psychopath. How does psychopathy develop? At what age can it be diagnosed? Is it necessarily linked with violence? Is treatment possible?

This new, comprehensive review summarizes what is known about psychopathy from psychological science. While contemporary measures of psychopathy have brought much-needed organization to what was once a confused field, there remains debate as to whether psychopathy is a unitary syndrome or a configuration of several different but intersecting traits. The authors propose a new model, drawing on commonalities found among the many diverging definitions of psychopathy, that can serve as a building block for the conceptualization of the disorder. They examine research calling into question the common belief that psychopaths are “born”—rather than being a product of both genetic and environmental influences—and question whether the diagnosis is useful or appropriate for children. They also discuss evidence that, contrary to popular belief, psychopathy is not necessarily linked to violent behavior and that psychopaths are in no way “untreatable.”

Hear author Scott O. Lilienfeld discuss the science behind psychopathic personality at the [24th APS Annual Convention](#).

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Editorial: Current Scientific Views of Psychopathy

By **Don C. Fowles**

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