

## You say sociopath, I say psychopath

**Most psychopaths are not serial killers, but most serial killers are psychopaths.**

People often use the terms psychopath and sociopath interchangeably. I've heard a policeman use the term 'sociopath' to describe a gang member who will abide by the rules of the gang but not the rules of larger society. However, in the *Macmillan Dictionary of Psychology* 'sociopath' is described as an outmoded synonym for 'psychopath'. In the *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – DSM-5* - a psychopath is in fact a person with borderline or antisocial personality disorder. However, most people prefer to use the shorthand of 'psychopath'.

If you want to test if someone you know is a psychopath try the following Hare psychopathy test (attached is a warning that the test can't be fully indicative unless carried out by a professional). The test is ranked - 0 = item does not apply, 1 = item applies somewhat, 2 = item definitely applies. The scores are summed to create a rank of zero to 40. Anyone who scores 30 and above is probably a psychopath.

1. Do you have 'excess glibness' or superficial charm?
2. Do you have a grandiose sense of self-worth?
3. Do you have an excessive need for stimulation or proneness to boredom?
4. Are you a pathological liar?
5. Are you conning or manipulative?
6. Do you display a lack of remorse or guilt?
7. Do you have 'shallow affect'?
8. Do you have a 'parasitic lifestyle'?
9. Do you have poor behavioural controls?
10. Do you have a history of promiscuous sexual behaviour?
11. Do you have a history of early behavioural problems?
12. Do you lack realistic long-term goals?
13. Do you have a high level of irresponsibility?
14. Have you had many short-term 'marital' relationships?
15. Do you have a history of juvenile delinquency?
16. Do you display 'criminal versatility'?
17. Do you display callousness, lack of empathy?
18. Do you display impulsivity?
19. Have you revoked conditional release (i.e. break your bond or bail)?

## 20. Are you overly impulsive?

James Lee Burke in *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead* provides a poetic description of a psychopath and the havoc he (most psychopaths are male) can cause in people's lives. "One of those pathological and malformed individuals who ferret their way among us, occasionally for a lifetime, and leave behind a trail of suffering whose severity can only be appreciated by the survivors who futilely seek explanations for their loss the rest of their lives."

There are some well-known psychopathic killers depicted in novels and on the big screen. Some examples are Tom Ripley in the Ripley series by Patricia Highsmith; Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris; Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis; Lou Ford in *The Killer Inside Me* by Jim Thompson; Quentin P in *Zombie* by Joyce Carol Oates; and Kevin in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* by Lionel Shriver. Less well-known are the psychopathic killers portrayed in *The Torment of Others* by Val McDermid; *Lost* and *The Suspect* by Michael Robotham; *The Advent Killer* by Alastair Gunn; *All My Enemies* by Barry Maitland

Arthur Gary Bishop, an American serial killer, said, "For me, seeing pornography was lighting a fuse on a stick of dynamite. I became stimulated and had to gratify my urges or explode. All boys became mere sexual objects. My conscience was desensitized and my sexual appetite entirely controlled my actions."

The reasons why a person becomes a serial killer and their likely victims are outlined in *Ashes to Ashes* by Tami Hoag, "Prostitutes were high risk victims. Easy pickings. Their killers tended to be socially inadequate, under-employed white males who had a history of humiliating experiences with women and sought to get back at the gender by punishing what they considered to be the worst of the lot."

Serial killers usually choose victims at random, but there'll be a unifying thread. Most tend to have a specific focus or obsession and violence increases as they need more of a thrill. They want a more visceral experience. They often have an obsessive compulsive fear of what will happen if they don't do the 'thing'.

Some reference books to help you when you are writing about your serial killer or psychopath are:

- *Talking with Serial Killers* by Christopher Berry-Dee (A series of interviews with American serial killers.

- *The Gates of Janus: Serial Killing and its Analysis* by Ian Brady (Based on correspondence between Colin Wilson and Ian Brady (Moors murderer) and Brady's thoughts about well-known serial killers)
- *The Milat Letters* by Alistair Shipsey (Letters from Ivan Milat to Alistair Shipsey and an analysis by Shipsey)
- *The Ice Man: Confessions of a Mafia Contract Killer*, (240 hrs of interviews in Trenton State Prison. Although a mafia hit man Richard Kuklinski also committed several killings on his own)
- *The Anatomy of Evil* by Michael H Stone
- *Without Conscience* by Robert D Hare (An analysis of psychopathy in society today)
- *A New Century of Sex Killers* by Brian Marriner (Thesis that most sex killers want to be caught. The emergence of a new type of criminal called 'reactive man' – wants what he wants and now! A product of our society)
- *The Criminal Mind* by Katherine Ramsland (A writer's guide to forensic psychology and how to use the information)