

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COGNITIVE STYLE AND DEFENSIVE PROCESS IN THE PSYCHOPATH

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The authors review Yochelson and Samenow's (1977) model of the criminal mind. They propose a levels hypothesis for understanding the relationship among object relations, defensive operations, and the conscious cognitive-behavioral style of the psychopath. They advocate the addition of an explicit psychodynamic dimension to Yochelson and Samenow's model. A hypothetical case is presented to illustrate the relationship between unconscious defense process and conscious cognitive-behavioral style of the psychopathic personality.

The psyche can be accessed at different levels, depending upon the context, the tool of access, and the conscious state of the subject (Stone & Dellis, 1960). Schafer (1954) proposed experiential markers for a levels continuum: dreaming, day-dreaming, purposeful visualizing, and normal perceiving. Continua such as primitive to advanced, regressive to progressive, unconscious to preconscious to conscious, all presuppose internal psychological operations that may occur at various ontogenetic, perhaps even phylogenetic (Bailey, 1987), levels. We view the

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relationship between unconscious defense process and conscious cognitive style as a "levels" phenomenon and believe that the unconscious defenses are manifest in and can be inferred from assessment of the "psychopath's"¹ conscious cognitive-behavioral style (including the psychopath's verbalizations).

Our hypothesis is that object relations theory concerning the Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Kernberg, 1974, 1975; Kohut, 1971), and developing hypotheses concerning the psychopath as a more deviant and aggressive subtype of narcissistic disorder (Bursten, 1973; Kernberg, 1974; Millon, 1981), correlate with Yochelson and Samenow's (1977a, 1977b) cognitive-behavioral understanding of the criminal personality. We propose an integrated perspective on the criminal mind, viewed from two different "levels" that could be assumed to be largely unconscious (object relations) and largely preconscious or conscious (Yochelson and Samenow, 1977a, 1977b). The empirical validation of one such level in future research may not invalidate the other; our reasonable hope is that both will lend construct validity to our further understanding of the criminal mind.

COGNITIVE STYLE AND DEFENSIVE PROCESS

Many individuals having the diagnosis of Antisocial Personality Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1980) share ongoing conscious styles of thinking and behaving that are dependent on specific unconscious internal regulating mechanisms (Bursten, 1972). These unconscious internal mechanisms are rooted in the early phases of normal ego development. They become maladaptive only in later development if they continue as the predominant mechanisms of defense (Kernberg 1971, 1973; Lustman, 1977). The primitive defenses as described by Klein (1946) and elaborated by Kernberg (1966, 1970) contain the linkages between early modes of cognitive-affective organization and major forms of psychopathology (Grala, 1980).

Yochelson and Samenow (1977) considered psychoanalytic terminology inadequate for understanding the psychopath. They

defined criminality in terms of irresponsibility, specific thinking errors, and general thinking patterns. In our clinical experience these criminal thinking patterns or, as we refer to them, "conscious cognitive-behavioral patterns," can be consistently found in those adult clients we conceptualize as psychopathic (Gacono, 1985), as well as the majority of clients diagnosed as Antisocial Personality Disorder (APA, 1980; Gacono, 1988a, 1988b). One of the authors has also found variations of these cognitive-behavioral patterns in 15- to 18-year-old conduct-disordered adolescents and psychodynamic correlates of these patterns in younger conduct-disordered children. In the process of assessing the children, psychological testing often revealed specific aggressive themes including identification with the aggressor, and non-age appropriate grandiosity admixed with themes of inner vulnerability, worthlessness, inadequacy, and helplessness. Contrary to Yochelson and Samenow (1977), and despite their de-emphasis of psychoanalytic theory, we assert that there is a relationship in the psychopath between conscious cognitive-behavioral patterns and unconscious defensive processes (see Table 1), and that knowledge of this relationship can aid the clinician in understanding transference and countertransference phenomena.

Central to Yochelson and Samenow's cognitive-behavioral style of the psychopath is a process they called the "shut-off mechanism" (Yochelson & Samenow, 1977, p. 23). They describe this mechanism as a psychological defense operating more rapidly than repression. The shut-off mechanism is at the core of the psychopath's thinking patterns. It explains the psychopath's ability to exclude aspects of his personality that could either tarnish grandiose self-perceptions or contradict exploitive, ruthless behaviors toward others. Splitting is the defensive process that regulates the shut-off mechanism. Splitting is the genotypic or fundamental "vertical" (Kohut, 1971) defense in all borderline personality organization. It is implicit in all the defensive processes in Table 1 and, with the exception of suppression, in Table 2. At the most primitive level in the psychopath it is phenotypically expressed as denial; at the developmentally most advanced level, it is clinically apparent as rationalization, that is,

TABLE 1
Cognitive Style and Defense Processes in Psychopathy

Conscious Cognitive-Behavioral Style (Yochelson and Samenow, 1977)	Unconscious Defense Process
1) Criminal Pride, uniqueness, pretentiousness, perfectionism	Idealization of self representations, denial, omnipotence, devaluation of others
2) Ownership/Entitlement	Omnipotence, denial of others needs
3) Failure in empathy	Omnipotence, devaluation, dissociation
4) Victim Stance	Projective identification
5) Refusal to be dependent	Omnipotence, projective identification, persecutory introjection
6) Lying	Denial, omnipotence, rationalization
7) Zero State	Affective emptiness, evacuation of good self and object representations
8) Power Thrust	Projective identification, omnipotent control
9) Anger	Projective identification, omnipotent control, denial
10) Sentimentality	Idealization of past self and object representations
11) Non-Psychotic hallucinations	Introjection, dissociation
12) Sexuality	Projective identification, idealization, devaluation, omnipotent control

Other areas of criminal thought

Energy, fear, religion, suggestibility, loner, lack of time perspective, failure to endure adversity, poor decision making toward responsible living.

NOTE: Conscious Cognitive-Behavioral Styles were adapted from Yochelson and Samenow's (1977a) criminal thinking errors and patterns. Often Yochelson and Samenow's (1977a, 1977b) terminology is unclear. Their failure to differentiate levels of experience and the use of a private terminology not based on one of the major psychological schools of thought, such as learning theory or psychoanalytic theory, contributes to the lack of clarity.

self-responsibility is logically "warded off" or "split off" from conscious elaboration of a behavioral event.

Splitting refers to a fragmented organization of the ego characterized by cognitive immaturity, limited synthetic or

TABLE 2
Mental Mechanisms and Defense Processes in Psychopathy

Mental Mechanisms (Yochelson & Samenow, 1977)	Defense Processes
Shut-off	Splitting, denial, dissociation
Corrosion	Suppression
Cut-off	Splitting, denial, dissociation

NOTE: Mental Mechanisms are from Yochelson and Samenow's (1977a) mental mechanisms, processes, and patterns.

combinatory capacities, and an active separation of introjects and identifications of opposite valence (Kernberg, 1966). Primitive defenses regulated by the grandiose self-structure ensure the psychopath's manipulative style (Bursten, 1972) and manifest themselves in the conscious cognitive-behavioral style described by Yochelson and Samenow (1977a, 1977b) as illustrated in Table 1.

Through splitting the psychopath simultaneously contains highly unrealistic, overvalued (grandiosity) and undervalued representations of himself (inner emptiness, worthlessness). Yochelson and Samenow (1977b) observed the psychopath's grandiosity manifest in virtually every area of the criminal's thinking, including their "criminal pride," "perfectionism," "uniqueness," and "pretentiousness." They label the undervalued cognitive-affective complex, which has been described by Cleckley (1952) as an inner emptiness and by Wishnie (1977) as an inner state of anxiety, the "zero state" (Yochelson and Samenow, 1977a, p. 266). They describe the experience of it as a self-perception containing three beliefs: the individual is totally worthless, a "nothing," all bad; everyone else shares this dim view; and this state of being a nothing will last forever.

Wishnie (1977) and Yochelson and Samenow (1977a, 1977b) believed that extreme fear of this inner state often serves as an impetus to acting out behavior prior to its actual experience. We

also believe that acting out behavior and the psychopath's grandiosity prevent the experience of the zero state. It is only when the grandiose self-structure fails or when the psychopath is prevented from repairing his self-esteem through aggression and acting out that he or she is in danger of experiencing this state.

During the process of multifamily group treatment, it was discovered that conduct-disordered youth could readily verbalize their experiences of extreme envy and grandiosity coupled with inner boredom and emptiness. In response to the question of what they would be like without the part of them that was "super-human" or better than anyone else, they replied, "Worthless, helpless"; "I would be like a guy in a three-piece suit, who goes to work everyday, nine to five"; "I would be helpless, vulnerable"; "It would be like death." One youth adamantly refuted an interpretation linking his depression and substance abuse until his depression was reframed as emptiness and boredom, at which time he dropped his head and became very depressed in appearance (Gacono & Meloy, 1988).

In addition to extreme self-perceptions, Yochelson and Samenow (1977a) observed two distinct self-serving mental processes within the psychopath. They labeled these learned processes "corrosion" and "cutoff" (Yochelson & Samenow, 1977, p. 413). Yochelson and Samenow (1977a) believe the psychopath is able to choose those situations in which they rely on these processes. Through the process of corrosion the psychopath is able to eliminate systematically from his thoughts any external or internal deterrents until the desire to commit an act outweighs any fears. He also uses corrosion to maintain an overvalued image of himself. Whereas corrosion is described as a systematic process, like conscious suppression, where the psychopath cognitively talks himself into a desired mental state (Yochelson and Samenow, 1977a), cutoff referred to a rapid unconscious eradication, or dissociation, of fears from the mind differing from suppression. As noted in Tables 1 and 2, we view all dissociative phenomena as phenotypic expressions of splitting.

Concrete thinking (Glueck & Glueck, 1952, Eissler, 1950) and "fragmentation" (Yochelson & Samenow, 1977a) are also indica-

tive of cognitive immaturity in the psychopath. Concrete thinking is exemplified by the psychopath viewing others as objects, lacking empathy, experiencing extreme opposite and alternating views of a person over time, extrapolating from a few concrete events to form a global perception, and failing to learn from experience (Hare, 1980; Yochelson & Samenow, 1977a).

Fragmentation refers to an extreme form of vacillation manifested by contradictions and fluctuations in the psychopath's thinking (Cleckley, 1952; Yochelson & Samenow, 1977). The discrepancies between the intentions of the psychopath and his actual behavior, and between his behavior and self-perceptions, are examples of fragmentation. Yochelson and Samenow (1977a, p. 415) believe cutoff produces the fragmented pattern within the psychopath's cognitive style. We think that fragmentation, however, is an inadequate term for describing contradictions in attitude, behavior, and self-perceptions due to splitting. Splitting and the other primitive defense processes remain unconscious, supporting cognitive mechanisms such as corrosion and cutoff (see Table 2), which are then manifested in the criminal's cognitive-behavioral style (see Table 1) reported by Yochelson and Samenow (1977a, 1977b).

Idealization, devaluation, projective identification, introjection, omnipotent control, denial, and dissociation are phenotypic defense processes that support the psychopath's conscious cognitive-behavioral style (see Table 1). We will illustrate the relationship between conscious cognitive-behavioral style and unconscious defense processes by discussing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of a hypothetical sexual psychopath prior to, during, and following the rape of a female victim.²

HYPOTHETICAL CASE EXAMPLE

In the beginning sequence of targeting a female victim for rape, the sexual psychopath will unconsciously use projective identification to idealize the potential victim. The victim will usually meet a "goodness of fit" stereotype that is an experiential derivative of

the psychopath's previous experience with females, most notably the primary female parental object. Projective identification allows the sexual psychopath to both externalize and control (Grotstein, 1980) the idealized object representation within the grandiose self-structure. This is not a psychotic identification because perceptual distinctiveness remains. The identification occurs only at an object concept, rather than a perceptual level (Meloy, 1985, 1988).

The initial stalking of the rape victim is a primary example of the "power thrust" (Yochelson & Samenow, 1977) that influences most of the cognitive-behavioral style of the psychopath (see Table 1). The power thrust combines the psychopath's narcissistic self-perceptions with his need for omnipotent control and is expressed through sexual exploitation.

At this phase, the affective state that accompanies the omnipotent control fantasies is exhilaration. One 28-year-old, regressed pedophilic, sex offender described his experience when breaking and entering with intent to rape as, "The fear inside was me euphoric." The psychopath may be consciously thinking, "She really wants me," or, "Look how she's looking at me." There is evidence of both corrosion and cutoff in his conscious cognitive-behavioral style as he eliminates from his thoughts any ideational deterrents that would interfere with his grandiose fantasies of power and control or that would discourage the ensuing rape.

The cognitive distortions of the psychopath are supported by his own unconscious projective processes. In all of his interpersonal interactions, projective identification and omnipotent control are defense processes that maintain the grandiose self-structure and prevent the zero state. Inherent within the grandiose self-structure and supported by projective identification is the psychopath's "lack of empathy," which includes the joined attitudes of "ownership" and "entitlement" (see Table 1). The psychopath relates to others only as a conceptual extension of himself (Meloy, 1985, 1988).

Yochelson and Samenow (1977) noted the presence of ego-alien, cognitive deterrents that often correlated with the initial phases of criminal activity. For example, the psychopath might

hear an "internal voice" stating, "Don't do it," or "This is wrong." The "nonpsychotic hallucinations" are at times able to intrude upon the psychopath's conscious cognitive process. We think these forms of nonpsychotic hallucinations are actually dissociated or severely "split off" introjects of the psychopath's personality as noted in Table 1.

When the psychopath makes verbal or physical contact with the victim, reality begins to intrude upon his grandiose fantasies. The victim will quickly become angry or frightened, behaviors that are contrary to the psychopath's grandiose, power-thrusting fantasies. The psychopath then unconsciously takes back the projective identification of the ideal object, defensively protecting the grandiose self-structure. At the same time the psychopath projects internal persecutory, malevolent introjects, possibly representations of his actual parent of abuse, onto the victim. The victim is thus devalued, transformed into a "monster" through projective identification, and is now perceived as a threat. Under such circumstances aggression and sadism within the grandiose self-structure may be mobilized and dissociative processes will occur that further perceptually distance the psychopath from his victim. Specifically, the psychopath may experience more aggressive nonpsychotic hallucinations commanding him to carry out the act.

At this moment a conscious sense of entitlement is supported by several unconscious defensive processes: The victim has been devalued as an idealized love object and subsequently perceived as a persecutor; therefore, the psychopath feels entitled to victimize her through acts of sexual sadism that hurt and control (Shapiro, 1981). The psychopath also denies the reality of the actual victim as a whole object deserving of empathy, and denies the monstrosity of his own deeds. Denial and dissociation occur on an unconscious level enabling the psychopath to maintain his grandiose self-structure, while on a conscious level cutoff and corrosion (suppression) exclude and eliminate any cognitions that would interfere with his inflated self-image. The sexual psychopath who is also a serial killer incorporates homicide into these regulatory processes.

With the diminution of autonomic arousal following physical and sexual violence, the multiple defensive processes of omnipotence, devaluation, and dissociation disallow any conscious feelings of empathy (see Table 1). Conscious expression of these defensive processes was expressed by a serial murderer, Angelo Buono, who was also a sexual psychopath, in his statement, "Some girls don't deserve to live" (O'Brien, 1985, p. 117). Dissonant cognitions are eliminated from thought through corrosion and cutoff, clinically expressing the varieties of dissociability and splitting inherent in psychopathic defensive operations.

CONCLUSION

We have elaborated on a "levels" hypothesis for object relations and cognitive-behavioral style by exploring theoretical linkages between object relations and defensive operations and the conscious cognitive-behavioral style of the psychopath. As Leaff (1978) and Bursten (1973) suggested, a description based on common psychological characteristics rather than on a mixture of psychological and sociological factors delimits and clarifies the understanding of the psychopathic personality, enables more precise characterological diagnosis, and improves treatment understanding. Viewing the psychopath in this manner leads us to believe that not all individuals meeting the criteria for Antisocial Personality Disorder (APA, 1980) are psychopathic personalities, and that some individuals who do not meet DSM III criteria (APA, 1980) may be psychopathic by a combination of psychodynamic and cognitive-behavioral criteria. In a subsequent article we will discuss the treatment implications when an explicit psychodynamic dimension is added to Yochelson and Samenow's (1977a, 1977b) model.

NOTES

1. Throughout this article we use the terms *psychopath* and *criminal* interchangeably. We use the term *psychopath* in a generic sense, as suggested by authors such as Cleckley

(1952), Bursten (1972, 1973), and Leaff (1978), to describe personality structure and functioning rather than a description of antisocial behaviors (DSM III; American Psychiatric Association, 1980).

2. It is not our intention that this hypothetical example capture the complexity of the sexual psychopath's mind, but only that it demonstrates the interplay between defense process and cognitive-behavioral processes. Please see Groth (1979) for an in-depth analysis of personality patterns in sex offenders.

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