Chapter 2

A NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE SEXUAL PSYCHOPATH

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ABSTRACT

Recent research indicates that there is a relationship between psychopathic personality disorder and some forms of sexual violence. This article offers a review of the current scientific understanding of this relationship. Sexual violence committed by psychopathic individuals is associated with unique patterns of sexual behaviour (e.g., diverse types of sexual offending), motivation (e.g., thrill seeking), and severity levels (e.g., excessive, gratuitous violence). Further, rapists are more commonly psychopathic than child molesters, and an even higher proportion of offenders who target both child and adult victims are psychopathic. New data examining the relationship between psychopathy and sexual homicide are presented. Based on the research findings, we argue that some sex offenders can be classified as sexual psychopaths—criminals whose sexually deviant behaviour is directed at diverse victim profiles and who are primarily motivated by thrill seeking (not paraphilia).

The extent of sexual violence in society never before has been as apparent. Because more victims are now willing to disclose their sexual victimization, the rate of incarceration for sexual offenders has been steadily rising (e.g., Motiuk & Belcourt, 1997). Unfortunately, the problem of sexual violence is not easily resolved by identifying and incarcerating perpetrators. A recent meta-analysis (Hanson & Bussière, 1998) of 61 samples found that the recidivism rate of sex offenders within 4-5 years after release into
the community was 13% for sexual offenses and 36% for non-sexual offenses. However, when followed-up after longer periods of time the rate of sexual recidivism is often considerably higher (e.g., Doren, 1998). It should be kept in mind that these statistics are based on official reports, almost certainly providing an underestimate of true offending. Because of the high rate of recidivism, an important task for the legal system is the identification of and intervention with high-risk sex offenders. Research that contributes to a better understanding of such individuals will inform and improve this process.

A factor that contributes significantly to crime in general and sexually deviant behaviour in particular is the constellation of characteristics known as psychopathy. Psychopathy is estimated to affect about 1% of the general population and is marked by a distinct pattern of interpersonal (e.g., manipulativeness, deceitfulness, egocentricity), affective (e.g., lack of empathy, remorse or guilt), and behavioural (e.g., irresponsibility, impulsivity, criminal behaviour) features (Hare, 1991, 1996, 1998b). Given the clear association between psychopathy and crime and violence (see Hart & Hare, 1997), it has become one of the most important psychological constructs applied within the criminal justice system (e.g., Hare, Clark, Grann, & Thorton, 2000). In this chapter, we describe the theoretical and empirical links between psychopathy and sexual violence. Based on this review and our own research, we argue for a unique class of sex offender that may be best described as a sexual psychopath (for further information, see Porter et al., 2000).

"Mr. C," a middle-aged offender incarcerated in a Canadian federal prison, exemplifies our conception of the sexual psychopath. At the time of his assessment (by the first author), he had been most recently convicted of the repeated sexual assaults of three teenage girls. Over the course of a one-year period, he maintained a “master/slave” relationship with his victims. His previous sexual offences had been perpetrated against a variety of victim types, and included the serial rapes of adult females, sexual assaults on children, and bestiality. Mr. C reported that his pattern of offending typically involved focusing on one victim type at a time after which he would change to a different victim type when he admittedly “got bored.” Convictions for numerous other serious and sometimes violent non-sexual offences were also present in his criminal history. During his incarceration, Mr. C was suspected of perpetrating sexual assaults on inmates and was often inappropriate with female staff. For instance, he forwarded an envelope containing obscene material to a female parole officer prior to a parole hearing. Multiple psychological assessments described Mr. C as a “textbook psychopath” and he rated very highly on the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 1991). Given his criminal history and the diagnosis of psychopathy, Mr. C was viewed as a very high risk to re-offend.

What is notable about Mr. C’s case it that there was no evidence of a paraphilia or difficulties with anger—characteristics that often seem to underlie the motivation for sexual offending. His sexual and criminal offending profile appears to be captured more accurately by the concept of a sexual psychopath than by traditional descriptions of sexually violent men. We hypothesize that sexual psychopaths are individuals who, like all psychopaths, lack empathy or remorse for their actions. Their behaviour, including sexual deviancy, is primarily motivated by thrill- and sensation-seeking as well as a proneness to boredom, rather than by anger or some form of paraphilia. This thrill-
seeking drive leads sexual psychopaths to eventually lose interest in a particular victim type and, over time, perpetrate sexual offences against multiple victim types (e.g., adults and children). This same versatile pattern may extend to non-sexual criminal behaviour and reflect a wide array of violent and non-violent antisocial acts. Well-known cases of offenders with the characteristics of sexual psychopathy include Ted Bundy and Albert DeSalvo. Both Bundy and DeSalvo are recognized as psychopathic individuals who targeted a large number of victims within a very wide age range and with a spectrum of physical characteristics.

**VARIATIONS IN SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

It is clear that sexual violence is a heterogeneous set of behaviours characterized by diverse patterns of motivation (e.g., Rice & Harris, 1997), *modus operandi* (e.g., Baxter, Marshall, Barbaree, Davidson, & Malcolm, 1984; Kaufman, Hilliker, & Daleiden, 1996), and personality traits (e.g., Carpenter, Peed, & Eastman, 1995; Kakichman, 1991). Some forms of sexual violence are highly premeditated, sadistic, and callous, while others are impulsive, situational, and/or rationalized (e.g., Knight & Prentky, 1993). Although offenders with a paraphilia usually have a single preferred victim type, other offenders perpetrate sexual violence against multiple types of victims (Rice & Harris, 1997). In addition, as is the case with non-sex offenders, some sex offenders are psychopathic while others are not (e.g., Brown & Forth, 1997).

The most basic classification system of sex offenders distinguishes child molesters and rapists. This distinction seems to have validity for a number of reasons. First, child molesters tend to be motivated by the sexual aspects of their crimes (e.g., Malcolm, Andrews, & Quinsey, 1993). In contrast, anger is more likely to drive the sexual offending of many rapists (e.g., Barbaree, Seto, Serin, Amos, & Preston, 1994). Second, child molesters appear to focus their criminal behaviour in a sexual manner, whereas the criminal behaviour of rapists usually includes non-sexual offences as well (Baxter et al., 1984; Prentky, Lee, Knight, & Cerce, 1997; Proulx et al., 1997). On average, rapists have longer antisocial histories and higher rates of general and violent recidivism than child molesters (e.g., Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Quinsey, Rice, & Harris, 1995; Rice & Harris, 1997).

This broad distinction between child molesters and rapists has its limitations, however. This dichotomy does not take into account offenders who victimize both children and adults, a group associated with a high risk for sexual violence. In their meta-analysis, Hanson and Bussière (1998) found that one of the strongest predictors of sexual recidivism was a history of diverse sexual offences. Rice and Harris (1997) found that sex offenders who offended against multiple types of victims were the most dangerous, as indexed by their faster rate of violent recidivism. Despite indications that a versatile victim profile is indicative of a dangerous sex offender, there has been little systematic study of this pattern.
THE LINK BETWEEN PSYCHOPATHY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

We think that a significant proportion of the heterogeneity in sexual offending (e.g., criminal diversity, impulsivity, degree of empathy, victim types) relates to the presence or absence of the psychopathy. Psychopathy, as diagnosed with the PCL-R (Hare, 1991), is a major concern in offender populations, characterizing approximately 15-25% of all offenders in federal correctional settings (e.g., Hare, 1998a,b). Offenders scoring high in psychopathy show a distinctive pattern of criminal behaviour, violence, and poor conditional release. Relative to other offenders, psychopaths begin committing crimes at a younger age and go on to commit a wider variety of crimes (e.g., Hare & McPherson, 1984), including violence (e.g., Forth, Hart, & Hare, 1990; Haapasalo, 1994). Criminal psychopaths are also more likely than non-psychopathic offenders to engage in institutional misbehaviour and to re-offend sooner, more often, and violently while on conditional release (Hare, 1998b; Hart & Hare, 1997; Hart, Kropp, & Hare, 1988; Hemphill, Hare, & Wong, 1998; Porter, Birt, & Boer, 2001; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1996; Serin, 1991). When violent, psychopaths are more likely to use threats and weapons than non-psychopaths (Serin, 1991). They are also more likely to victimize strangers and their violence is more commonly motivated by revenge and retribution (e.g., Cornell et al., 1996; Williamson, Hare, & Wong, 1987). In contrast, violent non-psychopathic criminals typically offend against victims they know and often in reaction to emotional distress (Cornell et al., 1996). Thus, psychopathic offenders appear to differ in significant ways from non-psychopathic offenders with regard to the nature, motives, and the variety of criminal acts they commit.

In theory, psychopathy should play an important role in understanding and predicting sexual violence (e.g., Seto & Barbaree, 1997). A central feature of this disorder is a profound affective deficit and an accompanying lack of respect for the rights of others and societal rules (e.g., Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1998a,b; Hart & Hare, 1997; Porter, 1996). Psychopaths lack the emotional resources that would normally inhibit an urge to forcefully satiate a deviant sexual drive or impulse. Indeed, sex offenders with affective (e.g., empathy) deficits appear to use more aggression in their attacks than those without such deficits (e.g., Lisak & Ivan, 1995). However, only a small number of studies have specifically examined patterns of psychopathy in sex offenders (e.g., Brown & Forth, 1997; Porter et al., 2000).

An examination of the emotional precursors to a sexual offence provides some indication of the differences between psychopaths and non-psychopaths concerning patterns of sexual offending. Brown and Forth (1997) assessed 60 rapists and found that the intensity of self-reported negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression, anger) during the 24-hours proceeding a sexual offence was negatively correlated with the PCL-R total scores and Factor 1 scores (i.e., the core affective and interpersonal features of psychopathy). Thus, unlike most sex offenders, the motive for sexual offending in psychopathic individuals may not be related to the experience of intense negative emotions. Brown and Forth (1997) also examined the characteristics of the sexual offence itself in relation to level of psychopathy. Most of those who scored high on the PCL-R
(35%) were classified as either "opportunistic" (i.e., use of instrumental aggression motivated by impulsive situational exploitation and non-sexual motives) or "pervasively angry" (i.e., use of expressive aggression motivated by global and undifferentiated anger and non-sexual motives). In contrast, the most common category among those scoring low on the PCL-R was "sexually non-sadistic" (i.e., sexual motive and premeditated). Thus, psychopathic individuals appear to have a specific pattern of sexual offence characteristics and differ in some respect from non-psychopaths in the primary motivations underlying their sexual deviancy.

A number of studies have examined the contribution of psychopathy to sexual recidivism. For example, Quinsey et al. (1995) found that psychopathy predicted both sexual and violent recidivism among a forensic sample of 178 rapists and child molesters. Psychopathy-related traits also have been found to predict both sexual and non-sexual aggression in non-criminal samples (e.g., Kosson, Kelly, & White, 1997). Furthermore, the combination of psychopathy and deviant sexual arousal is one of the strongest predictors of a fast rate of sexual recidivism (Rice & Harris, 1997). Some researchers have found an association between sadistic/ deviant sexual arousal and psychopathy (Holt, Meloy, & Strack, 1999; Rice, Harris, & Quinsey, 1990; Serin, Malcolm, Khanna, & Barbaree, 1994), but most psychopaths are likely not sadistic. Compared to more traditional risk factors of recidivism, the relative importance of psychopathy is demonstrated by the finding that the PCL-R adds to the prediction of both sexual and non-sexual recidivism above that predicted by offender age, offence history, and psychiatric history (Rice et al., 1990). Recognition of the importance of psychopathy in predicting general and sexual violence has lead to the inclusion of the PCL-R in a number of risk assessment measures (e.g., Boer, Wilson, Gauthier, & Hart, 1997). For example, one of the most widely used risk assessment tools, the Violence Risk Assessment Guide (VRAG), includes the PCL-R total score as its most heavily weighted predictor (Webster, Harris, Rice, Cormier, & Quinsey, 1994). The VRAG has been shown to have some utility in predicting sexual recidivism (Rice & Harris, 1997). Thus, psychopathy is considered an important component of risk assessment for sexual and violent recidivism.

Despite the findings described above, the relationship between psychopathy and sexual offending may not be straightforward. For example, Brown and Forth (1997) found that the PCL-R scores of rapists (35% were psychopathic) correlated with the number of prior non-sexual offenses, but not with the number of past sexual offenses or age of sexual offending onset. In addition, Forth and Kroner (1995) found that although rapists displayed the highest base rate of psychopathy (26%) among the 456 adult sex offenders in their sample, psychopathy was negatively related to the total number of sexual victims. Another complex issue involves the link between victim harm and psychopathy. A higher level of violence and victim injury during the commission of the sex offence has been associated with higher PCL-R scores among adolescents and adults (e.g., Gretton, McBride, Lewis, O'Shaughnessy, & Hare, 1994; Miller, Geddings, Levenston, & Patrick, 1994; Rice & Harris, 1997). However, others have found no relationship between victim injury and PCL-R scores (e.g., Brown & Forth, 1997). Despite the fairly direct relationship between PCL-R scores and general and violent
recidivism (see Hemphill et al., 1998), the relation between psychopathy and sexual violence appears to be complex.

While psychopathy and rape appear to be closely related (e.g., Porter et al., 2000), the relationship between child molesting and psychopathy is much less clear. A considerably higher proportion of rapists score high on the PCL-R than do child molesters (Quinsey et al., 1995; Porter et al., 2000). Psychopathic rapists also tend to have more extensive criminal histories and are more opportunistic than their non-psychopathic counterparts (Forth & Kroner, 1995; Porter et al., 2001). Their PCL-R scores almost always fall at or above the medium range, suggesting a stronger tendency toward a “criminal” lifestyle relative to the more “specialized” child molesters. In light of the high rates of re-offending among child molesters in general (e.g., Prentky et al., 1997), psychopathy may add little to the prediction of their sexual re-offending except to reinforce an assessment of elevated dangerousness.

To understand the complexity in the association between psychopathy and sexual offending, Porter et al. (2000) recently examined a large sample of diverse sex offenders. They found some interesting variability in the relation between the interpersonal/affective (Factor 1) and behavioural (Factor 2) dimensions of psychopathy and sexual offending. Mixed rapist/molesters, rapists, and non-sex offenders all scored significantly higher than exclusive child molesters on Factor 2. This finding suggests that the former groups had more chronic and diverse antisocial lifestyles than did child molesters. In addition, the traditional moderate correlation between Factor 1 and 2 of the PCL-R (Hare, 1991) varied depending on the type of sexual offender. For non-sex offenders, a significant positive correlation was found. However, with the exception of rapists, Factor 1 and 2 were not significantly correlated among the various sub-groups of child molesters. This pattern of results suggests that the affective and interpersonal traits of psychopathy in many molesters may be specific to sexual offending, unlike the more generalized criminal pattern of rapists and non-sex offenders. This premise is consistent with clinical observations that many molesters maintain an otherwise “normal” existence while preying on children.

**IS THERE A SEXUAL PSYCHOPATH?**

Individuals scoring high on psychopathy tend to engage in a diversity of antisocial behaviour, much of which is either highly instrumental or related to thrill seeking (e.g., Ellis, 1987). Barbaree et al. (1994) found that offenders with non-sexual motives for their sex offences (i.e., primarily antisocial, hostile towards women, impulsive, callous disregard for victim) scored higher on the PCL-R than did offenders who were motivated by a paraphilia. Consistent with this finding, the construct of the sexual psychopath represents an individual whose sexual violence is motivated primarily by thrill-seeking or anti-social behaviour. Indeed, many psychopaths appear to direct their thrill-seeking at a particular type of crime for a period and then move on to another form of thrill-seeking. For sexual psychopaths, we argue that it is the sexual elements and the victim type that
are generally (or at that particular point in time) the object of their violent thrill-seeking (Porter et al., 2000).

Recently, Porter et al. (2000) hypothesized that psychopathic individuals are over-represented in offenders who offend sexually against a variety of victim types. They argued that a sub-group of sex offenders are dominant, manipulative individuals with a thrill-seeking and antisocial life-style. These individuals are hypothesized to obtain their greatest thrill from diverse sexual gratification, and as a result, target many different victims over time. By contrast, non-psychopathic child molesters (many with a paraphilia) are more likely to restrict their offending to one victim type. Porter et al. (2000) examined a sample of 329 incarcerated Canadian offenders and found support for the classification of a sub-group of offenders that could be conceived of as sexual psychopaths. They found that although most of the psychopathic offenders in the sample sexually victimized adults only (39%), 17% had offended against both children and adults compared to only 4% of non-psychopathic offenders. In addition, adult sex offenders with diverse victim profiles (child and adult victims) demonstrated the highest base rate of psychopathy (64%) relative to exclusive child molesters, rapists, and non-sex offenders (see Table 1). Offenders who sexually victimized both children and adults were between two and ten times as likely as other offenders to be psychopaths. Therefore, the victim profile revealed by Porter et al.’s study builds on previous findings (e.g., Brown & Forth, 1997) and clearly shows that profiles of psychopathy vary according to patterns of sexual violence, and that psychopathic offenders are more likely to be highly represented in mixed victim profile groups.

Other researchers also have found that most offenders who cross the line from child to adult victims (or vice versa) are psychopathic (e.g., Rice & Harris, 1997). Rice and Harris (1997) examined 288 sex offenders and found that those with a varying victim profile had the highest mean PCL-R total score. Porter et al., (2000) also found that this group of sex offenders had the highest Factor 1 scores, indicating an elevated level of ruthlessness and callousness. This profile is indicative of a very dangerous group of offenders with a potentially high rate of violent re-offending. Compared to exclusive child molesters and rapists, sex offenders with mixed victim profiles have been found to have more serious violent, non-violent, and sexual criminal histories, re-offend violently sooner, and cause the highest level of victim injury during their sexual offences (Rice & Harris, 1997). Rice and Harris (1997) also found that mixed sex offenders were the slowest to re-offend sexually compared to child molesters and rapists. This pattern may be indicative of a non-sexual motive for the sexual offending among the mixed victim group. It is possible that the dominance of psychopathy among mixed rapist/molesters reflects their engagement in thrill-seeking and impulsive propensities that include a sexual component (without ruling out a sexual deviancy). As such, this type of offender may be more appropriately called a sexual psychopath. In the absence of empathy or remorse, these offenders can victimize different types of victims when the opportunity arises or when they grow bored with a previous target.
### Table 1. Prevalence of Psychopathy (PCL-R Scores) by Offender Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offender Group</th>
<th>Percent of Psychopathic Offenders (&gt;30 on PCL-R)</th>
<th>Total PCL-R Score</th>
<th>Factor 1 Score</th>
<th>Factor 2 Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra-familial Molester</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>20.93 (6.05)</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>8.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-familial Molester</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>21.17 (6.38)</td>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>7.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapist</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>25.92 (5.87) <em>ab</em></td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>12.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Rapist/Molester</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>29.0 (6.48) <em>abc</em></td>
<td>11.84</td>
<td>12.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Sex Offender</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25.75 (6.99) <em>ab</em></td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>12.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. A letter subscript (a, b...f) indicates that the given mean was significantly ($p < .05$) higher than the mean of the group associated with the particular letter. The breakdown of the offenders by offense type was as follows: 48 EF molesters (14.6%), 37 IF molesters (11.2%), 16 mixed E/I molesters (4.9%), 103 rapists (31.3%), 25 mixed rapist/molesters (7.6%), and 100 non-sex offenders (30.4%).

### Sexual Psychopathy and Adolescents

Recent research has identified psychopathic personality traits in adolescent sex offenders (e.g., Wieckowski, Hartsoe, Mayer & Shortz, 1998). In fact, depending on the particular sample and clinical cut-off used to diagnose psychopathy, 13-23% of adolescent sex offenders score in the psychopathic range on a youth modified version of the PCL-R (PCL-YV; Långström & Grann, 2000; Långström & Lindblad, 2000; McBride, 1998; Wieckowski et al., 1998). However, it is still difficult to assess whether the concept of sexual psychopathy can be applied validly to adolescents due to limitations in the existing research on adolescent psychopathy and sexual offending. Specifically, studies that measure adolescent psychopathy validly and compare psychopathy with different patterns of sexual offending (e.g., sexual offence type, victim selection, number of victims) are lacking. Therefore, the specific relationship between adolescent psychopathy and sexual offending is not clear and available findings have been...
contradictory. For example, Caputo, Frick, and Brodsky (1999) used an adolescent self-report version of the Psychopathy Screening Device (PSD; Frick & Hare, in press) to measure psychopathy in a sample of young offenders. They found that significantly more sex offenders (35%) showed elevated scores on the PSD scale measuring callous and unemotional traits than violent (6%) or non-violent (7%) youth. These traits are comparable to those that comprise Factor 1 of the PCL-R and capture the core affective and interpersonal features of psychopathy. However, Gretton (1998) found that adolescent psychopathic and non-psychopathic offenders were similar in terms of having a history of sexual offending, number of prior sexual offences, committing a sexual index offence, and time to sexual recidivism. Despite such inconsistencies, it is possible that, as has been found in adults (see Porter et al., 2000), the type of sexual assault (e.g., sadistic rape) or committing a range of sexual offence types may be linked to youth psychopathy.

There has been some evidence that diverse victim profiles are more prevalent among adolescent sex offenders than they are among adults (e.g., Aylwin et al., 2000). Wieckowski et al. (1998) found that more than half of the 30 adolescent sex offenders in their sample had criminal profiles involving multiple victim types. Forty percent of their sample had offended against both males and females, 20% had victimized both children and adolescents, and 7% had victimized both children and adults. In addition, this sample had a high rate of psychopathic characteristics. Specifically, 13% were psychopathic (PCL-YV) and 30% scored within the moderate range (20-29). However, because Wieckowski et al. (1998) did not compare the level of psychopathy across the various victim profiles of their sample, it is not possible to make any direct conclusions about the influence of psychopathy on sexual offending behaviour.

Although indirect, there is additional evidence for the classification of a sexual psychopath among adolescent sex offenders. Among a mixed sample of 179 incarcerated adolescent sex offenders, Kaufman et al. (1996) found those who offended against both male and female victims utilized various aspects of victim grooming more frequently, and appeared to rely on a larger repertoire to manipulate, threaten and coerce their victims than did those who offended against only one gender. However, because Kaufman et al. (1996) did not measure psychopathy it is not possible to infer whether these young offenders were more or less psychopathic than offenders with single gender victim profiles. Långström and Lindblad (2000) reported that 16% of a sample consisting primarily of violent adolescent sex offenders were psychopathic, as measured by the PCL-YV. Only 5% of this sample met diagnostic criteria for a paraphilia and none of these paraphilic youths had a comorbid personality disorder. This suggests that paraphilias are not common among adolescent sex offenders, while a subgroup seem to display a significant number of psychopathic characteristics that may contribute to their sexual offending behaviour.

In summary, there appears to be a group of adolescents who victimize multiple victim types, who commit other types of violent offences, and who use more manipulative and threatening behaviours to coerce their victims. These behaviours may be linked to characteristics of adolescent psychopathy. However, based on the existing research, it is clear that little is known about the impact of psychopathy on sexual offending in adolescents. Further, the appropriateness of the construct of sexual
psychopathy among adolescents requires further research. Considerable research is still required to increase the understanding of the relationship between psychopathy and sexual offending in adolescent sex offenders. Specifically, it is not clear whether certain sexual offending patterns are more likely to be associated with psychopathy, as has been found among adults. Such information would assist in the reduction of the reported heterogeneity among adolescent sex offenders, inform decisions pertaining to case management and treatment planning, and may assist in the early identification of a particularly dangerous group of sex offenders.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
PSYCHOPATHY AND SEXUAL HOMICIDE

As mentioned earlier, a number of studies have suggested that psychopathy is related to sadism and sexually sadistic behaviour within the general offender population (e.g. Hare, Cooke, & Hart, 1999; Holt et al., 1999; Meloy, 1999). A "sexual homicide" can be conceptualized as a homicide that includes sexual activity before, during, or after the actual commission of the homicide. Sexual homicides are relatively rare compared to other types of homicides and are estimated to represent less than 1% of all murders reported each year in the United States (Meloy, 2000). The proportion of sexual homicides committed in Canada each year is also quite small. Between 1974 and 1986, sexual homicides were estimated to account for 4% of all homicides committed by offenders (Roberts & Grossman, 1993). It has only been recent that this troubling and complex form of violence has received research attention.

In an attempt to increase understanding of sexual homicidal behaviour, some researchers have focused on the role of psychopathy. Among 48 sexually homicidal offenders assessed between 1982 and 1992, Firestone, Bradford, Greenberg, and Larose (1998) found that these offenders generally scored significantly higher on both Factors 1 and 2 of the PCL-R than a comparison sample of incest offenders. Further, Meloy (2000) found that approximately two-thirds of the sexually homicidal offenders in his sample scored in the primary or severe range on the PCL-R. Additional evidence of a link between psychopathy and sexual homicides comes from Stone's (1998) large-scale analysis of the biographies of 297 homicide offenders. Stone reported that 77 of the males in this group were involved in serial sexual homicides, and 96% of them met the PCL-R criteria for psychopathy (cut-off score of 25 or above). Therefore, a profoundly large proportion of the male serial sexual killers was found to be psychopathic.

Recently, Woodworth, and Porter (2001) investigated the link between psychopathy and the dynamics of homicidal behaviour in 125 incarcerated offenders from two Canadian federal medium security prisons. Results indicated that psychopathic homicidal offenders were significantly more likely to sexually assault their victim either before, during, or after their murder. In most cases, the weapon of choice for psychopathic offenders was a knife rather than a gun, which was the most commonly used weapon by other homicidal offenders. Further, psychopathic individuals were significantly more
likely to engage in gratuitous or unnecessary violence while committing a homicide. Such gratuitous violence is relevant to the construct of a sexual psychopath given that one of the main criteria used to code gratuitous violence in Woodworth and Porter’s (2001) study was the presence of “sadistic sexual behaviour.” Thus, excessively violent and sexually deviant behaviour appears to be more prevalent in the homicides of psychopathic individuals and this pattern may be linked to the construct of a sexual psychopath.

Sexual homicidal behaviour has not been limited to adults. Meloy (2000) recently reported that the rate of sexual homicides in adolescence was similar to that reported for adults. This is not particularly surprising considering that the number of adolescent offenders arrested for sexual crimes has steadily increased over the past decade (Hunter, 2000). In fact, one study found that 20% of the homicides committed by a sample of 25 homicidal youth were sexual in nature (Myers, Scott, Burgess, & Burgess, 1995). This percentage exceeds the current estimate for the adult population. Limited research has also suggested that psychopathic traits are often present in adolescents who have committed sexual homicides. Myers and Blashfield (1997) found that all but two of the 13 adolescent sexually homicidal offenders assessed with the PCL-YV demonstrated a moderate to severe level of psychopathic traits. Similarly, Dempster and Hart (1996) found that adolescents charged with murder or attempted murder with high scores on the PCL-R were more likely to have committed a sexual homicide. Hence, as with adults, psychopathy may play a role in the sexually homicidal behaviour of adolescents. In summary, based on the adult and adolescent literature cited above, it would appear that psychopaths not only participate in a diverse range of deviant sexual violence, but that they also are more likely to take the life of their victims.

**CONCLUSION**

Our conceptualization of the *sexual psychopath* has implications for heightening our understanding of sexual violence. A group of violent sexual offenders has been identified who show a high prevalence of psychopathy and who can be expected to offend persistently and often violently across the life span (e.g., Porter et al., 2001). Recent studies have not only linked psychopathy to diverse sexual violence (e.g., Porter et al., 2000), but to sexual homicides as well (e.g., Woodworth & Porter, 2001). In addition, limited evidence has suggested that there is a relationship between psychopathy and victim diversity among sexually offending adolescents. Further research should be directed towards the validation of the construct of sexual psychopathy across the life span. An important first step to such validation would involve a more detailed investigation of the motivations for sexual offending behaviour in psychopathic and non-psychopathic offenders. We plan to track the offenders used in the Porter et al. (2000) sample for the next several years and measure institutional adjustment, performance on conditional release, and long-term recidivism rates. Results from such longitudinal data
will assist in establishing the predictive utility of psychopathy, and more specifically, the construct of sexual psychopathy.

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**AUTHOR NOTE**

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