CHAPTER 5

Memory for Murder: The Qualities and Credibility of Homicide Narratives by Perpetrators

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine being a juror in a trial concerning the strangulation murder of a woman in her home. Two weeks later, police arrest a suspect who is an acquaintance of the victim. The defendant—a 34-year-old man—was last seen in her company walking along the road to her home. From the time of his arrest, the defendant admitted that he spent the evening with the victim, but that he recalled almost nothing after she made disparaging comments about his family and an argument ensued. He claims to recall nothing after the argument until he read about her murder in the newspaper the next morning. Eyewitness evidence suggests that both the defendant and victim each had consumed two to three drinks earlier in the evening but likely were not
The Qualities and Credibility of Homicide Narratives by Perpetrators

The impact of trauma on memory has been the subject of a longstanding debate, with two main theoretical perspectives emerging. According to the traumatic memory argument (TMA), traumatic events result in memory impairment such that the recollections contain sensory/emootional images but lack a coherent verbal narrative (e.g., Herman, 1992; Kihlstrom, 1986). Conversely, the trauma superiority argument (TSA) asserts that trauma may enhance memory rather than impair it, resulting in vivid and coherent memories (Bernstein, 2001; Porter & Birt, 2001; Shobe & Kihlstrom, 1997). Because each of the witnesses, victims and perpetrators can experience trauma as a result of violent crime, the resolution of this controversy has great forensic relevance.

To date, most research has focused on trauma and memory in victims or witnesses (e.g., Peace & Porter, 2004a; Porter & Birt, 2001; Yuille & Cutshall, 1986) with relatively little attention to perpetrator memory. Based on work with victims and witnesses, there is increasing evidence...
for the validity of the TSA. For example, Terr (1979) investigated the
memories of 26 children, 5-14 years of age, who had been kidnapped on a
school bus, driven around for 11 hours, and then buried underground in a
tractor-trailer. After 27 hours, part of the roof collapsed and the children
dug their way to freedom. These children had intact and detailed mem-
ories of the incident after 13 months (Terr, 1979). In a follow-up study,
Terr (1983) found that the children’s memories for the event remained
detailed four years later. In an investigation of the consistency of memory
over a much longer period, Wagenaar and Groeneweg (1990) compared
the memory reports of 78 World War II concentration camp survivors
from the trial of Marinus De Rijke in the 1980s with statements given
to Nuremberg investigators soon after the war. The survivors’ own
traumatic memories were accurate and detailed despite the passage of
time. Specifically, the accounts of the camp, camp registration numbers,
malignous treatment, daily routine, labour, housing and main guards
were ‘remarkably consistent’ over four decades. Porter and Birt (2001)
asked 305 adults to describe their most traumatic and their most posi-
tive experience. Although the traumatic memories (many concerning
violent crime) were more detailed, both memory types were highly vivid
and coherent. Further, trauma severity did not impair memory quality,
despite a prediction of the TMA. Peace and Porter (2004a) conducted a
prospective study of 59 community participants who had experienced
a recent violent or non-violent trauma. They recalled both the tra-
umatic and another emotional experience in interviews separated by three
months. After three months, traumatic memories remained more vivid
and consistent than other memories (and showed little major alteration
or impairment), lending further support for the TSA. A later analysis by
Peace and Porter (2004b) revealed that traumatic memories involving
criminal victimisation were more consistently recalled over time than
traumatic memories involving serious injuries or illness (Porter & Peace,
2006).

In one of the first field studies addressing eyewitness memory for
a violent crime, Yuille and Cutshall (1986) examined the memories of
13 witnesses four to five months after they had witnessed a murder
and attempted murder. Results indicated that the witnesses’ mem-
ories were accurate, detailed and resistant to the effect of misinformation.
Christianson and Hubinette (1993) examined witnesses’ (victims’
and bystanders’) ability to recall post office robberies. Results indi-
cated that recollections of details (actions, weapon, clothing) four to
fifteen months after the crime were highly consistent with the initial
reports to police. Overall, there is mounting evidence that both victims’
and witnesses’ memories of potentially traumatic events are relatively
accurate for ‘core’ details and can be highly resistant to misinformation
(e.g., Peace & Porter, 2004a; Wagenaar & Groeneweg, 1990; Yuille &
Cutshall, 1986). On the other hand, peripheral details can become
distorted or recalled in less detail due to a narrowing of attention
with emotional stress (e.g., Burke, Heuer & Reisberg, 1992; Porter,
Spencer & Birt, 2003).

Despite this typical pattern, in rare cases, people who experience
violence forget part or all of the experience as a result of the psycholog-
ical trauma. For example, Christianson and Nilsson (1984) reported a
false story of a woman who developed amnesia after an assault and
rape. This individual became extremely upset when taken back to
the scene of the crime, despite that she did not explicitly recall what or
where it had happened. This type of memory impairment is known as
disassociative, functional or psychogenic amnesia. As described in
the DSM-IV (APA, 1994), dissociative amnesia is characterised by an
inability to recall important personal information in the absence of an
organic pathology. In addition, the extent of the memory loss must be
too great to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness. Of the several types
of dissociative amnesia, the most common is localised amnesia (APA,
1994). This type is characterised by an inability to recall events occur-
ring during a circumscribed period of time, which usually includes the
first few hours following the traumatic event. Less common is selec-
tive amnesia, which is the failure to recall some, but not all, of the
events during a circumscribed period of time. In general, dissociative
amnesia can occur at the time of the traumatic experience and last
from minutes to days (Bremner & Marmar, 1998; Schacter, Wang,
Tulving & Friedman, 1998).

Researchers have found that perpetrators of violence frequently
report such memory impairment for their crime (e.g., Kopelman, 1996;
Porter et al., 2001; Schacter, 1996a), far more often than victims or
witnesses. For example, estimates of self-reported amnesia in
murders range from 10% to 70% (Bradford & Smith, 1979; Olma,
Nijman, Merckelbach, Kremer & Hollnack, 2004; Kopelman, 1987; Parwati,
Holcomb & Menninger, 1985; Pyszora, Barker & Kopelman, 2003;
Schacter, 1986a; Schacter, 1986b; Taylor & Kopelman, 1984). Further elaboration of perpetrator amnesia for crime
can be found in Chapters 8 and 9, this volume.

Although claims of memory impairment by perpetrators may be
genuine, other cases of reported perpetrator amnesia are almost
certainly malingering. Perpetrators may make false claims of amnesia
for a variety of reasons including an attempt to raise doubts about
the degree of their involvement in the offence, to gain sympathy from
others involved in the legal proceedings (e.g., judge/jury) or family
members, to avoid having to lie outright about their involvement.
because of physiological arousal due to duping delight (as opposed to the anxiety experienced by other offenders). Studies addressing response to rehabilitation programmes provide indirect evidence for psychopathic deception in the treatment context. Seto and Barbaree (1999) found that offenders in a sex offender treatment programme who had received the most positive evaluations during treatment had high PCL-R scores and subsequently showed the highest re-offence rates. It is likely that psychopaths had ‘put on a good show’ during the programme through the proficient use of deception. On the other hand, given the research described above, Hare (2003) has suggested that while psychopaths may be no more adept than other offenders at deception, they are more likely to use deception than are other offenders. That is, they may simply be more likely to lie whether they are good actors or not. In addition to their greater propensity for lying about their violent crimes, psychopaths also appear to have a profound emotional deficit that could influence the nature of their recall for their crimes. This emotional deficit is manifested as callousness, lack of remorse, lack of empathy and lack of anxiety. Research using a variety of paradigms has established the existence of the emotional deficit originally proposed by Clonkley (1976). For example, research has consistently demonstrated that psychopaths have a deficient startle reflex, considered to be a physiological correlate of both fear and anxiety (e.g., Levenson, Patrick, Bradley & Lang, 2000; Patrick, Bradley & Lang, 1993; Vanman, Mejia, Dawson, Shell & Raine, 2003). Patrick et al. (1993) examined the relationship between startle modification and psychopathy in a sample of 54 incarcerated offenders. While non-psychopaths showed an increase in the startle reflex during the presentation of negative stimuli, psychopaths displayed a similar startle reflex to both positive and negative stimuli. This emotional deficiency extends to the manner in which psychopaths process emotional language and sounds (e.g., Hervé, Hayes & Hare, 2003; Verona, Patrick, Curtin, Bradley & Lang, 2004). For example, Hervé et al. (2003) asked offender participants to sort a number of metaphorical statements on a continuum from very negative to very positive. Results indicated that psychopaths made significantly more sorting errors than non-psychopaths, despite being able to sufficiently understand the literal meaning of the metaphors. Hervé et al. (2003) concluded that psychopaths’ emotional deficit translated to a decreased understanding of the emotional content of language. The results of a recent British study suggest that the emotional deficits observed in psychopaths may even extend to the commission of homicidal violence. Gray, Macculloch, Smith, Morris and Snowden

DECEPTION BY AND MEMORY FUNCTION IN PSYCHOPATHIC PERPETRATORS

One subgroup of murderers who may be particularly prone to providing intentionally altered accounts of their homicides and also recalling them differently from other offenders is criminal psychopaths. Psychopaths, comprising about 15–25% of federally incarcerated inmates in most samples, long have been characterised as perpetrators (see Porter & Woodward, 2006). For example, Clonkley (1976) viewed untruthfulness and insincerity as being important features of the disorder, an observation adopted by Hare (1991, 2003) in his development of the Psychopathy Checklist–Revised (PCL-R, 2003). Emotional factors have been implicated in psychopathic deception; anxiety and guilt are largely missing in the psychopath, facilitating the use of deception (e.g., Ekman, 2002; Lykken 1995). In contrast, some psychopaths may even experience ‘duping delight’ from successfully deceiving others (e.g., Ekman, 1991, 2002; Porter et al., 2001). Despite these clinical observations, only a few empirical studies have addressed deception in psychopaths. Raskin and Hare (1978) examined the ability of incarcerated offenders to lie successfully during a polygraph examination about a mock crime. They found that psychopaths were no more successful at lying than non-psychopaths, perhaps

(Porter et al., 2001; Porter & Yuille, 1995, 1996), or as a legal defence (e.g., insane automatism in Canada). For example, many defendants may claim amnesia to bring into question their criminal intention or mens rea (Swinhert et al., 1999). Unfortunately, it is likely that such deception by perpetrators is often successful within the legal system. Numerous studies have demonstrated that both legal professionals and laypersons are poor at detecting deception, typically performing at around the level of chance (Vrij, 2000) or worse. For example, a sample of 32 Canadian parole officers performed significantly below chance at detecting deception in videotaped speakers (Porter, Woodworth & Birt, 2000). It appeared that a major factor in this poor performance was a reliance on erroneous cues to deception. Although this may come as a surprise to many judges, Justice Roke of the Court of Alberta (1996) recognised the problem and stated (at a 1996 judicial conference) that judges are probably no better than laypersons in judging credibility. Lawyers may be no better at detecting lies. As well-known Canadian criminal lawyer Clayton Ruby observed, ‘We’re terrible. That’s in part because people hear what they want to hear. You want to believe your client’s version of events’ (Dotto, 2004, p. 45).
seemed very dark... darker than usual. Time seemed to slow down. We continued to struggle... down the stairwell... [I] didn't see her face. I could see peripherally... and I had enough coherency... to know I was going down the stairwell... but [there] wasn't anything normal about it. I remember growling... I wasn't actually vocalizing that growl... but I was growing inside my head. I felt like I wasn't inside my head... it was almost as if another part of me was manipulating me I was actually growling inside my head... and I felt like an animal almost. I wasn't aware... I was totally focused on what was in front of me and nothing else mattered. I remember choking her, but I don't remember seeing her face anymore... she wasn't a person anymore. I remember holding my wife while I picked up the knife. I remember picking up the knife over my head, and that's all I remember... from the point where I picked up the knife, it was black. I don't remember stabbing my wife. Apparently I stabbed her all over her body... I stabbed her 14 times.

The above account was given by a homicide offender who participated in a study by Porter and Woodworth (2006b) examining the qualities of the narratives of psychopaths and non-psychopaths concerning their homicides, relative to the official reports. The evaluation of a perpetrator’s credibility or honesty includes an assessment of his/her self-reported description of the crime (Rogers & Cruise, 2000). In fact, the interview in which the perpetrator’s account of the crime is collected is one of the most important evidence gathering tools during an investigation (e.g., Holmberg & Christianson, 2005). Additionally, reactive, spontaneous offences are often accompanied by a relatively light sentence, providing a motivation for some offenders to lie in their crime narratives. Subsequently, the manner in which an accused person discusses his/her crime and what he/she purports to remember about the incident, may have relevance when considering potential treatment and release options (e.g., Byrne, 2003). Considerations of credibility are especially relevant when the defendant is psychopathic. In the clinical literature, psychopaths long have been characterized as having a remarkable disregard for the truth (e.g., Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1998; Meloy, 1988), to the extent that deceit often is regarded as a defining characteristic of the disorder. As described by Porter and Woodworth (2006b), there are several evolutionary, affective and social factors that may contribute to the prodigious use of deception seen among psychopathic individuals (e.g., Porter & Woodworth, 2006b).

Porter and Woodworth (2005) examined potential differences in the self-report and official descriptions of crimes by homicide offenders by using a coding scheme developed to examine the
instrumentality/reactivity of a violent crime (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). This coding scheme was devised as a reliable measure of the level of instrumentality evidenced during a violent act by using a detailed official file-based description. However, this approach served as a foundation for a novel investigation of the credibility of psychopaths' own narratives in describing their criminal behaviour. Specifically, here the scheme was not only used to measure instrumentality from the official description, but to examine the instrumentality evidenced in the offender's own description. We hypothesized that psychopaths would be more likely than other offenders to ‘re-frame’ the level of instrumentality that had been involved, in terms of minimizing the degree of premeditation and exaggerating the victim’s role in, and the spontaneity of, the offense. We also focused on another strategy that offenders may use to avoid acknowledging criminal culpability - leaving out key details of a crime, often referred to as ‘deception by omission’ (e.g., Ekman, 2002). It was predicted that psychopaths would be more likely than non-psychopaths to omit or alter the facts of their offense. For example, they may minimize or be reluctant to discuss sexual elements of the homicide (Warren, Hazelwood & Dietz, 1996). On the other hand, it is possible that psychopaths would be more likely than non-psychopaths to callously boast about their involvement in the offense, even to the point of exaggerating its instrumentality. Since all offenders in the sample had already been convicted (and were describing the offense in a confidential research interview), they would have little to gain by exaggerating the reactivity of the homicide.

The sample consisted of 50 convicted homicide offenders who were incarcerated in one of three correctional institutions in Atlantic Canada. Based on the above methodology, Porter and Woodworth (2006b) were able to compare the official and self-reported descriptions to investigate whether psychopaths were actually more likely than non-psychopaths to minimize the instrumentality (i.e., exaggerate the reactivity) of their crimes in a self-exculpating fashion. The results replicated previous research by Woodworth and Porter (2002) indicating that psychopaths were more likely to have committed instrumental (premeditated, goal-driven) homicides. However, this instrumentality difference disappeared when the offenders' narratives were examined. Psychopaths exaggerated the reactivity of their violence to the extent that it appeared as reactive as the violence carried out by non-psychopaths. That is, psychopaths were more likely than other offenders to ‘re-frame’ the level of instrumentality that had been involved, in terms of minimizing the degree of planning/predetermination and exaggerating the victim's role in, and the spontaneity of, the offense. Although some non-psychopaths also exaggerated the reactivity of their offence, it was not to the same extent as the psychopathic offenders. Additionally, results revealed that the tendency to exaggerate the reactivity of the homicides was strongly related to the Factor 1 score on the PCL-R (Hare, 2003) that considers the interpersonal and affective characteristics of psychopathy (e.g., shallow affect and lack of guilt). Such limited affect appeared to be related to the psychopathic offender to discuss his homicide offence with cold disregard for the victim (casting blame for the crime on the deceased individual). As mentioned above, we also examined whether psychopaths were more likely to omit major details of the crime in their narratives. Such details were defined as any information that was crucial to understanding what occurred during the homicide (e.g., location, weapon use, sexual elements, extent of the violence, etc.). Results also indicated that psychopaths were more likely to omit major details of the offence. In summary, although murderers in general tend to exaggerate the reactivity or emotional intensity of the murder context, the pattern is stronger for psychopaths who also omit significant details or information from their stories. The applied implications for this research include highlighting the need to consider the concordance of the instrumentality of the official report and perpetrator's self-report as a credibility assessment technique. A professional involved in interviews with suspects would certainly want to be aware of the need for increased scrutiny if they are obtaining the self-report of a psychopathic defendant. While the deceptive nature of psychopaths has long been acknowledged, Porter and Woodworth’s (2006) findings suggest that psychopaths may try to stay from the truth in a subtle but self-serving manner. The above results might be useful in the offender treatment context. For example, an increasing concordance between the instrumentality of the official crime report and offender's report during treatment could be viewed as the offender's increased acceptance of responsibility for his/her crime.

The Qualities of Perpetrators' Memories for Homicide

Given the affective deficit associated with psychopathy (described previously), it seems unlikely that psychopathic murderers would experience memory impairment of a dissociative or psychogenic origin (see Porter et al., 2001). As such, Woodworth, Porter, Cook, and Patenaude (2005) examined whether psychopathic murderers would be less likely to report experiences of amnesia or dissociation than non-psychopathic homicide offenders. The sample consisted of the same 50 homicide offenders from the credibility study discussed earlier. The authors
were interested in examining whether the offenders would report any type of memory impairment before, during, or after their homicide offence. For coding purposes, 'before' and 'after' referred to events that did not include the actual murder, but were still considered to be an integral part of the homicide event. Memory impairment was classified into different categories considering the severity and type reported. These included 'partial' or 'patchy' amnesia, 'circumscribed' amnesia referring to a discrete period of complete forgetting within the homicide event, and generalised amnesia referring to a global amnesia including the entire homicide event. Dissociation was recorded if the offender reported any altered state of consciousness before, during, or after the homicide. Dissociation was further classified as either 'depersonalisation' or 'derealisation'. Depersonalisation was recorded if the offender reported a sense of detachment from himself/herself (e.g., one offender reported feeling as though he were a robot), another example would be a report of feeling detached from himself and watching events unfold from a different vantage point in the room). Derealisation was recorded if the offender reported that the environment felt unreal, surreal, or dreamlike.

Our results demonstrated that nearly half (45.7%) of the murderers reported experiencing some type of memory impairment. Specifically, 23.9% of the offenders reported experiencing partial amnesia, 10.9% of the offenders reported circumscribed amnesia, and 10.9% of the offenders reported experiencing generalised amnesia. Further, 20.4% of the offenders reported a dissociative experience during the homicide. Specifically, 15.2% of the offenders reported an experience consistent with depersonalisation, 2.2% of the offenders reported an experience consistent with derealisation, and 13.0% of the offenders reported an experience consistent with both depersonalisation and derealisation. The mean score on the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES; Bernstein & Putnam, 1988) was 17.4. Seven (15.5%) offenders scored above the suggested clinical cut-off of 30 for the presence of potential dissociative disorder. Offenders who were experiencing a high level of dissociative symptomology exhibited less vivid and poorer memories for the homicide than other offenders. Dissociation also was positively correlated with periods of not remembering the event (r = .36) and the memory changing over time (r = .34).

Considering the possible role of psychopathy in the memory reports, 32.3% of the psychopathic offenders reported experiencing some type of memory impairment, compared to nearly half (48.6%) of the non-psychopathic offenders. Further only 11.1% of the psychopathic offenders reported experiencing some type of dissociative state in association with their offence, compared to 35.1% of the non-psychopathic offenders. However, these differences were non-significant, likely due to the small sample size. For example, the finding that 11.1% of the psychopaths experienced some type of dissociation means that only one of the nine psychopaths reported such an experience. Future studies with larger samples should be conducted to investigate whether such trends reflect true differences.

The results of the Porter and Woodworth (2006) paper showed that psychopaths had committed significantly more instrumental offences. Research has demonstrated that the majority of offenders who report amnesia for criminal behaviour have committed non-premeditated murders (e.g., Kopelman, 1980; Taylor & Kopelman, 1984). In contrast, anecdotal evidence suggests that offenders who plan and premeditate their offence(s) tend to remember them vividly. As such, psychopaths may have superior memories for their violent crimes, as they are more likely to premeditate and fantasize about their crimes (see Porter et al., 2001).

Another line of research that would be useful in revealing the role of psychopathy in offender memory impairment could focus on secondary versus primary psychopathy. Primary, or fundamental, psychopathy is believed to largely stem from a polygenic or biological predisposition that hinders the development of affective bonds, and reflects the core underlying, innate deficit of the psychopathic personality. Alternatively, secondary psychopathy is thought to result largely from environmental factors in childhood. According to Porter (1996), secondary psychopaths have a capacity for empathetic responding, but it is 'burned off' with repeated disillusionsment of the child through physical or sexual abuse or other mistreatments. Porter (1996) argued that a child who develops secondary psychopathy was born with the capacity to form a normal human affect, unlike a child with primary or fundamental psychopathy, who does not have this capacity as a result of their genetic predisposition. With secondary psychopathy, the profound affective deficit may result from an ability to detach oneself from their emotions as opposed to an inability to experience their emotions, as seen with fundamental psychopathy. In other words, it is not that the secondary psychopath cannot experience emotion, but rather that they would employ dissociative techniques during traumatic or psychologically difficult situations to avoid extreme emotional arousal. Poythress and Skeem (2006) explored Porter's hypothesis using a sample of 521 prison inmates. They tested whether dissociation symptoms mediated the relationship between child abuse and PCL-R scores. Child abuse correlated positively and directly to psychopathy and dissociation partially mediated the relationship. It would be useful to conduct future research investigating whether secondary psychopaths are more
to the murder. However, all three confessions were determined to be false; DNA evidence established that the actual murderer was Kenneth Patton. Two of the three individuals who falsely confessed recounted detailed versions of how Exner was murdered that were inconsistent with the actual cause of death, while the third individual was unable to remember committing the offence (even though he ‘confessed’ to the murder of Exner; see Wrightman & Porter, 2006). Interviewed for the CBC documentary (Disclosure, 2003, January 28), Joel Labadie later stated: ‘I’m not even sure how to explain it, ‘cause I’m not sure how it happened to me. All I know is for hours on end I said “No, I had nothing to do with it.” Next thing you know I’m sitting here going “Sure, why not? I did it.” More or less its [sic] like they kill your spirit or something’.

Given their highly selfish orientation, it may seem very unlikely that psychopaths would ever falsely confess to a crime. However, there are many cases to contradict this prediction. We believe that of the three main types of false confessions that have been identified (voluntary, compliant and internalised false confessions; Kassin, 1997; Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004), psychopathic offenders are most likely to provide voluntary false confessions, and only when they are highly self-serving. For example, Henry Lee Lucas – a ‘textbook psychopath’ – became known as America’s most prolific serial killer after a string of homicide confessions following his arrest in 1983. However, this claim since has been hotly contested after it was shown that numerous (perhaps hundreds) of his confessions clearly were implausible. He later recounted many of his confessions admitting that he wanted to improve his living conditions (he was, in fact, treated like a pseudo celebrity and often taken to restaurants and cafes by police investigators). Further, although he was sentenced to death, his cooperation with investigators in numerous investigations may have been an attempt to avoid the execution as long as possible (Cox, 1991).

Are police able to recognise false confessions? Recent research suggests not. Kassin, Meissner and Norwick (2005) had college students and police investigators view or listen to 10 offenders confessing to crimes. Half of the confessions were true and half were false (fabricated for the study). Students were more accurate than police in distinguishing true and false confessions, and accuracy rates were higher among those presented with the audiotaped versus the videotaped confessions. Further, police were more confident in their judgements despite their impaired performance.

FALSE CONFESSIONS TO MURDER

Adding further to the complexity of assessing the credibility of an individual’s memory for a homicide offence is the phenomenon of false confessions, as outlined by Gudjonsson (Chapter 11 this volume). Typically, a false confession is revealed when the real perpetrator is found, if no crime was actually committed, or when other evidence (e.g., DNA) shows that the confessor clearly was innocent (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). In one Canadian case, the body of Darrelle Exner, who had been raped, beaten and murdered, was found by one Kenneth Patton. During the course of the investigation the police questioned a 17-year-old boy and two of his friends, each of whom would eventually independently confess

likely to experience some type of memory impairment (perhaps as a result of their proneness to dissociation) than other psychopaths.

Another important issue to consider is whether the offenders in the sample were providing honest accounts regarding potential memory impairment for their homicide. Considering the number of psychopaths (and, to a lesser degree, non-psychopaths) in the sample who exaggerated the reactivity of their offence, the credibility of the above self-reported memory impairment results must be interpreted with caution. Further, information pertaining to the homicide perpetrators’ drug and alcohol use at the time of the homicide was available in the official file reports for most of the offenders. The potential influence of intoxicants on the perpetrators’ memories for the incident was also a concern. However, results indicated that 53.8% of the offenders who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the homicide reported experiencing some type of amnesia, while 50.0% of the offenders who were not under the influence at the time of the homicide reported experiencing some type of amnesia. Therefore, there was no significant relationship between intoxication and amnesia for the offence, suggesting that there were other factors that contributed to the memory impairment experienced (or at least reported) by the offenders in the sample. We suggest that future studies examine the level of suggestibility of the inmates to consider issues such as possible memory contamination. Further, more effort should be given to exploring various other factors that were not considered in the current study, and that may have contributed to the likelihood of the participants not providing credible memory accounts. For example, it was difficult to obtain information about the strength of external motivations for individual offenders to be dishonest in their self-reports.
CONCLUSION

A substantial amount of research on memory impairment has been conducted on victims or witnesses of traumatic events. In general, the evidence supports the trauma superiority argument, which posits that a traumatic incident may enhance someone's overall memory for an event. On the other hand, there is evidence that in rare cases, trauma can greatly impair memory to the point of psychogenic amnesia. Until recently, little research has been conducted on the crime narratives of the perpetrators of violent offences. Our programme of research has addressed both the credibility of murderers and the qualities of their memories concerning the homicide. We have demonstrated that murderers generally tend to minimise the instrumentality of their offence. That is, they tend to report that the crime was less premeditated and more provoked than indicated in the official report. Psychopathic offenders, known for their prodigious use of deception, exaggerate the reactivity of their crimes significantly more than other offenders. Psychopaths also omit central details from their crime narratives. Based on previous work and our recent work reported in this chapter, perpetrators of homicide report a substantial amount of memory impairment, including various forms of amnesia and dissociative experiences. As we reviewed earlier, some of these reports likely are sincere accounts. It is clear that homicide can be extremely traumatic for the perpetrator — assuming that he/she does not have the profound affective deficits associated with psychopathy — and this trauma can result in memory impairment in some cases. On the other hand, we provided tentative evidence to suggest that psychopaths may be less likely to experience any type of memory impairment, although larger samples are required to establish this pattern with greater confidence.

There is a great need for additional innovative research on perpetrators' memories for their crimes. As we have argued, such work has the potential to greatly advance our scientific knowledge concerning both deception and traumatic memory.

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