New directions in research on well-being: psychological process in everyday contexts

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• Offenders are heterogeneous population whose characteristics are studied from many different points of view (social psychology, sexology, clinical psychology, etc.).

• To explain personal and individual characteristics of the offenders, in the literature, we find multifactorial and interactive factors models.

• In this pilot study we attempt to connect the social and the clinical approaches, to promote a forensic sexology model.
Psychopathy is a personality disorder consists of a constellation of symptoms related to each other.

A distinctive feature is the lack of moral conscience.

**Emotional and Interpersonal**
- Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
- Glibness/superficial charm
- Grandiose sense of self-worth
- Lack of remorse or guilt
- Callous/Lack of empathy
- Cunning/manipulative
- Shallow affect
- Pathological lying

**Lifestyle and Social Deviance**
- Impulsivity
- Poor behavioral controls
- Criminal versatility
- Lack of realistic long-term goals
- Irresponsibility
- Early behaviour problems
- Juvenile delinquency
- Promiscuous sexual behaviour
- Failure to accept responsibility for own actions
- Many short term marital relationships

Cleckley, 1941; Hare, 1993
Psychopathy assessment

- PCL-R (Psychopathy Checklist-revised)
  - the target is the criminal population
  - cut-off score:
    \( \geq 30 \) in North America;
    \( \geq 25 \) in Europe

Hare, 1991, 2003; Hart, Cox & Hare, 1995; Forth, Kosson & Hare, 1996; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996
PCL-R: Factors

Emotional and Interpersonal

Lifestyle and Social Deviance

PCL-R Factor 1

PCL-R Factor 2

Hare, 1991, 2003
Incidence of psychopathy - 1

Not criminal population

1% General population

3.5% World of finance

Hare, 2003; Babiak & Hare, 2006, Coid et al., 2009
Incidence of psychopathy - 2

Criminal population

15 - 20% in North America

5 - 9% in Europe

Hare, 1998, Coid et al., 2009
Incidenc of psychopathy in sex offenders (SOs)

Porter et al., 2000

Sex offenders 5 - 20% of criminal population

Figure 1: Proportion of Psychopaths Within the Offender Groups.
NOTE: EF = extrafamilial; IF = intrafamilial; I/EF = mixed intra/extrafamilial.
SOs and psychopathy

- Elevation of Factor 1 of PCL-R, compared to non-sex offenders (NSOs).
- Scores on the PCL-R > in mixed sex offenders (adult and children victims) and in rapists, compared to child molesters.
- Sexual assault motivation also linked to the thrill-seeking, and less to only sexual deviant interests.
- Sadistic sexual arousal and high levels of violence during sexual assault ▶ high incidence in sexual homicide.

Beech et al., 2009; Hart et al., 2003; Porter et al. 2000, 2003
Albert Bandura introduced Moral Disengagement (MD; 1991) within the framework of social cognitive theory (1986), which grounds moral agency in a self-regulatory system.

MD refers to social cognitive processes by which a wrongful, harmful and antisocial behaviour is psychologically transformed such that it no longer has these negative qualities that may serve to deter the actor from performing it.
Figure 1 - Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement (Bandura et al., 1996)

Moral Justification
- Palliative Comparison
- Euphemistic Labeling

Minimizing, Ignoring, or Misconstruing The Consequences

Dehumanization Attribution of Blame

Reprehensible Conduct

Detrimental Effects

Victim

Displacement of Responsibility
- Diffusion of Responsibility
MD as a cognitive distortion

- MD may be considered a cognitive distortion (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995) or a bias through which individuals may view their own aggressive behaviour and its negative consequences in a socially and morally favourable or at least acceptable way.

- Murphy (1990) defined it as self-statements made by offenders that allow them to deny, minimize, rationalize or justify their behaviour.

- The construct of “cognitive distortions” was adapted to sexual offending by Hanson et al. (2012).

- Every consideration on the subject matter of the present study, regarding the cognitive distortion found in SOs matching the MD mechanism as defined in the Bandura's social cognitive theory, starts from Murphy's definition above.
MD in SOs/NSOs

- Mechanism, for instance, of Moral Justification, Distortion of Consequences, Blaming the Victim could seem to be included in that kind of self statement made by offenders that allow them to deny, minimize, rationalize or justify their behaviour.
- In the case of SOs, through the Dehumanization mechanism, victims are deprived of their human dignity so that they do not elicit any feelings of identification or empathy.
- Furthermore, with Blaming the Victim mechanism, all responsibility for a certain harmful event is attributed to the victim’s presumably provocative attitude.
MD assessment:

The Moral Disengagement Scale (Italian version) measures the 8 mechanisms of MD:

it comprises 32 items evaluated through a 5 point likert-type scale, from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Psychopathy and moral disengagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychopath</th>
<th>Moral disengagement mechanisms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of moral conscience</td>
<td>General moral disengagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not evaluate the consequences of his actions</td>
<td>Distortion of consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to accept responsibility for own actions</td>
<td>Diffusion and displacement of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of guilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person centered on itself, lack of empathy, difficulties in relationships with others</td>
<td>Attribution of blame, dehumanization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psychopathy & Moral Judgment

• Through studies effectuated with the MR (magnetic resonance) was seen that high psychopathy scores are correlated with significant reductions of gray matter in the three regions of the prefrontal cortex (medial and lateral orbitofrontal and frontopolar), which are believed to be directly involved in the regulation of social conduct.

• The frontopolar cortex, in particular, seem involved in moral judgment.

(Yang et al., 2005; De Oliveira-Souza, Moll, Ignácio, Hare, 2008).
• The strong involvement of frontopolar cortex in moral judgment (Heekeren et al., 2003; Moll et al., 2001) indicates the crucial role of the same with respect to long-term social goals and values (Moll et al. 2005, 2006).

• As a result, one of the possible manifestations of the damage to the frontopolar cortex in psychopathy is represented by recurrent violation of moral norms of behaviour in favor of instant gratification.

(Heekeren et al., 2003; Moll et al., 2001; Moll et al., 2005; Moll et al., 2006)
Hypothesis and methods

• 1\textsuperscript{st} hypotheses: a correlation between psychopathy and mechanisms of moral disengagement in the sample.

• 2\textsuperscript{nd} hypotheses: mechanisms such as distortion of consequences, dehumanization, attribution of blame, diffusion and displacement of responsibility are expected to be more present in subjects with high scores on the scale of psychopathy.

• 3\textsuperscript{rd} hypotheses: SOs and NSOs are expected to differ in the scale of psychopathy in the two factors (SOs with higher levels in factor 1 and NSOs in factor 2, linked to antisocial).

• 4\textsuperscript{th} hypotheses: in SOs rapists and child molesters are expected to differ in the scores of PCL-R (rapists > child molesters).
35 Male jailed:  
25 SOs – 10 NSOs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARITAL STATUS</th>
<th>Frequence</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Valid Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VALID SINGLE</td>
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<td>42,9</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARRIED</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25,7</td>
<td>25,7</td>
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<tr>
<td>COHABITEE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5,7</td>
<td>5,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEPARATED/DIVORCED</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20,0</td>
<td>20,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIDOWER</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>2,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARRIED TWICE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,9</td>
<td>2,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100,0</td>
<td>100,0</td>
</tr>
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Methods

Instruments and Procedures

Moral Disengagement Scale (Italian version)

Psychopathy Checklist- Revised (Italian version)
(Caretti V., Manzi G.S., Schimmenti A., Seragusa L., 2012)

After a personal history interview, the subjects were individually administered the MD Scale and PCL-R.
Results – HP 1

• Scales in PCL-R presented many high correlations with MD total score as well as Mechanisms scale scores.
• Total PCL-R correlated with MD total score (.57).
Results - HP 2

- Total PCL-R correlated, with **Attribution of Blame** (.58), with Advantageous Comparison (.60) and with **Displacement of Responsibility** (.61).

- PCL-R first factor correlated with Moral Disengagement total score (.49), with **Attribution of Blame** (.51), with Advantageous Comparison (.50) and with **Displacement of Responsibility** (.60).

- Life-Style PCL-R correlated with Moral Disengagement total score (.49), with Moral Justification (.45), with Advantageous Comparison (.41) and with Displacement of Responsibility (.51).

- Antisocial PCL-R did not showed significant correlations with any of Moral Disengagement scales.

- PCL-R factor 2 correlates with Moral Justification (.39), and with Advantageous Comparison (.42).
Results – HP 3

Differences emerge in factor 1 & 2, even if not statistically significant.

• Factor 1 (Emotional and Interpersonal):
  SOs > NSOs
  Specifically, Child molesters > NSOs statistically significant.

• Factor 2 (Lifestyle e Social Deviance):
  NSOs > SOs.
  • In any case, this is still a pilot study, therefore the sample will be increased and we assume this result could change.
Results - Hp 4

• Rapists and child molesters show significant differences in factor 1 of the PCL-R, where child molesters get much higher scores.

• Child molesters get high scores especially in the interpersonal component of factor 1.

• This Hp has been disconfirmed.
• The results of this pilot study show a significant correlation between Psychopathy and Moral Disengagement; specifically the MD’s mechanisms more frequent are: Attribution of Blame and Displacement of Responsibility.

• Concerning the differences in the two factors of PCL-R seems that child molesters are more prone to show Emotional and Interpersonal difficulties than rapists.
CONCLUSIONS

• This study is still in progress, we hope to increase the sample and deeply analyse differences between SOs and NSOs, and between different kind of SOs.

• In any case this results are interesting to set up specific guidelines for treatment of the offenders and especially for the relapse prevention.

Many thanks!