



From soap opera to science: Towards gaining access to the psychopaths who live amongst us

Christine A. Kirkman*

Health & Social Studies Department, The University of Bolton, UK

This idiographic and essentially exploratory study examined the unique experiences of 20 women who had been victimized within the context of heterosexual relationships with a male partner who was rated as having the characteristics associated with psychopathy.

An integrated approach, using questionnaires, and biographical and narrative data, was utilized. The experimental group consisted of 20 women who had partnered males rated by the women on the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999) as having many or most of the features of psychopathy. As this was the first reported use of the Hare P-SCAN to provide partner ratings, norms for scorings on this assessment tool were obtained from ratings provided by a control group of a random sample of 100 women who had completed the Hare P-SCAN and provided ratings for their last male partner. Four two-tailed independent samples *t* tests were conducted to test for significant differences in scorings between the two groups. Following screening, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the experimental group, that is, 20 women who had partnered males with psychopathic traits.

The four independent samples *t* test showed that significant differences occurred between the ratings of male partners by women in the experimental group and ratings provided by the control group. Narrative data, generated from written accounts and interviews with women in the experimental group, was successful in clarifying the manner in which males with the personality traits which define psychopathy managed the heterosexual relationship and the nature and patterns of the abusive behaviours which occurred in this context.

Whilst it lacks diagnostic precision, the Mental Health Act (HMSO, 1983) describes psychopathic disorder as:

* Correspondence should be addressed to Christine A. Kirkman, Health & Social Studies Department, The University of Bolton, Deane Road, Bolton BL3 5AB, UK (e-mail: C.A.Kirkman@bolton.ac.uk).

A persistent disorder or disability of mind (whether or not including significant impairment of intelligence) which results in abnormally aggressive or seriously irresponsible conduct.

Cleckley, arguably the most influential and quoted writer of this clinical condition, formulated a list of 16 key characteristics of the psychopath which included such traits as superficial charm and good intelligence, absence of nervousness or psychoneurotic manifestations, untruthfulness and insincerity, lack of remorse or shame, and pathological egocentricity and incapacity to love (Cleckley, 1964).

Cleckley's framework for distinguishing the main characteristics of the psychopath, takes a personality-based approach. All 16 characteristics may not be present in every case but Cleckley asserts that the majority should be for diagnosis to take place. This framework is used when conducting research studies on psychopaths and the characteristics listed by Cleckley are incorporated into diagnostic tools, including the Hare Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R) (Hare, 2003), which is considered to be the 'gold standard' for clinical assessment.

Our current knowledge of psychopathy indicates that both a biological predisposition and the social environment play a part in the development of this disorder (Costello, Costello, & Holmes, 1995; Dolan & Coid, 1995; Martens, 2000; Mitchell & Blair, 2000). Mitchell and Blair (2000) point out that while a biological predisposition determines whether a person has the emotional difficulties associated with psychopathy, such as lack of empathy and lack of conscience, it is an adverse social environment that creates the conditions necessary for the development of the antisocial behaviour typical of this disorder. The findings of Hare (1991) provide convincing evidence that the emotional difficulties and the antisocial behavioural characteristics of the psychopath do indeed have different correlates. For example, Factor 2 items of the Psychopathy Checklist (Hare, 1991, 2003), antisocial behaviours, are inversely related to socio-economic status whereas Factor 1 items, the emotional difficulties, are unrelated to socio-economic status or I.Q. When the literature for psychopathic disorder is reviewed, Cleckley (1976) and Hare (1991) emphasize that Factor 1 items as opposed to Factor 2 items correlate more highly with the clinical view of the prototypical psychopath.

Whilst there can be no doubt that we have gained valuable insights into many facets of antisocial and offending behaviour from our studies conducted with incarcerated offender samples, it is now proposed that studies which focus on non-incarcerated psychopaths have an arguably equal potential to illuminate our understanding of the emotional difficulties, such as lack of empathy, lack of guilt and so forth, that underlie psychopathy, un-confounded by criminality or the effects of long term institutionalization (Kirkman, 2002). Filling in the gaps in our knowledge of the risk factors for the development of this disorder can only serve to benefit sufferers, their victims, and the wider society.

Although Hare (1996) outlined the urgency of developing ways to study non-incarcerated psychopaths, the obstacles that have presented themselves have imposed

serious restrictions upon researchers hoping to identify and access this group as research subjects. The near exclusive use of incarcerated offenders, who are often prolific offenders, has led to assessment tools being developed which are assessing criminal and antisocial behaviours rather than personality features (Belmore & Quinsey, 1994; Hare, 1991, 1996; Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996). As pointed out by Hare (1996), in institutional settings, little emphasis has been placed upon the psychological constructs that lead to this personality disorder; this being so, if we rely on the criteria and diagnostic tools used in institutional settings where antisocial behaviour is part of the overall assessment, people who have the personality characteristics of the psychopath but have not necessarily developed offending behaviour, can remain undiagnosed.

In 1977, Widom, recognizing the limitations that offender samples had imposed upon psychopathy research, conducted a study into what she termed *successful psychopaths*, that is, individuals who had either committed offences that failed to reach the level for prosecution, or that their skills of deception and manipulation had resulted in them being successful in avoiding the criminal justice system. The study, which aimed to disentangle the attributes relating to antisocial behaviour and those relating to psychopathy, demonstrated that it was possible to recruit males who, although they were psychopaths, lived in the community, and had managed to be fairly successful in avoiding convictions that had resulted in long jail sentences. The utility of Widom's methodology was underlined when Widom and Newman replicated the work in 1985. This later study was again successful in recruiting psychopaths living in the community as participants in laboratory investigations which sought to disentangle the characteristics associated with psychopathy and behaviour associated with criminality. While Widom (1977) and Widom and Newman (1985) do not claim that non-institutionalized psychopaths are crime free, their research did demonstrate that it was the behaviour of the most antisocial individuals in the sample that most closely resembled the behavioural characteristics of an institutionalized sample.

A further study conducted by Seto, Khattar, Lalumiere, and Quinsey (1997) sought to examine whether the manipulation and deception encountered in psychopaths was specific to certain contexts. Forty-seven heterosexual men were recruited from within the community and, following assessment which demonstrated high scorings on psychopathy measurement scales, were assessed for their use of deception in both sexual and non-sexual contexts. The results of this study indicated that the deception found in psychopaths is relatively context independent, with psychopaths being more mendacious in both contexts.

Although we have been contemplating the idea of gaining access to non-incarcerated psychopaths for research purposes for almost 30 years, the lack of reliable assessment tools for this group has seriously harnessed such efforts. Lilienfeld and Andrews (1996) provide a convincing argument for the need to develop assessment tools for use with populations who display the personality traits associated with psychopathy but have not necessarily been involved in the legal transgressions seen in offender populations. To this end, Lilienfeld and Andrews turned their attention to the development of

self-report scales for use with non-incarcerated samples. The Psychopathy Personality Inventory (PPI) (Lilienfeld & Andrews, 1996) has produced encouraging results for researchers wishing to gain insights into the characteristics of community psychopaths, particularly the psychological features of this disorder. However, as the psychopath is acknowledged to be what Karpman (1949) originally described as 'the liar par excellence', and is known to be a thoroughly unreliable informant regarding the account they give of themselves, their own behaviour and events (Hare, 1996), this leads to questions being raised regarding the validity, reliability, or generalizability of questionnaire or interview data generated from a non-incarcerated sample when additional data to support the findings is absent (Kirkman, 2002). It is further proposed by Kirkman (2002) that the methods used for conducting research with incarcerated samples, where there is a high base rate for psychopathy and file data is available to support research findings, cannot be easily modified for use in community settings.

Overall, it would seem that the medical model of research, where assessment and diagnosis of participants is central to the research endeavour, has seemingly to date paid small dividends in terms of helping us to understand the emotional difficulties, that is the Factor 1 items, which are specific to psychopathy rather than traits which are related to criminality. Furthermore, it would seem that the obstacles that have hindered research with non-incarcerated psychopaths and which have led to a dearth of studies being conducted with this particular group, are unlikely to be overcome unless new and alternative methodologies are developed for use in future research programmes.

The work of Meloy (1997) entitled *Violent Attachments*, played a major role in informing the methodology for this present study. Research methods which generate multiple data from key informants and which have provided valuable insights into areas of study such as partner and child abuse were used by Meloy to produce the only case history located of a woman, Pamela, who had a 20-year relationship with a male partner who displayed the personality and behavioural characteristics of the psychopath. Pamela's husband Charles lived a relatively stable life in the community where, over many years, he managed to convince Pamela, her family and his associates, of his trustworthy character. It was only when his deceptive characteristics were exposed by Pamela that Charles's psychopathic tendencies were revealed; he murdered his wife and is now serving a life sentence with no opportunity for parole. Meloy, who acknowledges the limitations of his work as no clinical interview took place with the murdered woman, constructed a most interesting post-mortem psychological evaluation of Pamela. He provided a detailed account of her life with her husband using narrative data (diaries) and accounts of family and friends. A case study was produced which led Meloy to conclude that a woman could spend many years with a psychopathic male and be at considerable risk, without knowing that this is the case.

Taking into account the obstacles that have prevented research into non-incarcerated samples of psychopaths (primarily their unreliability as research subjects) it was the intention of this present study to examine the heterosexual relationships of

males with psychopathic characteristics from a female victim perspective with a sample of women whose experiences had been similar to Pamela (Meloy, 1997). In the same way that research studies into domestic violence and child abuse have enabled us over the last several decades to build up a picture of the characteristics of perpetrators, it seemed reasonable to assume that the female partners of males with psychopathic characteristics could provide valuable insights into what is termed by Reiber and Vetter (1994) 'the psychopathy of everyday life'. It was reasoned that if, from the accounts of victims, it was possible to build up a fairly concise picture of psychopathic interactions and behaviour within this specific context, this would represent a considerable contribution to our knowledge of the emotional difficulties which underpin this condition rather than simply increasing our knowledge of the social problem of criminality. Finding support for this approach, it is useful to consider the assertions of Daisy Shalling (1978), a colleague of Robert Hare, who was instrumental in the development of scales for measuring personality traits associated with psychopathy. She proposed that psychiatric interviews and assessment scales had their limitations and in fact were sometimes 'inappropriate, or at least insufficient' with regard to researching aspects of the psychopaths interpersonal life. She proposed that:

Anamnestic data, life records and direct observations of behaviour, especially of interpersonal interactions, are crucial in this field, since psychopathy refers to recurring patterns of behaviour, and to characteristics of emotional reactivity and interpersonal relations which are difficult to explore in brief interviews. . . . Careful long term observations of real life behaviour are probably the only good basis for assessment in this area. (Shalling, 1978, *Psychopathic Behaviour*, p.95)

To develop the methodology for this present study it was reasoned that as the psychopath has a disturbed emotional life, the heterosexual relationship had the potential to provide a specific and appropriate context within which the affective, interpersonal and behavioural characteristics of non-incarcerated psychopaths could be researched. It was proposed that if the experiences and observations of women who had been involved in relationships with males with psychopathic traits could be explored, this could serve to illuminate our understanding of the manner in which such males manage the heterosexual relationship and the ways in which psychopathic characteristics of the psychopath are manifested in this context.

Only one non-clinical tool was available at the time this research was conducted which had the potential to be used as a screening tool for behaviours and traits related to psychopathy. This was the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999), and as this was the first study to utilize the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999) for generating ratings of males by female partners, it was necessary to obtain the norms for this instrument. Four two-tailed hypotheses were tested to determine whether there were significant differences in the three facet scores and the total score on the Hare P-SCAN of the male partners of 20 women who formed the experimental group, and the last male partners of a randomly selected control group of 100 women in the community.

To identify the manner in which the behavioural and personality characteristics of males, rated by female partners as having the behaviours and traits of the psychopath, were manifested within the context of the heterosexual relationship the following research question was raised: 'What is the nature, (i.e. the fundamental qualities: the essential character) of the heterosexual relationship with a male rated by their partner on the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999) as having most of the affective, interpersonal, and lifestyle characteristics of the psychopath but where:

- (1) the male has lived for an extended period in the community setting;
- (2) physical abuse is not necessarily a feature of the relationship;
- (3) the female is not an accomplice of the male in antisocial or criminal behaviour?'

Methods

Participants

The study group consisted of two groups of participants. The experimental group consisted of 20 female volunteers with a mean age of 48 years and 6 months ($SD = 9.96$) who had been involved in a heterosexual relationship for longer than 6 months with a male who was rated by them on the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999) as having many or most of the affective, interpersonal, and lifestyle characteristics that define the psychopath.

The control group for this study, which was part of a larger investigation, were a random sample of 100 women from the community who were sampled to obtain the distribution of partner scores on the Hare P-SCAN for their last male partner. No additional data was generated from the control group who were sampled purely to obtain the norms for the Hare P-SCAN from a representative sample.

Instruments and procedures

The experimental group

A fictitious character, Jon Lindsay, from a 1997 storyline in the British soap opera *Coronation Street* (Granada Television), was used as a reference point in newspaper advertisements to recruit the experimental group consisting of 20 women who had partnered a man with similar characteristics. Jon Lindsay was portrayed in the soap opera as having the characteristics associated with psychopathy; he led a dual existence, using charm, deception and manipulation to victimize an unsuspecting Deidre Rashid (played by Ann Kirkbride) who was eventually imprisoned on account of her partners' fraudulent activities.

The Jon Lindsay scenario had attracted 18 million viewers for each episode over a period of several months. The large telephone response received at Granada television from women who had been victimized in the same manner as Diedrie Rashid was confirmed by one of the researchers for the programme. Women who had been victimized by a male partner through lying, manipulation, and deception were invited in newspaper advertisements to submit details of their own experiences to the author in writing.

A letter of reply, giving details of the processes of the research, was forwarded to women who had responded to the advertisements. They were invited to complete and return two schedules. The first schedule, the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999), which is a derivative of the PCL-R, is a 90-item observers schedule with a questionnaire format that enables observers such as mental health professionals, the police, private investigators, school counsellors, or social workers to screen for behaviours and traits consistent with psychopathy. The P-SCAN was designed for non-clinical situations and is not a diagnostic tool. The writers state that data can be generated from a variety of sources, including family members, victims and business associates. A total score of 30 or over falls in the high range of scores and is significant in that this indicates that the person being profiled may have many or most of the features that define psychopathy. Such a score, the writers state, should be 'a cause for concern' to the user, and referral to specialist agencies is recommended. It was reasoned that women who had been involved in a heterosexual relationship would be in an ideal position to report accurately on the characteristics of their partner using this particular screening tool.

The second schedule, developed specifically for this study was the Participant Screening Questionnaire. This contained 13 fixed-choice questions and was used to (a) provide data about the characteristics of respondents, for example, age, employment status, occupational and educational background, and (b) details of the relationship with the male partner, for example the woman's marital status at the time of the first meeting, the length of time the relationship had lasted and when the relationship with the male partner had terminated. Details of the woman's mental health status were also requested. This screening process was designed to collect demographic data and also designed to eliminate women from the study where (i) the woman had a drug/alcohol problem, (ii) there was evidence that the woman had serious mental health problems, (iii) the woman stated she was undergoing therapy, or (iv) she provided details of her hospital admission record that indicated she was emotionally distressed. Women who fall into one of those groups could be considered to be vulnerable and not competent to give informed consent (Polit & Hungler, 1991).

Thirty-nine replies were received in response to the advertisements placed to recruit participants to take part in the research. Five respondents were eliminated during the initial screening process, including two males who stated that they had been 'cheated' by female partners' and one male whose female 80-year-old relative had been the victim of robbery by a 'con-man'; two female respondents were also eliminated as the content of their letters indicated they were suffering from mental health problems.

There were four non-respondents, that is, they failed to return the screening schedules. Two women were eliminated from the study through the screening process as they were undergoing therapy, and one woman was eliminated as the relationship she had written about was not a heterosexual relationship. A further five women were eliminated as they had partnered males whose total score on the Hare P-SCAN fell below 30 (the cut-off point used for this study). Two women had partnered males whose score did reach this level, but they declined to take part in an interview.

Following screening through the Participant Screening Questionnaire, a telephone interview was conducted to establish personal contact with women eligible to be included in the study and to further validate the written details they had provided regarding their partner. Appointments were made to conduct face-to-face interviews with a sample of 20 women where (a) the total score on the Hare P-SCAN indicated that the traits and behaviours encountered in their partner were consistent with psychopathy, (b) they were eligible for inclusion in the study, and (c) had stated their willingness to take part in a face-to-face interview.

At the interviews, women were asked to give an in-depth account of their experiences within the relationship from the time of the first meeting with their male partners. A co-researcher took notes.

The control group

As no norms were available for the Hare P-SCAN, a random sample of 100 women, recruited as they shopped in the shopping precincts of three north-west towns were invited to complete and return the Hare P-SCAN in relation to their last male partner. The first 100 completed schedules received at the University provided data from which the norms were calculated for the three facet scores and the total score of the P-SCAN.

Data handling and statistical analysis

The questionnaire format of the Hare P-SCAN required respondents to rate whether each of the 30 items on each of the three facets, that is, the interpersonal facet, the affective facet and the lifestyle facet, applied to their partner using the scale 0 = *item does not apply*, 1 = *item applies somewhat*, 2 = *item definitely applies* or ? = *insufficient information*.

In accordance with the instructions, the scores achieved from the three parts to the P-SCAN (30 items each) were totalled and divided by three to produce the P-SCAN total scores for both groups. This data enabled the four scores, (the three facet scores and the total scores) to be plotted on graphs, allowing the scores to be interpreted in accordance with the guidelines. Scores on the graphs range from 0 to 58 and the graph indicates whether the three facet scores or the total psychopathy score achieved by the person being profiled fall within the very low, low, moderate, high or very high range.

SPSS was used to conduct the independent samples *t* tests which set out to test the four two-tailed hypotheses.

The data provided on the Participants Screening Questionnaire was analysed by calculating the number of women who had placed a response in each separate category box. The narrative data generated from the women's original letters and the semi-structured interviews was subjected to theory-led thematic analysis (Hayes, 1997). In this type of analysis, theory is used throughout to drive research questions and predictions, to inform the data collection process, and to structure the qualitative analysis (Hayes, 1997).

The themes of the analysis were established on the basis of:

- the theoretical background to the research on psychopathy;
- the research relating to women in abusive relationships in general, and
- the limited research conducted specifically on the female victims of male psychopaths, as outlined by Meloy (1997).

A theme was only included in this study if the experience was recorded by at least 10 (50%) of the women who formed the experimental group. The scholarship of researcher's Lecovin and Penfold (1996), in their study on 'the emotionally abused woman', was used to inform the decision to use the 50% figure to determine whether an item constituted a theme. Typewritten scripts were generated from the notes taken at the time of interview. Each transcript was read several times to identify commonalities and variance in the women's experience; as similar patterns, meanings and experiences emerged in the data, colour coding was utilized to organize statements made by the women into themes.

Ethical issues

The study was prepared in accordance with the guidelines of The British Psychological Society: Ethical principles for conducting research with human participants (revised) (1993) and The Statement of Ethical Practice of the British Sociological Association (1991). Informed consent was obtained and anonymity of the 20 women who formed the experimental group was achieved by the use of pseudonyms and alterations of specific details which could inadvertently reveal the identity of participants. The 100 women in the community who completed and returned the Hare P-SCAN completed the schedule anonymously.

Results

The participant screening questionnaire

The 20 women in the experimental group provided the following information:

Age of participants: The mean age of participants was 48 years and 6 months ($SD = 9.96$) One participant was aged between 20 and 30 years, three were between 31 and 40 years, eight were between 41 and 50 years, seven were between 51 and 60 years, and one was over the age of 61 years.

Present employment status: Thirteen of the women interviewed were in full time employment, one was a full time student, and two were self-employed. Two women were home-makers and two were unemployed.

Occupational background: The women in the experimental group had diverse occupational backgrounds. Six women had been employed in clerical/administrative work, three had been retail/shop assistants, and three were teachers. One woman was a telephone operator, two described themselves as industrial/manual workers, four were health care assistants and one was a catering manageress.

Education: Seven women had received higher education, six women had attended college and two women had obtained a vocational qualification. The remaining five women were educated to secondary school level.

Status of the woman at the time of meeting her partner: Five of the women were divorced or separated from their husband at the time of meeting their new partner. Three had broken up from a previous boyfriend, two were unhappily married at the time of the first meeting, one was widowed and nine were single. Those nine women had not been involved in any previous serious relationship.

Length of time the relationship lasted: The relationships lasted between 10 months and 30 years. The mean length of time the relationship lasted was 14.7 years.

Time elapsed since the relationship ended: Five of the relationships had terminated between 6 months and 1 year ago, six had ended between 1 and 3 years ago and a further five had ended between 4 and 10 years ago. A longer period had elapsed since the remaining four relationships had terminated, with two having ended between 11 and 20 years ago and two having ended over 20 years ago.

Impact on health: 100% of the women stated they felt their experiences in the relationship had impacted upon their health. Only two of the sample stated that they had 'trouble with nerves' before the relationship commenced, while 14 women stated that they had suffered trouble with nerves in the last 2 years, and six continued to take antidepressant medication. None of the women suffered problems concerning drink or drugs and none were undergoing therapy at the time of interview.

The Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999)

All 90 items (i.e. 30 items on each of the three facets of psychopathy, interpersonal, affective, and lifestyle) were scored by the random sample of 100 women, producing a full data set. The validity of the data was not compromised by insufficient information being scored for more than five items on any facet or 15 items overall (Hare & Herve, 1999).

The mean score produced on the interpersonal facet for this community sample was 13.67 ($SD = 9.80$, $N = 100$). The mean score for the affective facet was 9.14 ($SD = 9.94$, $N = 100$) and for the lifestyle facet was 5.33 ($SD = 4.88$, $N = 100$). All scores for the three facets fall within the very low range of scores.

The mean total score calculated from the ratings given by the control group was 9.58 ($SD = 9.38$, $N = 100$), which falls within the very low range of scores.

Seventy percent of the total scores for the 100 males fell within the very low range; a further 20% fell within the low range, eight within the moderate range, and two within the very high range.

All 90 items (i.e. 30 items on each of the three facets of psychopathy) were scored by each of the 20 women who formed the experimental group, producing a full data set. As expected, the intimacy of the relationship the women had had with their partners enabled them to make judgments about the vast majority of items, validity was not

compromised and items which failed to produce a score on account of insufficient information was low (mean = 3.5 items, $N = 20$).

From the ratings given by the 20 women who formed the experimental group the mean scores on the three facets of psychopathy were calculated. The mean score for the interpersonal facet was 45.30 ($SD = 10.68$, $N = 20$). The mean score for the affective facet was 43.05 ($SD = 8.85$, $N = 20$), and for the lifestyle facet, 33.10 ($SD = 12.65$, $N = 20$). The scores for all three facets fell within the very high range of scores. The mean total score calculated from the ratings given by the experimental group for their male partner was 40.45 ($SD = 8.60$, $N = 20$) which falls in the high range of scores.

Four independent sample t tests were conducted to test the hypotheses that significant differences would occur between the norms for the three facets scores and the total P-SCAN scores of the partners of women who formed the experimental group. The results of the t tests showed that statistically significant differences occurred on the scorings generated by the experimental and control group on the interpersonal facet ($t = 12.98$, $p \leq .000$, $df = 118$), on the affective facet ($t = 14.14$, $p \leq .000$, $df = 118$) and on the lifestyle facet ($t = 16.75$, $p \leq .000$, $df \leq 119$). Statistically significant differences also occurred between the total scores for both groups ($t = 13.60$, $p \leq .000$, $df = 118$). In all instances, scorings for the experimental group were higher than for the control group.

Although, as expected, the mean total score and the mean of the three facet scores for partners of the experimental group were considerably higher than those achieved for the community sample, the pattern of the scores generated for both groups was the same. The interpersonal facet score produced the highest contribution to the total score for both groups, and the lifestyle facet score produced the lowest scores for both groups.

The biographical data

Women in the experimental group stated in their letters that they were able to identify with the soap opera scenario outlined in the original advertisements. Letters received from the 20 women who formed the experimental group were subjected to theory-led thematic analysis (Hayes, 1997). Three main themes emerged from this data. The first theme related to the superficial charm and good intelligence of the male partner. Those characteristics were reported upon consistently throughout the biographical data, with charm being a characteristic that originally made the male attractive to the woman. Superficial charm and good intelligence were also cited as tools used by the male to convince the woman, her associates, family and friends that he was trustworthy.

Theme 2 was identified as pathological lying. One hundred percent of respondents reported this trait. Lying occurred in all contexts throughout the term of the relationships. Women reported that partners frequently used aliases, and false details were given to them regarding the male's home address, marital status, employment, and financial status. Fraud, conning and stealing, facilitated by lying, were given particular

mention by respondents. Lying also occurred regarding the male's involvement with other women during the course of the relationship. Some males were involved in many relationships at the same time and some respondents were themselves an extra marital affair without knowing that this was the case. Perhaps the most significant comments came from a woman who lived with a partner for 10 years while he successfully led a dual existence. She stated, 'I wonder now who I had been living with for 10 years. The man I fell in love with did not even exist'.

Theme 3 was identified as the antisocial pursuit of power. Women reported that the men gained power over them by a variety of controlling behaviours. Eight respondents stated that domestic violence had played a part in their relationship, with two women linking this to the males' alcohol abuse. The majority of the women stated they had been subjected to psychologically abusive behaviours which included imprisoning them, putting locks on bedroom doors, hiding food from the children, refusing them access to money, and destroying their belongings.

Interview data

Fifteen women were interviewed in their own homes and five women were interviewed at the University in a private room. The women were asked to give an account of the relationship with the man they had written about in their letters, starting at the first time of the meeting. Theory-led thematic analysis (Hayes, 1997) was carried out and 23 themes were identified in the 20 scripts. Again, an item was only considered to be a theme if at least half of the experimental group (10 women) made reference to this item.

The nature, (that is the fundamental qualities, the essential characteristics) of the heterosexual relationship with male partners rated as having many or most of the characteristics associated with psychopathy, appears to have eight constituent elements as follows:

Talking the woman into victimization: 100% of the women stated that they were 'talked' into victimization with facile charm and glibness being used to facilitate this. The pace at which the relationships progressed and became firmly established was a constantly recurring theme, with many of the women living with the male or married to him (at his insistence) within weeks of the first meeting. Deception and talking the woman into victimization, an intentional action on the part of the male and a feature of all of the relationships, seems to produce the correct climate for the abuse and victimization of the female partner which occurs in this context.

Lying: All women reported in the interviews that lying was manifested in all contexts of the relationships. This was often of an intricate or bizarre nature. False identities, connected with uniforms and/or power, were created by a number of male partners. These included an officer in the Grenadier Guards, a member of the S.A.S., a member of the Special Branch, a Vietnam veteran, a fireman, and a senior officer on board ferries. Two further males, who claimed to be an accountant and a travelling salesman, respectively, created false non-uniformed occupations. Overall, 12 males were impostors,

and one further male used aliases on occasions. It was against this backdrop of deception, manipulation and lying that the remainder of the abusive behaviours took place.

Economic abuse: A variety of behaviours occurred across the sample that represented economic abuse. Seventy-five percent of male partners lived a parasitic lifestyle, that is, they used the woman's home and money for their daily living, persuaded the woman to make expensive purchases for the male's use from her own capital or raise finance for his benefit. Twelve males failed to take or retain useful employment. Some male partners used the woman's name and bank account details to obtain goods and services of which she had no knowledge and the woman's physical resources were further reduced in relationships where the male stole money and/or goods from her, sold her property without her permission, or created situations where the woman was forced to replace money that the male had fraudulently misappropriated.

Emotional abuse and psychological torture: The following behaviours were reported upon by the 20 women in the experimental group, which have been placed under the category heading of *Emotional abuse and psychological torture*:

- (1) Taunting her with accounts of sex with other women;
- (2) Making rules and instituting punishment;
- (3) Publicly humiliating, criticizing and ridiculing her;
- (4) Timing and checking her;
- (5) Threatening to physically injure her or her child;
- (6) Threatening to abandon her;
- (7) Threatening to damage treasured possessions or actually damaging them;
- (8) Convincing her she was insane;
- (9) Controlling her eating/sleeping;
- (10) Invading her privacy;
- (11) Character assassination;
- (12) Emotional withholding;
- (13) Sexual harassment.

The abusive behaviours were of an extreme nature. For example timing and checking for four of the women incorporated being forced to raise their clothes before they left the house in case the colour of their underwear revealed in some way that they were involved in prostitution. The interviews revealed that rather than recalling the events that occurred in the relationships as upsetting or distressing, women recalled the male's behaviour as producing a climate of fear that served to terrify them.

Multiple infidelities: Multiple infidelities were encountered across the sample. Although only 20 women were interviewed, the 20 male partners were involved with over 100 women during the course of the relationship with some males being involved with many women at the same time. One woman in the sample located six women, all of whom were having a relationship with her husband and all of whom believed that they were his sole partner. A large number of affairs took place with the woman's closest friends, her relatives and colleagues, or with women who lived only a short distance away.

Isolation and coercion: Seventy-five percent of the women in the sample were subjected to behaviours which resulted in them becoming isolated.

This included:

- (1) Damaging the woman's relationships with family or friends and actively preventing her from communicating with or seeing other people;
- (2) Insisting that the couple lived in an unfamiliar place where the woman had little or no contact with her friends and family;
- (3) Limiting her access to the outside world by force.

Perhaps the most alarming and abusive form of isolation was the manner in which some women had their access to the outside world limited by force. Four of the women in the sample were virtually imprisoned by male partners. Two women were locked in the house, one for several months, and one woman was consistently refused permission to leave the house; her husband eventually nailed all the windows down.

Physical assault, sexual assault, and rape: Physical assault was reported by 40% of the women in the sample at the time of interview. The assaults perpetrated against the women included hitting, punching, beating, and torturing. Physical assaults that took place seemed to occur without warning on the flimsiest of pretexts for perceived or, in many cases, manufactured transgressions. Three women in the group experienced sexual assault. Those three women were also the victims of domestic violence of a serious nature, two of whom were subjected to physical torture and one of whom was repeatedly raped if she refused to have sex with her husband every night. One woman had petrol poured around her on more than one occasion as her husband hovered over her with a match before raping her.

Using children and ill-treating children: Ill-treatment in the form of emotional abuse was reported across the sample as being directed at children of all ages. This included:

- (1) Lying to them;
- (2) Ignoring them;
- (3) Failing to provide for them;
- (4) Bullying and terrifying them;
- (5) Breaking promises to them;
- (6) Destroying their toys.

Although no physical or sexual abuse of children was reported by the women, they were used as pawns to victimize their mother. Children born to these women, and the male's children by other women, were subjected to a variety of abusive behaviours by the male that served to distress them.

Discussion

Although the male partners were not assessed, it became evident while conducting this study that there are males living amongst us who have the characteristics associated

with psychopathy. They possess highly developed skills that enable them to victimize others to fulfil their need for pathological stimulation seeking (Quay, 1965). It has also become evident that there are women in the community who are unwittingly manipulated into welcoming those men into their lives as love objects, and in doing so, pave the way for years of their own emotional upheaval and distress. In the same way as Meloy (1997) (having pointed out that without clinical evaluation, he was not rendering a diagnosis of the males he wrote about), the author shall allow the reader to judge the degree of psychopathy encountered in the men.

One overriding conclusion can be drawn from this study; although the males lived for long periods in the community setting, they were certainly not crime free. They did though, in the main, manage to avoid prosecution with alarming success. It is useful also to note that the vast majority of their crimes were fraud-like offences, which are given particular mention by Cleckley (1982) as being a feature of the crimes committed by psychopaths.

What is particularly interesting about the accounts given by the female respondents regarding their experiences within their relationships, is the striking similarities occurring between those accounts. The author would propose that those similarities cannot be dismissed as pure coincidence; male partners did not only manifest extremely similar behavioural patterns, in many cases women who were unknown to ourselves, and unknown to each other, reported that they made the same utterances. It is worth underlining at this point that although the interactions and behaviours which occurred within the relationships were, from a normal standpoint, quite bizarre, there was no suggestion made by any of the women in the experimental group that the male partners had any underlying delusional or hallucinatory state to indicate they were suffering from a psychotic disorder.

While there are some commonalities between the behaviours previously identified as occurring in bad and stressful relationships (Marshall, 1996), and those encountered in the heterosexual relationship with a psychopathic male, several behaviours, for example, deception and talking the woman into victimization, multiple infidelities, and parasitic lifestyle seem to be specific to the latter. It is interesting to note that the deceptive nature of male partners, their failure to sustain a monogamous relationship with a sexual partner, and their parasitic lifestyle (all of which were reported upon by the women who formed the experimental group) are traits of psychopathy which are incorporated into the diagnostic tools used for clinical assessment of this disorder (Hare, PCL-R 1991, 2003).

There can be no doubt that the Hare P-SCAN (Hare & Herve, 1999), being a derivative of the PCL-R, while not widely validated, made a useful and worthy contribution to this study. It must be noted that since this study was carried out, a second research version of this instrument has been developed: the Hare P-SCAN RV2 (Hare & Hare, 2003). This is a 120-item checklist which has four, rather than three facets: interpersonal, affective, lifestyle, and antisocial. The purpose and usage of this instrument remains unchanged.

One of the strengths of this study was that the innovative approach taken to recruit the sample allowed data to be generated on a previously inaccessible group; it allowed psychopathic traits to be placed under scrutiny within a specific and naturally occurring context, that is, the heterosexual relationship in a community setting, rather than being examined in a manufactured environment such as laboratories and forensic establishments where clinicians lead the research endeavour. Five women interviewed had a friend or relative present during part or the entire interview and a sixth woman spoke to her daughter on the telephone during interview. Some respondents volunteered their personal effects, for example photographs, newspaper cuttings and letters written by their general practitioner, to provide further verification of their verbal accounts of events; their main concern seemed to relate to being believed.

An obvious flaw in the process is that the soap opera scenario, which provided a frame of reference to attract respondents, may have been self-limiting. The advertisement contained details about a male character in a British soap opera who had presented himself in a false uniformed occupation. Women whose partners had similar traits to this male character but did not have a uniformed occupation may have failed to identify with the details given in the advertisement. The fact that 19 of the 20 women in the experimental group were from the white, indigenous population could also be viewed as a further limitation of the work.

Most studies that use volunteers as samples attract participants who are relatively well educated (Marshall, 1996). As expected therefore, the women who responded to advertisements for participants and completed the schedules had received quite a high level of education. The method of recruitment and data collection used in this study carried the possibility of excluding women who had had similar experiences to the experimental group, who could report accurately upon them, but lacked the ability required to record them in written and numerical form. On a positive note however, the interesting demographic data generated from the Participants Screening Questionnaire demonstrated that the women had diverse characteristics that made them a fair representation of the general population of women.

The use of complementary approaches served to strengthen the study in terms of enhancing validity and generalizability and the high levels of triangulated convergence achieved supported the truthfulness of findings (Slevin & Sines, 2000).

As more than one data collection method was used to address the research question, careful scrutiny of data took place to assess convergence of the findings from each method.

This study is the first word to be written on the topic area of the heterosexual relationships of males who displayed the characteristics of the primary psychopath. No doubt it will not be the last and it is likely that this work will represent no more than the gateway to the study of a group of people who have, until now, remained elusive.

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