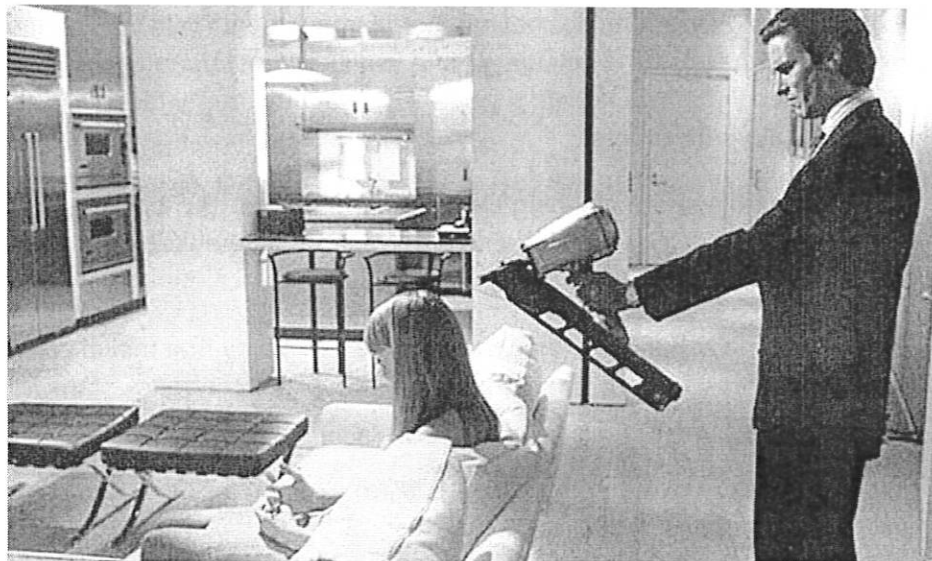


Differences Between a Psychopath vs Sociopath

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Society has conspired with Hollywood to put two seemingly-sexy psychology terms into our collective consciousness — psychopath and sociopath. Psychopath and sociopath are pop psychology terms for what psychiatry calls an antisocial personality disorder. These two terms are not really well-defined in the psychology research literature, and so there is some confusion about them.

Nonetheless, there are some general similarities as well as differences between these two personality types. Both types of personality have a pervasive pattern of disregard for the safety and rights of others. Deceit and manipulation are central features to both types of personality. Contrary to popular belief, a psychopath or sociopath is not necessarily violent.

The common features of a psychopath and sociopath lie in their shared diagnosis — antisocial personality disorder. The DSM-5¹ defines antisocial personality as someone have 3 or more of the following traits:

1. Regularly breaks or flouts the law
2. Constantly lies and deceives others
3. Is impulsive and doesn't plan ahead
4. Can be prone to fighting and aggressiveness
5. Has little regard for the safety of others
6. Irresponsible, can't meet financial obligations
7. Doesn't feel remorse or guilt

In both cases, some signs or symptoms are nearly always present before age 15. By the time a person is an adult, they are well on their way to becoming a psychopath or sociopath.

Traits of a Psychopath

Psychology researchers generally believe that psychopaths tends to be born — it's likely a genetic predisposition — while sociopaths tend to be made by their environment. (Which is not to say that psychopaths may not also suffer from some sort of childhood trauma.) Psychopathy might be related to physiological brain differences. Research has

shown psychopaths have underdeveloped components of the brain commonly thought to be responsible for emotion regulation and impulse control.

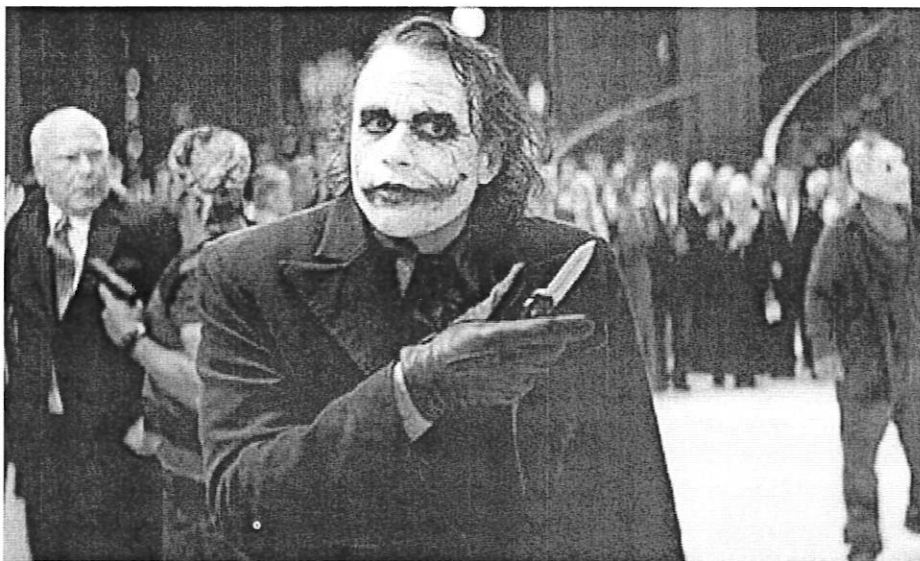
Are you a psychopath?
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Psychopaths, in general, have a hard time forming real emotional attachments with others. Instead, they form artificial, shallow relationships designed to be manipulated in a way that most benefits the psychopath. People are seen as pawns to be used to forward the psychopath's goals. Psychopaths rarely feel guilt regarding any of their behaviors, no matter how much they hurt others.

But psychopaths can often be seen by others as being charming and trustworthy, holding steady, normal jobs. Some even have families and seemingly-loving relationships with a partner. While they tend to be well-educated, they may also have learned a great deal on their own.

When a psychopath engages in criminal behavior, they tend to do so in a way that minimizes risk to themselves. They will carefully plan criminal activity to ensure they don't get caught, having contingency plans in place for every possibility.

Psychopath Pop Culture Examples: Dexter, Anton Chigurh in *No Country for Old Men*, Henry in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*



Traits of a Sociopath

Researchers tend to believe that sociopathy is the result of environmental factors, such as a child or teen's upbringing in a very negative household that resulted in physical abuse, emotional abuse, or childhood trauma.

Sociopaths, in general, tend to be more impulsive and erratic in their behavior than their psychopath counterparts. While also having difficulties in forming attachments to others, some sociopaths may be able to form an attachment to a like-minded group or person. Unlike psychopaths, most sociopaths don't hold down long-term jobs or present much of a normal family life to the outside world.

When a sociopath engages in criminal behavior, they may do so in an impulsive and largely unplanned manner, with little regard for the risks or consequences of their actions. They may become agitated and angered easily, sometimes resulting in violent outbursts. These kinds of behaviors increase a sociopath's chances of being apprehended.

Sociopath Pop Culture Examples: The Joker in *The Dark Knight*, JD in *Heathers*, Alex Delarge in *A Clockwork Orange*

Who is More Dangerous?

Both psychopaths and sociopaths present risks to society, because they will often try and live a normal life while coping with their disorder. But psychopathy is likely the more dangerous disorder, because they experience a lot less guilt connected to their actions.

A psychopath also has a greater ability to dissociate from their actions. Without emotional involvement, any pain that others suffer is meaningless to a psychopath. Many famous serial killers have been psychopaths.

Not all people we'd call a psychopath or sociopath are violent. Violence is not a necessary ingredient (nor is it for a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder) — but it is often present.

Clues to a Psychopath or Sociopath in Childhood

Clues to psychopathy and sociopathy are usually available in childhood. Most people who can later be diagnosed with sociopathy or psychopathy have had a pattern of behavior where they violate the basic rights or safety of others. They often break the rules (or even laws) and societal norms as a child, too.

Psychologists call these kinds of childhood behaviors a conduct disorder. Conduct disorders involve four categories of problem behavior:


- Aggression to people and animals
- Destruction of property
- Deceitfulness or theft
- Serious violations of rules or laws

If you recognize these symptoms (and the specific symptoms of conduct disorder) in a child or young teen, they're at greater risk for antisocial personality disorder.

Summary

Psychopathy and sociopathy are different cultural labels applied to the diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. Up to 3 percent of the population may qualify for a diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder. This disorder is more common among males and mostly seen in people with an alcohol or substance abuse problem, or in forensic settings such as prisons. Psychopaths tend to be more manipulative, can be seen by others as more charming, lead a semblance of a normal life, and minimize risk in criminal activities. Sociopaths tend to be more erratic, rage-prone, and unable to lead as much of a normal life. When sociopaths engage in criminal activity, they tend to do so in a reckless manner without regard to consequences.

Footnotes:

1. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, the reference manual that defines the symptoms of mental disorders. []

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