

"A FASCINATING, IF TERRIFYING, LOOK AT PSYCHOPATHS....A CHILLING, EYE-OPENING REPORT."

-KIRKUS REVIEWS

WITHOUT



CONSCIENCE

THE DISTURBING WORLD OF
THE PSYCHOPATHS AMONG US

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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 hlink, 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 McMurtry, *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

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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.

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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 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.

"Experiencing" the Psychopath

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, 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 con-

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vinced 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

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—John Monahan, PhD,
University of Virginia Law School

"Brings together a wealth of information about psychopathy.... A 'must read' for students."

—Adelle Forth, PhD, Department of Psychology, Carleton University, Canada

Most people are both repelled and intrigued by the images of cold-blooded, conscienceless murderers that increasingly populate our movies, television programs, and newspaper headlines. With their flagrant criminal violation of society's rules, serial killers like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy are among the most dramatic examples of the psychopath. Individuals with this personality disorder are fully aware of the consequences of their actions and know the difference between right and wrong, yet they are terrifyingly self-centered, remorseless, and unable to care about the feelings of others. Perhaps most frightening, they often seem completely normal to unsuspecting targets. Presenting a compelling portrait of these dangerous men and women based on 25 years of distinguished scientific research, Dr. Robert D. Hare vividly describes a world of con artists, hustlers, rapists, and other predators who charm, lie, and manipulate their way through life. Are psychopaths mad, or simply bad? How can they be recognized? And how can we protect ourselves? This book provides solid information and surprising insights for anyone seeking to understand this devastating condition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert D. Hare, PhD, has conducted influential research on psychopathy for over 25 years. Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and the developer of one of the world's most widely used tools for assessing psychopathy, Dr. Hare is the author of over 100 professional articles and several books.

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