

Reflections on Psychopathy: Elucidating the Criminal Mind and Personality

Dustin B. Wygant, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology

Psychopathy has the distinction of being one of the most fascinating, feared, and misunderstood of psychiatric conditions. Since the term was first used in the 1800s, professionals and society alike have struggled to define this elusive construct that characterizes those among us who violate social norms with ease and lack any semblance of empathy, remorse, or concern for others. While psychopaths only make up an estimated 1% of the population, they account for 15-20% of prison inmates, and are responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime and violence. There remains considerable debate regarding the exact nature of psychopathy, the best way to assess it, and whether it is amenable to treatment. In this talk, Dr. Wygant will highlight his efforts to understand the psychopathic personality by mapping the underlying personality structure and brain deficits associated with psychopathy, thus elucidating the criminal mind. Moreover, he will explain how these traits differentiate the psychopathic offender from the more common criminal. His talk will include portions of filmed interviews he has completed with incarcerated psychopathic offenders drawn from his research. These inmates discuss psychopathy from their perspective, thus giving a voice to the psychopathic personality.