Investigative Applications for Psychopaths: A Summary

Taken from my work:

1. Johnson, S.A. (2019). Understanding the Violent Personality: Antisocial Personality Disorder, Psychopathy, & Sociopathy Explored. *Forensic Research Criminology International Journal, 7,2, 76–88. DOI: 10.15406/frcij.2019.07.00267*

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➢ Johnson, S.A. (2024b). Victim Questionnaire 2024. Handout on website: www.forensicconsultation.org on the "Handouts" page.

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1. **Always prepare for the interview**. Interviewers should avoid going into interviews cold (Levine, 2022). *The strategic use of evidence* is possible only with preparation. Only through a thorough preparation and understanding of the perpetrator and the perpetrator's history can things appear to fit or not fit the context of the crime.

2. **Complete the criminal history check and obtain the police reports and criminal complaints** for everything in the criminal history check even if no arrest or prosecution occurred. The more that is known about the perpetrator, the more context becomes clearer and the higher the likelihood of verbal slippage (e.g., Blair et al., 2010; Hartwig et al., 2006; Levine, 2022; Reinhard et al., 2011). I found that when I obtained the police report and criminal complaint for prior police contacts and convictions that the perpetrator's offense history and deviant preferences became clearer. This is one of the richest sources of information about the perpetrator that is often ignored. Also, obtaining a copy of the most recent *Presentence Investigation Report* (PSI) if the perpetrator has prior convictions is extremely helpful in understanding the perpetrators history and offers information about how to approach the investigation and interview.

3. **A thorough interview of the victim is essential.** You want to know everything that happened, every verbally threatening statement, every violent behavior, every sexual behavior (e.g., fondling, digital insertion, object insertion, being forced to role play or repeat phrases or words, number of times penetration occurred over the duration of time captive- not an exhaustive list!) I provide a checklist for free of some of the more important questions that often are not asked (see Johnson, 2024b).

4. **The strategic use of unexpected questions is crucial**, and one of the richest sources of information here is the prior criminal behavior and any police contact. The perpetrator is not expecting you to be aware of this information and is not prepared to discuss the past. Unexpected questions increase cognitive load making it more difficult to stay focused on their alibi. If their alibi statements appear plausible or are verifiable, check them (Blair et al., 2018). Again, a complete background check including obtaining the police reports and criminal complaints for all law enforcement contacts and a though interview with the victim is necessary and provides strategic areas for important questions.

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5. ***Pay attention to the perpetrator appearing too calm for the situation and demonstrating minimal if any anxiety or concern for the situation***. This is the most important cue to identify and if it is missed, the investigator may be misled by the perpetrator! The perpetrator's emotional response may appear exaggerated or out of context, usually far too calm, overly cooperative & emotionally detached.

6. ***The suspect of assault, domestic abuse or any sex crime should be approximately as upset as the victim. If not, the perpetrator is likely a psychopath.***

7. ***Remind yourself why you are there***, what initiated the contact. In most circumstances, the initial call for contact involved the perpetrator engaging in abusive behavior yet the perpetrator is more than calm and cooperative with the investigator, which most non-psychopathic abusers are not.

8. Pay attention to the strategies the perpetrator uses to justify their behavior and how ***matter-of-fact*** they appear (*this is what callous-unemotional looks like*).

9. Pay attention to their ***lack of any genuine sense of concern for the victim or for the possible consequences*** they may face. They need to debase their victim and make their victim appear psychologically disturbed but demonstrate no concern for the alleged psychological problems of their "loved one".

10. Go along with their projection of blame onto victim trapping them in their own alibi. If they believe you are buying their story, they will likely add more details and many of the details may appear egregious and contradictory to the facts and victim statement.

11. ***Accuse them of things they did not do and let them correct you***. By doing so, a confession to at least some of the crime will likely emerge (if you know they likely slapped the victim then accuse them of punching the victim). They have a need to correct you.

12. Pay attention to the ***risks*** the perpetrator has taken to abuse and control the victim, the brazenness by which they acted and how unconcerned they are of being caught and questioned.

13. ***For child porn cases, always investigate for contact offenses.*** Look into any contact they may have with children/minors, any position of power/authority they may have had with minors (Shelton et al., 2016). This should also include investigating the neighborhood they live in (e.g., playgrounds, churches, pools, schools) as the offender may hang around those areas watching children or engaging the children in activities. Child porn offenders with no prior sex offense convictions admitted having the most undetected victims, and their ability to remain undetected for so long requires special attention to investigate the offender's life (e.g., Owens et al, 2016).

14. A high percentage of children sexually abused likely never report the sexual contact or may not do so until they are much older, reducing the likelihood of prosecution due to the time lapse (e.g., Smith, et al., 2000).

15. ***Always ask victims if the offender took pictures of them. Also ask specifically if the offender made video of them***. If so, find the pictures and what was used to take the

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pictures or videos (cell phone, camera). The sexual behavior of the child is almost always recorded by the offender for sexual gratification and may also be used to blackmail and threaten the child into continued submission and compliance and secrecy (Briggs et al., 2011; Grosskopf, 2010; Krone, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2007; O'Connell, 2003).

16. ***Child porn offenders are likely to confess to possessing child porn; this is often misleading because by accepting a plea agreement, law enforcement is not likely to investigate for the presence of contact victims*** (Holmes, 1995; Lanning, 2010; McManus et al., 2015; Owens et al., 2016). This is especially true when the offender is very anxious to plead guilty.

17. ***Use of polygraphy during the investigative process yields more admissions of contact victims*** (Bourke & Hernandez, 2009; Bourke et al., 2015; Buschman et al., 2010; Heil & English, 2009; Gannon et al., 2013). It is estimated that likely 62% of child porn only cases would turnout to be contact offenses if polygraph is used (Owens et al., 2016). Again, 40-85% of child porn only offenders self-reported having undetected contact victims (Bourke & Hernandez, 2009; Seto, Hanson, & Babchishin, 2011; Merdian et al., 2018).

18. View any porn collection as a probable ***Practice and Premeditation*** process. *Practice* because the offender uses the porn to strengthen deviant sexual and/or aggressive fantasies and even rehearsing how to re-enact the fantasy in real-life. *Premeditation* because of the planning and fantasizing that occurs prior to initiating contact with the victim, especially when the themes or behaviors depicted in the porn matches the offenders' offense behavior. In addition, pornography is often used by the offender to desensitize children and adolescents before sexually abusing them.

19. ***Perpetrators often hide their homemade porn in their commerical porn collection.***

20. The psychopath's language is less emotionally intense & their grandiosity is evident in their presentations and statements.

21. The psychopath's crimes tend to be carefully planned and the perpetrator carried out the crime while often remaining calm (appearing to the victim as ***cool, calm, meticulous***).

22. ***Pay attention to when the perpetrator appears uncertain about the facts***, provide ***vague*** narrative detail, and when they response with ***frequent pausing, leaning backward, and leaning the head and torso away from interviewers***. Pay attention to ***dysfluencies*** (e.g., "er", "um") as this indicates you are asking about an aspect of the offense they were not prepared for.

23. Psychopathic liars ***present far too many details or present a story that is far too vague*** and impersonal to be believed.

24. Psychopaths demonstrate ***a lack of affect or demonstrate inappropriate affect***. They may appear detached and bored with the interview and may appear unconcerned about the allegations or possible outcome of the interview (e.g., arrest). They appear ***cool and detached***.

25. They attempt to ***change the conversation*** when uncomfortable or not in control of the interview topic.

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