

Is Psychopathy a Disorder?

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- “Psychopathy designates not a species of predator out there in the world, but a label, which is as much about the internal fears of the polite as any aspect of the external reality.” (Mullen 2008, p.144)

- The Problem:

Uncertainty and controversy regarding the nature of the condition

Uncertainty regarding the question whether the condition is (in some sense) beneficial for individuals

Outline

- 1.) The condition
- 2.) Challenge 1: Psychopathy as an adaptation
- 3.) Challenge 2: Successful Psychopaths
- 4.) Conclusion

The PCLR

Affective/personality dimension

Glibness, superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, deceitfulness

Shallow affect, lack of empathy, lack of remorse or guilt, manipulateness

Antisocial behaviour/ lifestyle dimension

Impulsivity, thrill seeking, early behavioural problems, parasitic lifestyle, poor behavioural controls, lack of realistic longterm goals, criminal versatility, juvenile delinquency, revocation of conditional release (promiscuity, many short relationships)

The Adaptationist Case

- The hypothesis: psychopathy is an alternative cheater strategy which is successful if a small minority in the population pursue it.
(Lalumiere et al.)
- Underlying assumption: Adaptations cannot be disorders (Wakefield)

Problems

- Heritability doesn't establish anything
- Psychopathy probably *less* advantageous historically
- Ignores or denies certain facets of psychopathy
- Neglects the link between childhood deprivation and problems and the condition

Adaptationist theories contribute to dehumanization of psychopaths. (Psychopaths as predators)

Cause further fragmentation and lack of consensus regarding the construct because of selective focus on specific traits.

Successful Psychopaths

“An individual who is cunning and manipulative and maintains a general disregard for the wellbeing of others might do very well for him/herself in a variety of contexts ranging from basic competition for resources to politics and business” (Anderson and Kiehl 2012)

Harmfulness of Psychopathy

- Harm as an indirect consequence of antisocial behaviour
- Harm as a direct consequence of impulsive and irresponsible behaviour

- How many successful psychopaths?
Distinguishing factors? (upbringing, IQ, presence/absence of certain traits?)
- Successful in what way and for how long?
- Dimensionality: Psychopathic Traits versus Psychopathy?

Conclusion

- Adaptationist accounts not satisfactory
- In many cases, psychopathy is harmful to those who have the condition
- Due to dimensionality of the construct possible that some psychopaths are not harmed by condition and therefore not disordered.

References

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