

# Antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy and media

*Transtorno de personalidade antissocial, psicopatia e mídia*

Alexandre M. Valença<sup>1</sup>

Antisocial personality disorder (APD) is characterized by a behavioral pattern of contempt and disregard for the safety and rights of other people, with no feelings of regret, guilt, remorse or compassion. Usually such characteristics emerge in early adolescence as a behavioral trend with oppositional attitudes to their elders or the existing rules. These individuals are often self-centered and incapable of experiencing grief or feeling of guilt. Given the lack of moral values that permeate their conduct, they present recurrently immoral, socially reprehensible behaviors or violating laws or current regulations<sup>1</sup>.

APD and psychopathy should not be used as synonymous, since they do not refer to the same construct. There are many individuals with APD who do not exhibit criminal behavior. The expression *psychopathy* is often used to classify individuals who present an important tendency towards criminal practice, characterized by a high rate of recidivism, emotional detachment, and violent and antisocial conduct. When individuals with APD develop criminal conduct, often they become counterfeiters, scammers, corrupts and corrupters, etc. (damage against property). Conversely, psychopathic individuals tend to manifest criminal behavior based on the expression of predatory violence typical of homicidal, serial killers, rapists and kidnapers (damage against the person)<sup>2</sup>.

In "Civilization and its Discontents"<sup>3</sup>, Freud presents the human being as a creature driven by powerful instincts of aggression and primitive passions, which lead to actions such as rape and murder, controlled, still imperfectly, by the social institutions and the feelings of guilt. Unconsciously, people exercise their drive for aggression through their fantasy, in a not acting manner. The psychopath exerts this deadly and aggressive guilt-free drive by acting and, is looked by the others with much interest and curiosity, projecting on them his unconscious living. It's like being at the same time terrified and fascinated by this dark side of the human being.

From a contemporary perspective, Simon<sup>4</sup> claims that traits of sadism found in serial killers have their most representative correspondents in individuals who will never commit murder or sadistic sexual crime of any kind. They are respectable people, good mothers, good parents and successful professionals, getting to sublimate their selfishness and aggression, transforming them into empathy to the others.

It is possible that there is a correlation between the social violence portrayed in sensationalist media and the recurrence of violent acts that occur in current society. Sensationalism stimulates

<sup>1</sup> Forensic Psychiatry Program, Institute of Psychiatry, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.

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Address for correspondence: Alexandre M. Valença  
E-mail: avalen@uol.com.br



violence by means of trivialization of the phenomena of crime and because it puts criminals in the spotlight, who became to see themselves as public figures of great projection and prominence in all the mainstream media. These individuals become stars of journalistic headlines and give interviews in front of dozens of TV cameras, microphones and recorders. They feel glorified and “famous” in their egos, with the repercussions in the media of their achievements. Undoubtedly, the images and “news” on topics of violence has expanded greatly, with the proliferation of the general (Internet, cellphones, TV, etc.) and social media.

Sensationalist techniques are the exploitation and manipulation of intense and deliberate emotions of the audience, in general inducing a low level of critical and intellectual reflection about such events. Certainly, the prominent exhibition of the personality of psychopaths is only justified with the objective of preventing any victims or helping the police with its work. After this, the exhibition of such characters serves only to cultivate morbidity among the general public and, what is more dangerous, to foster fantasies of perverse notoriety among other possible psychopaths<sup>5</sup>.

There's a popular myth that the psychopath is “a madman”. In fact, most of these individuals do not present psychotic disorders. From a forensic and legal standpoint, they are not considered mentally ill but as having a mental health disturbance. The legal concept of mental insanity refers to the ability of the individual to know whether his actions are right or wrong and that he has been able to choose them in a conscious and voluntary way. In forensic

psychiatry evaluation, these individuals are most commonly considered criminally responsible, and eventually partially-responsible (when there is loss of determination in the perpetration of the offence)<sup>6</sup>.

In this scenario, the Serial Killer Psychopath is the character that most often appears in the media, representing the social portrait of the classical monster in imaginary folk. Each of these monsters is a recipient of the yearnings and fears driven by culture, and in such way, are a representation of collective psyche of a specific culture. The serial killer is essentially an image of modern, anonymous, mediasaturated society and obsessed with instant celebrity. The choice of victims of serial killers also mirrors social values that unconsciously blacken certain groups, such as prostitutes.

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