



PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY AND DISTORTIONS OF AFFECTIVITY

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Abstract: The dimensional approach to personality allows for a broader understanding of the particular distortions of affectivity in the psychopathic personality. This can only be described in the context of the diversity and ideological and axiological anarchy characteristic of contemporary society in biologically vulnerable subjects. The empathic capacity of the psychopathic personality – viewed from the perspective of its two components, one cognitive and one affective – allows the understanding of the discrepancy between the ability to anticipate the needs and expectation of others in the form of “empathy” used strictly for manipulative purposes.

INTRODUCTION

The definition of the psychopathic personality can only be made in the context of the postmodern contemporary society and corresponding to the individual identity structures assigned to them. Contemporary society cultivates individualistic traits in man so that he is free to choose, but often does so in a selfish sense. Features such as spontaneity, competitive spirit, perseverance and pragmatism are outlined.(1)

In the process of self-determination, the individual tries to impose his will and dominate, always being convinced that this is what he wants to be. Immediate and intense satisfactions are sought. Ephemeral doctrines and idols are accepted, the satisfaction of personal needs becoming the main existential motivation. In relation to those around him, contemporary man has an intense need for subjective recognition, which substantiates his self-esteem.(1,2)

Diversity and ideological and axiological anarchy in contemporary society is always a challenge for an egocentric and fragile Self that lives more for itself and selectively relates to those around it. Personal interests and reasoning can precede feelings, beliefs, and common sense. In such a setting, the vulnerable and biological individual emotionally displays anxious and depressive feelings, superficial emotions and nonchalance along with an emotional detachment from peers.(1,3)

In the existential conditions dominated by conflicts, frustrations, failures, abuse, neglect and failure to meet their own needs and expectations, the tense subjectivity returns to those around them. Thus, dysphonic episodes, impulsivity, lack of empathy, envy and emotional inversion appear. Along with unprocessed cognitive strategies and intolerance of frustration, the emotional ignorance of those around them becomes the support of immorality and antisociality.(3,4,5)

Today the psychopathic personality is considered a variant of extreme severity of the antisocial personality. But it can also be seen as an evil corollary of a diversity of disharmonious personality traits belonging to different

typologies.(1,6)

Psychopathic personality has over half of the defining features common to antisocial personality disorder, predominant being emotional coldness, audacity and disinhibition. The first of these is inherited and maintains the need for dominance and control. This in turn favours pride and a sense of superiority which in the context described accentuates aggression and diminishes empathy.(1,6)

From a dimensional perspective, extroversion and neuroticism, also genetically dominant, have high and low values for the psychopathic personality, partially explaining the audacity and lack of fear as well as ignoring the dangers and the attitudinal disinhibition. The low values of neuroticism correspond to an emotional stability expressed by non-empathic detachment from others, behaviours devoid of anxious and depressive feelings and insensitivity to other's needs and expectations. Increased neuroticism has a correspondence only in the behavioural impulsivity of the psychopath. The increased values of extroversion explain in the same context the emotional superficiality but also the need for strong sensations that maintain a facile hedonism and promote self-esteem. This dimensional profile, which corresponds to a low level of anxiety, substantiates the increased immunity to stress and the social inciseness of the psychopath.(7,8,9)

Also, in the dimensional sense, the very low agreeableness is characteristic of both the antisocial personality and the psychopath. It is expressed through arrogance, cynicism, pragmatism, selfishness, with actions based on a cold logic, lack of empathy that integrates harshness and lack of pity in relation to those around. It associates verbal and physical impulsivity and aggression, as well as lack of scruples when he imposes his point of view as he always does. Focused on his own needs, the psychopath ignores the rights and expectations of those around him, which he manipulates with a domineering and aggressive style that always associates greed but not envy due to the feelings of absolute superiority he has. These facets of agreeableness mainly characterize the distant emotional

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psychopath with increased antisocial and criminal potential. However, they are unapparent or masked in the case of the primary psychopath who is elegant, captivating, seductive, with obvious adaptive abilities.(4,7,9)

In parallel with the antisocial personality also is evident the low level of conscientiousness that maintains low self-control, impulsivity, nonconformism, disorganization and inefficiency at work, low capacities for cooperation and interpersonal solidarity. Inconsistency and irresponsibility also mark psychopathic behaviour. The low values of conscientiousness are also found in the structural deficit of the individual ego expressed by disrespect for social rules and norms, indiscipline, incorrectness, immoral behaviours and the feeling of lack of existential meaning compensated by a self-assigned megalomaniac authority that allows the psychopath to live the laws created by himself. The primary psychopath whose traits are predominantly inherited has a higher level of conscientiousness corresponding to adaptive skills facilitated by the higher level of perseverance, patience, organization, competition and efficiency, diminished values of impulsivity. This psychopathic personality can structure a system of egocentric values that can accentuate its interpretability and envy and can explain the ability to plan hostility and aggression towards the target entourage.(6,7,8,10)

Regarding the dimension of openness, levels can be increased through a frequent shocking nonconformism in interpersonal relationships and in relation to community norms and values. Both the primary psychopath and the emotionally detached one have an openness to action and combativeness which associates egocentrism, lack of empathy and vitiated attachment.(4,7,8)

The affectivity of the personal world is reflected in the increased self-esteem which - as a component of pathological pride - is fragile but is maintained only by manipulating and subduing those around him. The tendency to deceive, manipulate and lie to the people around them causes an evil satisfaction that in turn fuels the belief in one's own superiority and being a stabilizing factor of self-esteem.(1,5)

Unmet emotional needs and attachment deficiencies in the early stages of personogenesis explain egocentrism and flawed emotional relationships with others. Disinterest in the needs of others and their feelings motivates a lack of remorse and gratitude and - also compensating - aggravates the need for intimidation and aggressive exploitation of those around them. This explains the inability to maintain mutual intimate relationships, the collapse of married life and promiscuity. Unable to recognize emotional stimuli, the psychopath is indifferent to the fear, sadness or despair of those around him that he always considers just simple objects that must be sacrificed to satisfy his pride and desires which absolutely dominate him. Despite the suffering caused to those around him, the psychopath ignores - due to egocentrically motivated autobiographical hypomnesia and emotional detachment from others - both the suffering caused and the consequences of his actions that sometimes even impose criminal liability.(3,6,11)

Interpersonal affective communication is based on the ability to mentalize. This presupposes the individual's ability to appreciate the cognitive and affective contents of the interlocutor's psyche. The phenomenon of mentalization as well as empathy from which it is otherwise difficult to differentiate is specific to the human person and has as substrate the mirror neurons in the orbito-frontal cortical area. Comparative studies of groups of psychopathic or non-psychopathic subjects, both with lesions in the prefrontal cortical area, showed poor results in tests corresponding to affective mentalizing.(12,13,14)

In this context, empathy has two components, one cognitive and one emotional, both involving intact mental skills.

From this perspective, psychopathic personalities are not deficient in terms of mentalization, being able to manipulate, confuse, deceive, lie with a lot of versatility. We can say that they, therefore, have empathic abilities because they can understand and anticipate the needs and expectations of those around them, but they treat them with indifference and lack of scruples.(13,15,16)

Psychopaths are unable to detect sadness or fear in the facial expression or attitude of others. Empathic receptivity is developed only to the extent that it can be manipulated. This confirms the presence of the two facets of empathy. The deficit of the affective component of empathy is obvious in this context and becomes a first-rate structural dominant of the psychopathic personality.(17,18,19,20)

CONCLUSIONS

From a moral perspective, psychopathic personalities are unable to assimilate values and are characterized by an inconsistent Superior Self that cannot control the manifestations of the Self. As a result, relationships with others are based on the binomial domination - unconditional submission.

The affective particularities of the psychopathic structures are also motivated, which in the case of both, the primary and the sensitive psychopath, can be masked by the intellectual and cultural level or by particular adaptive abilities. The dynamics of contemporary daily life sometimes play the same role.

The affective nucleus of the psychopathic personality is rounded to the high values of emotional stability that is found both in the hypertrophy of self-esteem and in the low level of anxiety and detachment, self-control and immunity to stress that pathognomonic imprints the psychopathic personality.

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