



Bringing psychopathy into developmental and life-course criminology theories and research

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ABSTRACT

Developmental and life-course criminology (DLC) aims to identify the causes and correlates of offending over the life span, focusing on the within-individual variations that result in criminal and delinquent behavior. While DLC theories have been very successful and increasingly popular in the field of criminology, a key predictor of antisocial and criminal behavior—psychopathy—has been notably absent from the DLC field. In fact, psychopathy is sometimes referred to as the most important construct in the criminal justice system. Many risk factors and personality traits of psychopathy are also similar to those proposed by DLC theories for antisocial and criminal behavior. Therefore, psychopathy may be used in DLC research to help understand the development of offending over the life-course, and improve the ability of current models to predict antisocial and criminal behavior. This article aims to bring psychopathy into DLC research by reviewing the empirical support for psychopathy and 10 major DLC theories, and outlining the specific opportunities for the integration of psychopathy within each theoretical framework. By doing this, we hope to lay the foundation for a new alliance between psychopathy and DLC researchers, and further our understanding of the clear relationship between psychopathic personality, antisocial behavior, and crime.

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Introduction

Psychopathy is a well-known construct to many criminologists, psychologists, criminal justice practitioners, and the public (see e.g., DeLisi, 2009; Farrington, 2005a; Harris, Skilling, & Rice, 2001; Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2011; Lynam, Miller, Vachon, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2009). In the centuries since Pinel's (1801) original description of psychopathy as "insanity without delirium", both the understanding of and empirical support for psychopathy has greatly increased (DeLisi, 2009). More currently, the psychopath has been conceptualized as an individual who shows an overall lack of remorse and empathy for others, does not care or consider what other people think or how his or her actions may affect others, feels little emotion, has low behavioral control, is manipulative, narcissistic, a pathological liar, and fails to accept responsibility for his or her actions (Hare, 2003).

Several instruments have been developed to measure levels of psychopathy and identify psychopathic individuals in the population. Among the most pervasive is Hare's Psychopathy Checklist (PCL) assessments, including the PCL-R (revised), PCL: SV (screening version), and PCL: YV (youth version) (Hare, 2003). The PCL-R is an itemized checklist composed of 20 traits and behaviors believed to represent psychopathic

tendencies, such as low empathy, a conning and manipulative personality, egocentricity, impulsiveness, and low affect, and behavioral elements such as sexual promiscuity, juvenile delinquency, and criminal versatility (Hare, 1991). While the PCL-R has been the subject of considerable research with most studies having indicated support for the validity of the PCL-R and the PCL-YV to predict adult and adolescent criminal behavior and recidivism respectively (Cooke, Michie, Hart, & Hare, 1999; Leistico, Salekin, DeCoster, & Rogers, 2008; Neumann & Hare, 2008), there also have been strong and persistent critiques of Hare's PCL assessments. These critiques have been based on the predictive predominance of antisocial behavior items of the PCL-R, especially the criminal versatility measures, over the affective and interpersonal items (the core dimensions of personality constructs) (see Skeem & Cooke, 2010).

The PCL-R commonly has been used in both risk assessment and the prediction of offending, and, again, much of the predictive validity of the PCL-R and PCL-YV regarding future offending involved only or primarily antisocial items (Corrado, Vincent, Hart, & Cohen, 2004; Salekin, 2008). However, researchers more concerned with explanation than with prediction have argued that any measurement of psychopathic personality should be independent of the measure of antisocial behavior. This differentiation is essential in order to explore theoretically hypothesized causal linkages between this personality construct and serious anti-social behavior, particularly, serious criminality. More recently, the Comprehensive Assessment of Psychopathic Personality (CAPP)

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instrument has been created to address these criticisms of the limitations of PCL based instruments. The CAPP consists of six domains and 32 items that emphasize core personality based psychopathic traits while excluding antisocial or criminal behavior items. The inclusion of the latter items has been the basis of tautological concern of several other psychopathy instruments (see Cooke, Michie, Hart, & Clark, 2004; DeLisi, 2009). In this article we too conceptualize psychopathy using only the personality traits and interpersonal behaviors, and exclude the antisocial and criminal elements despite most research on psychopathy having included them.

While approximately 1% of the general population is estimated to be psychopathic according to Hare's (1991) PCL criteria, research indicated that psychopaths were likely responsible for up to 50% of all violent crime, and that one in four prisoners in the United States were psychopaths (Patrick, 2007; Salekin, Rogers, Ustad, & Sewell, 1998). This extraordinary high prevalence has led some researchers to assert that "psychopathic traits are analogous to career criminality" (Vaughn & DeLisi, 2008, p. 39).

There has been a substantial empirical link established between psychopathy and a variety of antisocial and criminal behaviors, which persisted across community, clinical, and correctional samples, psychiatric, criminal, and professional settings, world culture, gender, age, race, and ethnicity (Brinkley, Schmitt, Smith, & Newman, 2001; Cale & Lilienfeld, 2006; DeLisi, 2009; DeLisi, Dooley, & Beaver, 2007; Frick, Stickley, Dandreaux, Farrell, & Kimonis, 2005; Hare, 1991; Harris, Skilling, et al., 2001; Jones et al., 2011; Neumann, Schmidt, Carter, Embley, & Hare, 2012; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1997; Sullivan & Kosson, 2006; Vaughn & DeLisi, 2008; Vaughn, Newhill, DeLisi, Beaver, & Howard, 2008). Moreover, psychopathy has been identified as one of the strongest individual-level predictors of general offending, age of criminal onset, criminal career length, offending frequency, offense types committed, and time until recidivism (DeLisi, 2009; Vaughn & DeLisi, 2008).

Psychopathy is also one of the strongest predictors of both general and violent offending, even when controlling for factors such as delinquent peers, drug use, prior delinquency, family criminality, family background, socio-economic status, school attendance, intelligence, moral disengagement, self-control, education level, gender, race, and age (Hare, 1998; Salekin, 2008; Vincent, Odgers, McCormick, & Corrado, 2008). Psychopathy, consequently, has been asserted to be the single best predictor of violence and recidivism currently identified in the criminological and psychological fields (Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 1991; Salekin, 2008; Serin & Amos, 1995; Vaughn, Howard, & DeLisi, 2008, p. 408). However, as discussed above, there has been an extensive controversy about whether this relationship is based on the antisocial behavior items in the PCL measurement of psychopathy rather than the core affective and interpersonal items of this instrument. Typically, the PCL Factor 1 scores, which measure the affective/interpersonal features of psychopathy, have been less strongly related to offending than the PCL Factor 2 scores, which measure the irresponsible/antisocial features (e.g. Farrington, 2006). However, Cooke and Michie's (2001) three factor model of psychopathy has, to some extent, helped address this issue by excluding antisocial behavior from the measurement of psychopathy, and studies utilizing this three factor model still suggest that higher levels of psychopathy increase the odds of chronic offending from adolescence through adulthood (see e.g., McCuish, Corrado, Lussier, & Hart, 2014).

Psychopathy and crime

Because of the strong empirical support for the ability of psychopathy to accurately predict a "wide universe of antisocial behaviors occurring in childhood adolescence, and adulthood" (DeLisi, 2009, p. 267), and the sheer number of psychopaths in criminal justice settings, psychopathy often has asserted to be the "most important construct in the criminal justice system" (Hare, 1998, p. 99; Harris,

Skilling, et al., 2001, p. 247). DeLisi (2009), for example, argued further that, of all the constructs emanating from the social, behavioral, and criminological theories and research, psychopathy was best able to explain and integrate a host of verified facts about criminal behavior. He, consequently, proposed that psychopathy should be the basis of any unified theory of crime.

Specifically, DeLisi noted that "psychopathy mirrors the elemental nature and embodies the pejorative essence of antisocial behavior, accommodates dimensional and categorical conceptualizations and examinations of antisocial behavior, and facilitates that study of antisocial phenotypes over the life span" (2009, p. 256). In other words, the core traits of psychopathy are internally consistent and highly similar to the general description of the key predictors in several of most theories of antisocial and criminal behavior. In addition the construct has the theoretical advantage of being conceptualized either as a taxon (i.e. psychopath vs. non-psychopath) or as a dimension (i.e. degrees of psychopathic personality) in predicting and explaining criminal behavior across the life-course. In effect, psychopathy arguably provides a parsimonious and valid theoretical framework for all forms of serious antisocial and criminal behavior. As DeLisi and Vaughn (2008) noted more specifically, there is "a synergy between the violent criminals' personality traits, lifestyle, and observed behavior that dovetails so exquisitely that it is as if their criminality is wrapped up in a box. That box is psychopathy." (p. 164).

Psychopathy and criminological theory

Given that psychopathy is a robust and consistent predictor of key antisocial outcomes and aligns with several fundamental concepts already contained in criminological theories, as we and others have argued previously (Farrington, 2005a; Vaughn & DeLisi, 2008), it is important to incorporate such personality constructs into key criminological theoretical frameworks. While psychopathy was not utilized explicitly in Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) classic general theory of crime (GTC), this personality construct incorporates the central and, essentially, sole explanatory construct of this theory i.e. low self-control (see Vaughn, DeLisi, Beaver, Wright, & Howard, 2007; Wiebe, 2003). The latter construct focuses on the key trait of impulsivity, which is one of the central characteristic themes of psychopathy i.e. psychopaths have been described as individuals who seek immediate gratification, are self-centered, engage in risky, sensation-seeking behaviors, lie and cheat to get what they want, are insensitive, unsympathetic, and uncooperative with others, and do not consider the consequences of their behavior (Cleckley, 1941; Vaughn & DeLisi, 2008; Vaughn et al., 2007). However, regarding self-control construct and predictive validity of the GTC, Vaughn et al. (2007) found that much of the variance accounted for by self control was subsumed by other major psychopathic traits such as narcissism. In effect, was the self-control construct in the GTC simply just a "watered down, less specified form of psychopathy" (DeLisi, 2009, p. 257).

In contrast to the GTC, the developmental and life-course criminological perspective (DLC) explicitly utilized psychopathy (see e.g., Moffitt, 1993; Raine, 1993; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985). For instance, longitudinal research showed that childhood and adolescent psychopathy scores were stronger predictors of adult criminality than levels of aggression, impulsivity, IQ, attention and conduct problems, or even previous offending (Lynam, 1997; Lynam, Miller, et al., 2009). Other studies also suggested a high continuity and stability of psychopathic traits from childhood through adolescence and adulthood (Lynam, Caspi, Moffitt, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2007; Lynam, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2008; Lynam et al., 2009).

In addition, psychopathic personality features were significant predictors of all dimensions of the criminal career, including age of onset, desistance, recidivism, offending severity, type, and frequency (Blackburn & Coid, 1998; Hemphill, Templeman, Wong, & Hare, 1998; Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001; Vaughn & DeLisi, 2008; Walters, 2003). For

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