

May 2022

## BTK: A Case Study in Psychopathy

Matthew S. Hutnyan  
mhutnyan@smu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/jour>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hutnyan, Matthew S. (2022) "BTK: A Case Study in Psychopathy," *SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25172/jour.7.2.4>  
Available at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/jour/vol7/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

# BTK: A Case Study in Psychopathy

Matthew S. Hutnyan

mhutnyan@smu.edu

Mentor: Dr. James Calvert<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Psychopathy and serial murder have been topics of great public interest and media attention for several decades. Dennis Rader, a serial killer well-known by his pseudonym “BTK,” was responsible for the gruesome torture and murder of ten people between 1974 and 1991. Although some information is known about him through media accounts, little work has been done to synthesize information about his life and crimes, and to examine him as a case study of psychopathy. Through careful literature review and analysis, this study aims to provide insight into Rader’s life and crimes, and to delineate his psychopathology to gain a better understanding of psychopathy. The results of this case study indicate that Dennis Rader exhibited many features of psychopathy, as well as antisocial and narcissistic personality disorders. This case study has important implications for the public perception of psychopathy and serial murderers, and the investigation of individual psychopaths, emphasizing the value of a comprehensive review of an individual’s life factors in relation to their criminal behavior.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There is perhaps no topic of psychology and criminology that has gained more widespread interest than that of psychopathy and serial murder. News media outlets have long sensationalized the heinous acts of serial killers like Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer, and films such as *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Se7en*, and *American Psycho* have captivated audiences for decades. Dramatized stories of violent crime, rape, and murder that are often associated with the term “psychopath” have rapidly populated American culture. Many of these accounts and portrayals fail to make an important distinction between psychopaths and other types of criminal offender—a distinction that is often lost not only on news media outlets, the entertainment industry, and the public, but also on professionals that work within the criminal justice system (e.g., psychologists, psychiatrists, law enforcement). In this context, it is important to demonstrate how psychopathy manifests and explain why it does.

“Bind them, torture them, kill them”—this was the motto of the infamous “BTK” killer of Wichita, Kansas who gruesomely murdered ten people between 1974 and 1991. His heinous acts created a wake of fear among Kansans that lasted for decades, and he will long be remembered as one of the most elusive serial killers in American history. BTK became infamous primarily because he did not have one “type” of victim, he did not kill in rapid succession, and he sent numerous letters to local media outlets and law enforcement, detailing his crimes and crafting a public persona for himself. After three decades of eluding capture, BTK made an erroneous decision to send law enforcement identifiable information. He was subsequently arrested and convicted for his crimes (Eagle Staff, 2019).

BTK was not a deformed monster or a devilish effigy. He was Dennis Rader—church president, Boy Scout leader, and ADT employee—who lived in an average neighborhood with his wife and two kids. He was the

archetype of a suburban man, with a sinister pastime. The study of serial killers and psychopathy requires a fundamental understanding that “monstrous acts do not necessarily proceed from monsters” (Gray, 2010, p. 191). It is easy to project one’s perception of horrible acts onto the person who commits them, but as exemplified by Rader, acts are often separate from the actor as he is known by others. “We expect that the person who committed the acts to be as horrible as the acts themselves,” says Psychologist Richard Gray, “but ultimately we find the evildoer pedestrian, his life outside of the crime and its contexts relatively unremarkable” (Gray, 2010, p. 191). From a layperson’s perspective, the case of BTK is disconcerting and fantastical. It seems unlikely that a man like Dennis Rader could commit the crimes of BTK, and if he did, that would mean that anyone could be walking around committing those crimes. This is the danger of a psychopath.

## 2. PSYCHOPATHY

### A. A Brief History

Researchers have found references to the construct of psychopathy—known as “moral insanity,” “constitutional inferiority,” “insanity without delirium,” and “moral derangement,” among other things—throughout time and across cultures (Hare, 1999; Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011; Wilson et al., 2014). Although definitions have shifted over time, many of the underlying traits and characteristics of psychopathy have been long observed. Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle’s, is considered one of the first people to formally write on the topic of psychopathy, calling those who lacked empathy and a conscience “the unscrupulous” (as cited in Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011, p. 359). Psychopathic characteristics are also common among characters in biblical, classical, medieval, and modern texts, including the works of Shakespeare, the Chinese epic *Jin Ping Mei*, Berthold Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera*, and Anthony

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. James Calvert is a senior lecturer in SMU’s Psychology Department.

Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, taking on diverse and often villainous forms.

A scientific notion of psychopathy was first described in the early nineteenth century by French Psychiatrist Philippe Pinel. He observed a distinct pattern of remorselessness and lack of restraint among some individuals that was particularly severe and malicious compared to other patients he had treated (Hare, 1999; see Arrigo & Shipley, 2001 for a discussion of Pinel and other key figures in the history of psychopathy). One of Pinel's students, Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol, dubbed this set of characteristics *la folie raisonnante*, which translates to "rational madness" (Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011). In the early 1940s, American Psychiatrist Hervey Cleckley (1941) wrote *The Mask of Sanity*, a seminal work on psychopathic characteristics. In it, he describes many cases of psychopathy characterized by a total lack of empathy, enhanced social skills and persuasive ability, and exceptional charm. While some of his patients were "plainly unsuited for life in any community," a select few were much more troubling: they were highly functioning businessmen, doctors, and lawyers, able to meet the demands of society "despite having the same clinical constellations as their less-functioning brethren, including grandiosity, impulsivity, remorselessness and shallow affect" (Cleckley, 1976, p. 188; Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011, p. 360). This early clinical view served as the foundation for a modern definition of psychopathy.

### B. Approaching a Definition

Although psychopathy has been observed for centuries, it was not until the past 40 years that it became a subject of systematic inquiry and elaboration (Wilson et al., 2014; Hare, 1999). The term "psychopathy" comes from the German word *psychopastische* (Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011, p. 361). In English, it translates to "mental illness" (from *psyche*, meaning "mind," and *pathos*, meaning "disease;" Hare, 1999). Over time, the word has taken on two definitions: one generic and one scientific (i.e., as psychopathy is discussed in this article).

In psychological science, psychopathy is viewed as a construct that "manifests as a syndrome characterized by a constellation of affective, interpersonal, lifestyle and antisocial features," such as grandiosity, deceitfulness, lack of empathy, callousness, and impulsivity (De Brito et al., 2021, p. 1). According to Psychologist Robert Hare (1999), psychopaths can be described as "intraspecies predators who use charm, manipulation, intimidation, and violence to control others and to satisfy their own selfish needs. Lacking in conscience and in feelings for others, they cold-bloodedly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret" (p. 26). These features of psychopathy were operationalized by the Hare Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R; Hare, 2003), the most widely used measure of psychopathy (De Brito et al., 2021). Hare's four factor model of psychopathy (Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2005) has substantial empirical support and remains the most popular conception of the construct (see Table 1; Neumann et al., 2015). Interpersonal and affective factors are considered particularly important features of psychopathy. Evidence suggests that affective features, such as lack of remorse and callousness, are central features of psychopathy

(Preszler et al., 2018; Verschuere et al., 2018). In addition, affective and interpersonal features distinguish individuals with psychopathy from individuals with the broader diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD; De Brito et al., 2021).

Throughout the history of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorder* (DSM), psychopathy has been closely tied to ASPD and there is ongoing debate regarding the diagnostic criteria of and conceptual overlap between the two (see Crego & Widiger, 2015). Although antisociality is considered a feature of psychopathy, the two terms are not synonymous and evidence supports them as discrete constructs (Neumann et al., 2015). The DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) does not include psychopathy as a personality disorder; however, ASPD and other Cluster B personality disorders are strongly associated with psychopathy (De Brito et al., 2021). Instead, the APA (2013) includes psychopathy in a special section of the DSM-5 entitled "Alternative DSM-5 Model for Personality Disorders." In the DSM-5, psychopathy is considered a "distinct variant" of ASPD marked by "a lack of anxiety or fear and by a bold interpersonal style that may mask maladaptive behaviors" (APA, 2013, p. 765). Psychopathy is characterized by a combination of high levels of attention seeking and low levels of withdrawal and anxiousness. This characterization of psychopathy maps onto Hare and Cleckley's conceptualizations well (Crego & Widiger, 2015) and reflects the particular importance of affective and interpersonal features.

### C. Development and Correlates of Psychopathy and Violence

There is little consensus regarding how psychopathy develops and what qualify as necessary or sufficient causes; however, several theories have been posited. Theories generally fall within two predominant models: a developmental and developmental (Lynam & Gudonis, 2005). A developmental theories hold that psychopathy doesn't *develop*, but is the result of underlying processes (e.g., deficit in response modulation) or traits (e.g., lack of fear, impulsivity; Lynam & Gudonis, 2005). Most developmental theories, on the other hand, hold that inborn traits (e.g., lack of empathy, unemotional temperament) interact with environmental factors to produce features of psychopathy (Lynam & Gudonis, 2005). Regardless of developmental model, there is robust evidence of underlying genetic risk for psychopathic traits (De Brito et al., 2021). In addition, studies have identified a wide range of environmental risk factors associated with later development of psychopathic features including prenatal maternal stress, harsh parental discipline during adolescence, negative parental emotions, and disrupted family functioning (De Brito et al., 2021). In addition to these risk factors, there are several correlates of psychopathy relevant to Rader's case.

### D. Intelligence

There is significant empirical support for a robust inverse relationship between intelligence and criminality (e.g., Rushton & Templer, 2009). Unsurprisingly, lower levels of intelligence have been associated with lifestyle features (e.g., impulsivity, lack of behavioral control) of

psychopathy (Heinzen et al., 2011). Mixed results have been reported regarding the association between other features of psychopathy and intelligence (e.g., Harpur et al., 1989; Forth, Hart, & Hare, 1990). Interpersonal features have previously been positively associated with intelligence (Vitacco et al., 2005; Neumann & Hare, 2007), but recent results did not replicate these findings (Heinzen et al., 2011). Despite a lack of consensus on the association between most factors of psychopathy and intelligence, higher levels of intelligence in psychopaths are associated with earlier initiation of violent crime (Johansson & Kerr, 2005).

#### E. *Childhood Maltreatment*

In addition, evidence suggests childhood maltreatment may play a role in the development of psychopathy (De Brito et al., 2021). Specifically, a strong relationship between childhood physical abuse and antisocial features of psychopathy has been found (Dargis et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2012). Findings related to other forms of childhood abuse (e.g., emotional, sexual) are mixed; however, positive associations between emotional abuse and psychopathy (Dargis et al., 2016) as well as sexual abuse and psychopathy have been found (Graham et al., 2012). Taken together, these results suggest that childhood maltreatment is related to antisociality and psychopathy.

#### F. *Traumatic Brain Injury and Neurological Disorders*

Substantial evidence supports the association between brain abnormalities—specifically in areas related to moral decision making, emotional processing, and learning—and psychopathy. In addition, connectivity between these areas (i.e., frontal and temporo-limbic regions) has been shown to be diminished in psychopaths (Debowska et al., 2014). Conditions such as frontotemporal dementia and traumatic brain injury (TBI) are also associated with psychopathy, and it has been proposed that disrupted prefrontal cortex connection is the mechanism by which TBI leads to an increased risk of psychopathy (Granacher & Fozdar, 2020). In a meta-analysis of traumatic brain injury studies, Fazel et al. (2009) found that individuals with a TBI were at greater risk for violent behavior and that comorbid psychopathology among individuals with TBI was associated with greater risk of violent behavior. These findings suggest that brain abnormalities, either congenital or acquired, may be important risk factors of psychopathy.

#### G. *MacDonald's Triad*

MacDonald's Triad (MacDonald, 1963) is a set of three childhood behaviors—fire setting, animal cruelty, and bedwetting (enuresis)—purportedly associated with later aggressive, violent, and sadistic behaviors (e.g., murder, rape). Evidence of the association between the full Triad and later violent behavior is mixed; however, fire setting and animal cruelty have emerged as stand-alone correlates of future violence and criminality (Langevin, 2003; Joubert et al., 2021; Slavkin, 2001). Conversely, bedwetting seems to be the weakest correlate of future violence and criminality (Heath et al., 1984; Slavkin, 2001). Given the mixed results related to the Triad, some reviewers (e.g., Miller, 2001; Parfitt et al., 2020) have suggested that each of the three

components be viewed as individual predictors, rather than as a cluster.

Instead of viewing fire setting and animal cruelty as direct antecedents of violence, Walters (2012, 2017) has suggested that they may be more accurately viewed as expressions of temperamental dimensions that predispose an individual to act violently (i.e., temperament mediates the relationship between Triad behaviors and later violent behaviors). Specifically, he showed that animal cruelty was highly correlated with fearlessness, whereas fire setting was highly correlated with disinhibition. In addition, he found that animal cruelty and fire setting failed to predict violent offending after controlling for fearlessness and disinhibition, respectively (Walters, 2017). This suggests that fire setting and animal cruelty may be behaviors directly associated with temperament rather than violence.

Particular attention should be paid to animal cruelty, because of a potential link between violence against animals and violence against humans. The violence graduation hypothesis maintains that cruelty against animals leads to violence against humans in a graduated fashion (Wright & Hensley, 2003). Although testing of this hypothesis has resulted in mixed findings (Hensley & Tallichet, 2009; Hensley, Tallichet, & Dutkiewicz, 2009; Walters, 2013), it seems to be the most promising predictor of the three Triad components.

#### H. *Sexual Fantasies*

In two studies of non-clinical samples, Visser et al. (2015) found that psychopathic traits predicted fantasy themes of anonymous, uncommitted, nonromantic sexual activity. In addition, they found that psychopathy predicted self-reported engagement in dominant, deviant, and adventurous sexual activity. Notably, participants who reported high levels of fantasizing about these sexual themes were more likely to engage in those behaviors if they also reported high levels of psychopathy. These findings suggest that psychopathy is an important mediator between sexual fantasies and sexual behaviors, especially those that are deviant. In addition, evidence suggests that psychopathy is positively associated with sadistic paraphilia (i.e., recurrent intense sexual urges, fantasies, or behaviors involving nonhuman objects, non-consenting people, or the suffering of oneself or another; Woodworth et al., 2013). In a study of sexual murderers, Prentky et al. (1989) found that serial murderers were more likely than single murderers to be diagnosed with paraphilia, experience violent fantasies, and organize their crime scenes (i.e., place bodies and objects in particular positions and places). The authors concluded that these results suggested fantasy may be a “presumptive mechanism for sexual sadism and sexual murder” (Prentky et al., 1989, p. 890). Taken together these results suggest that violent, sexual fantasies are more common among psychopaths than non-psychopaths and that fantasies experienced by psychopaths may lead to violent sexual behavior.

### 3. OBJECTIVE

Dennis Rader is of particular interest because he does not fit the mold of a conventional serial killer. He had unique victim preferences, he didn't kill in quick succession,

and he communicated with media and law enforcement in a brazen manner. Moreover, Rader did not appear to experience many of the adverse life experiences generally associated with the development of antisocial personality disorder, psychopathy, or a life of crime generally. Rader's is a unique case among psychopaths and serial killers. Although there exists a plethora of information regarding his crimes, the literature has lacked a comprehensive review and synthesis of information related to Rader's life and crimes. In addition, little work has been done to analyze his life and crimes to delineate his psychopathology. This case study provides a comprehensive review of Rader's life and crimes, as well as an analysis of them. Contributing factors to Rader's psychopathy as well as implications for public perception are discussed.

#### 4. METHODS

To gain a better understanding of the life and crimes of Dennis Rader, a careful review of extant literature was conducted. PsycINFO and Google Scholar were searched using the terms "BTK" and "Dennis Rader," resulting in a variety of source types, including media accounts (e.g., newspaper articles), books, and peer-reviewed journal articles. In addition, Google searches were conducted to find archived internet pages and media accounts contemporary with Rader's crimes. After synthesizing information known about Rader, a psychological analysis was performed to approximate how Rader's life and crimes relate to and satisfy criteria for relevant psychopathologies, with particular emphasis placed on psychopathy.

#### 5. DENNIS RADER'S LIFE

##### A. *Early Life and Education*

Dennis Lynn Rader was born March 9, 1945, to William and Dorothea Rader outside the small town of Columbus, Kansas (Ramsland, 2016; Douglas & Doddy, 2008). He was the oldest of four boys, all of whom were born within ten years (Sexton et al., 2005). His father was in the United States Marine Corps but was discharged and became employed as a mechanic shortly after Rader's birth (Ramsland, 2016). His mother's occupation throughout her adult life is mostly unknown. Rader was raised by both of his biological parents. Many described his mother as "loving" and his father as "tough but decent" (Magnus, 2005, para. 5).

Rader's first years were largely spent on his grandparents' farm, where his entire family lived in one house (Douglas & Doddy, 2008). In 1949, he and his family moved to Wichita, Kansas. There, his parents bought a house and worked tirelessly to maintain it, eventually crafting a small garden and chicken coops (Ramsland, 2016). As a boy, Rader became heavily involved in Zion Lutheran Church where he was baptized and, at the age of twelve, confirmed (Douglas & Doddy, 2008; Sexton et al., 2005). In his guided autobiography, he recalled a time when he swore off cussing, drinking, sex, and drugs, even returning home on the verge of tears after a friend of his spoke the name of God (Ramsland, 2016). In addition, he became involved with the Boy Scouts.

Although many details of Rader's school life, including his academic performance and socialization, are unknown, it seems as though he was a relatively high-performing student and kept mostly to himself. According to an eighth-grade classmate, Rader was bright and did well in school (Sexton et al., 2005). It has been speculated that Rader saved a fellow Boy Scout on a canoe trip when he was fifteen; however, this remains unconfirmed. It is also unknown whether he was bullied or teased, or if he engaged in any romantic relationships throughout his adolescence and teen years (Sexton et al., 2005). In 1963, Rader graduated from Wichita Heights Valley Center High School (Douglas & Doddy, 2008).

Two years after graduating from high school he enrolled at Kansas Wesleyan University where he completed courses for a year before enlisting in the Air Force (King, 2012; Sylvester, 2007). He served four years as a mechanic and subsequently returned to Kansas. Rader's father passed away in 1966 (Sexton et al., 2005). In 1971, Rader began working in the meat department of a local grocery store where his mother had been a bookkeeper. Around the same time, he married Paula Dietz and began attending Butler County Community College (Sylvester, 2007; Greene, 2005). Shortly after, he had a brief stint at Coleman Company, an outdoor supply company, where two of his victims, Julie Otero and Kathryn Bright, worked around the same time (Sylvester, 2007). In 1973, he enrolled at Wichita State University where he eventually earned a bachelor's degree in administrative justice (Sexton et al., 2005). During his time at Wichita State, he became employed by ADT, a national security company, as an alarm systems installer and had two children with his wife, Paula. He remained employed by ADT throughout the commission of most of his murders, from 1974 to 1988 (Sylvester, 2007; King, 2012; Eagle Staff, 2019). At one point he applied to the Wichita Police Department, but was rejected (Sexton et al., 2005). Three years after leaving ADT, Rader began working as a compliance supervisor for Park City, Kansas and remained in that role until his arrest in 2005. His duties included animal control, city ordinance enforcement, and responding to nuisance calls (Sexton et al., 2005; Sylvester, 2007). Throughout his adult life, Rader served as a Boy Scout leader and as the president of his church, Christ Lutheran (Eagle Staff, 2019).

Rader's degree of intelligence is unknown; however, by many accounts he was a bright, organized man. Many who knew Rader said he paid great attention to detail and worked in an organized manner; others viewed him as controlling (Eagle Staff, 2019). On the other hand, Rader did not seem to be a talented writer or speller. This was evident in his communications to the police and press, which contained many typos and errors (Eagle Staff, 2019). His first note to law enforcement was so poorly crafted that authorities believed the author may not have been a native English speaker (Gray, 2010). This lack of writing ability could have been because of some sort of mild learning disability or dyslexia, or it may have been a tactic by Rader to obfuscate his own characteristics to police (i.e., misspelling words was intentional).

### B. *Early Indicators of Psychopathy*

During his early years, the first signs of developing psychopathology arose. In his guided autobiography by Katherine Ramsland (2016), Rader claimed that he was accidentally dropped on his head by his mother during infancy, which allegedly caused him to stop breathing and turn blue. He also stated that his mother fell off a horse and injured herself while pregnant with him. There is no evidence to support these claims, however, and their validity is unknown. Rader was knowledgeable about the scientific evidence related to violence and crime available at the time, which supported early brain injury and other neurological disorders as factors in the development of antisocial personality disorder, violence, and crime (e.g., Diaz, 1995; Hibbard et al., 2000; Timonen et al., 2002), so his account should be regarded with skepticism. Whether Rader was physically, sexually, or emotionally abused as a child is also unknown; however, one of his brothers said their home was without any problems or abuse growing up and Rader has maintained that he was not abused as a child (Magnus, 2005; Efron et al., 2019).

While claims of neurological trauma cannot be verified and Rader was likely not abused as a child, he did exhibit one important behavioral component of MacDonald's Triad (MacDonads, 1963). Whether Rader experienced enuresis or experimented with fire-setting is unknown, but it is evident that he participated in animal cruelty and torture (Ramsland, 2016; Sexton et al., 2005). In an interview with Ramsland (2016) he admitted to torturing animals from a young age. In addition, it has been speculated that during his tenure as a compliance officer, Rader unnecessarily tranquilized and possibly even killed dogs on several occasions (King 2012; Sexton et al., 2005). In his book about Rader, John Douglas (2008) suggested that Rader's sadistic tendencies may have started on his grandparent's farm. It is reported that Rader wrote in his journal as a boy about watching his grandmother tear the heads off chickens and how it gave him a "vaguely sexual and thoroughly enjoyable" sensation in his stomach (Douglas & Doddy, 2008). If this account is accurate, it would provide substantial support to the violence graduation hypothesis (Wright & Hensley, 2003) and would explain how Rader's childhood environment influenced his violent, sexually charged behavior.

In addition to animal cruelty behavior, he developed an early fetish for women's underwear and started to have violent sexual fantasies about bondage and torture as early as elementary school (King, 2012). These fantasies persisted and intensified throughout his life, guiding his behavior (Gray, 2010). Each of his crimes included elements of bondage and torture, and after being arrested, he admitted to stealing his victims' underwear and wearing it for fun (King, 2012). Evidence of Rader's violent sexual fantasies in childhood and adolescence provides an explanation for his violent behavior later in life.

Many relevant pieces of information and details regarding Rader's life remain unknown. For example, although it is reported that Rader's parents were not out of the ordinary (Magnus, 2005), little detail is known regarding the home environment or the discipline style of his parents. In addition, claims of brain injury sustained at an early age (Ramsland, 2016) cannot be substantiated nor is there

evidence related to parental substance use, Rader's substance use, or Rader's romantic relationships and sexual experiences in adolescence.

## 6. BTK'S CRIMES

Between 1974 and 1991, Dennis Rader murdered ten people. In all cases, he bound them and then strangled, shot, or stabbed them. His known victims ranged from nine-years-old to 62 years old (King, 2012). Two of them worked with Rader, and all the murders were committed within a three-and-a-half-mile radius of each other. Rader used his education, training, and occupations to locate victims and his organized and highly structured lifestyle aided him in accomplishing these crimes without raising suspicion (Hickey, 2012).

### A. *Fantasies, Murders, and Taunts*

When Rader reached adulthood, the fantasies that he developed in adolescence grew more pervasive. The content of his fantasies became more violent, specific, and insatiable. According to Rader (as cited in Magnus, 2005),

[He] started working out [a] fantasy in [his] mind. And once that potential—that person [became] a fantasy, [he] could just loop it over. [He] could lay in bed at night and think about this person, the events and how it [would] happen. And it would become[...] real, almost like a picture show[...] He] wanted to go ahead and produce it and direct it and go through with it. No matter what the costs were, the consequences. It was gonna happen one way or another. Maybe not that day, but it was gonna happen. (para. 8).

Rader's murders were not committed in quick succession. Instead, he utilized long "cooling-off" periods, as he called them, of months or years. During these periods, Rader would troll (i.e., hunt) for his next victim while engaging in autoerotic fantasy. As he hunted for his victims, he learned their habits and routines, which caused him to become increasingly aroused. In this way, the trolling phase was akin to foreplay for Rader. His autoerotic fantasies and masturbation habits were aided by several trophies he collected from victims after murdering them. These were used to satisfy his sexual cravings between murders (Bonn, 2019). In addition to masturbation, Rader would dress in his victims' clothing, tie himself up, and lay down in shallow graves (Gray, 2010). Rader's crimes demonstrated the process by which fantasies build to action: internal practice (i.e., repetitively picturing fantasies playing out), self-reinforcement (e.g., masturbating while fantasizing), and the reinforcement of acting out one's fantasies (e.g., becoming gratified by murdering; Gray, 2010; Visser et al., 2015). His fantasies seemed to shape his behavior. This pattern began with his first murders, which were likely precipitated by a convergence of intense fantasies and life stressors.

In January of 1974, Rader was laid off from his job and was experiencing mental distress as a result. He began "trolling" for his first victim by scouting different

neighborhoods, including along Edgemoor Drive where his former coworker Julie Otero lived (Magnus, 2005). On the morning of January 15, after several days of planning, Rader cut the phone lines at the Otero residence and forced his way into their house. He killed four members of the family, including both parents and two of their five children, by strangling them with cord from their window blinds (Effron et al., 2019; Sexton et al., 2005). Joseph and Julie Otero were bound at the ankles and wrists, and Julie was found gagged on the bed. Their son, Joseph Otero Jr., was also bound and his head was covered with three hoods. Most gruesomely, the Otero's eleven-year-old daughter, Josephine, was found gagged, hanging naked from a pipe in the basement (Sexton et al., 2005). According to court testimony, after killing the others, Rader removed her clothes and led to her to the basement where he told her "'Well, honey, you're going to be in heaven with the rest of your family,'" and then masturbated while she hanged (as cited in Coates, 2005, para. 9).

Three months later, Rader struck again. His next victim was Kathy Bright, another coworker of his at Coleman Company. He selected her randomly, as he did with the Otero's (Magnus, 2005). On April 4, 1974, Rader attempted to murder Kathy but encountered her brother, Kevin, unexpectedly. Rader forced Kevin to bind and gag Kathy, then he bound Kevin and attempted to strangle him. Kevin broke free of his restraints and a struggle ensued. After wounding Kathy with a knife and Kevin with a handgun, Rader fled. Kevin survived, but his sister died in the hospital (Sexton et al., 2005).

His next two victims, Shirley Vian and Nancy Fox, were not murdered until 1977. Both were bound, gagged, and strangled to death, Vian by rope and Fox by belt (Sexton et al., 2005). Rader's voice was recorded when he made a 9-1-1 call to report Fox's murder (Sylvester, 2017). Although this voice recording was a promising piece of evidence, it never directly led to progress in the police investigation of the crimes.

Between 1974 and 1979, he sent several taunting letters to the police and new media outlets in which he revealed details of the crimes that were unknown to the public, claiming that he had committed the murders (King, 2012). In addition, he demanded media attention and posited nicknames that the public could give him, including "BTK" for "bind them, torture them, and kill them," his *modus operandi* (King, 2012; Eagle Staff, 2019). Some of his communications included pictures of victims, both living and deceased souvenirs he had collected. He utilized a special signature: the letters "B," "T," and "K," with the "B" in the shape of breasts (Eagle Staff, 2019). The letters stopped in 1979.

Rader's final three victims were Marine Hedge, Vicki Wegerle, and Dolores Davis (Eagle Staff, 2019). Hedge was abducted from her home blocks from Rader's on April 27, 1985 (Sylvester, 2007). She was later found in a roadside ditch, having been strangled by hand (Sexton et al., 2005). Wegerle was strangled in her home in September of 1986; this time Rader used a nylon stocking (Sylvester, 2007; Sexton et al., 2005). This crime was not initially attributed to Rader. His final known victim, Dolores Davis, was strangled with pantyhose in January of 1991. Like Hedge, she was abducted from her home and later found

dumped in a ditch (Sexton et al., 2005; Effron et al., 2019). After killing these women Rader became dormant for many years.

In all his crimes, Rader maintained a high level of control over his victims (Douglas & Doddy, 2008). He was methodical, but adaptable. He tied his victims with rope or whatever was handy, utilized a garrote or plastic bags to strangle or suffocate his victims, and ceremoniously arranged the victims' bodies. Before leaving some scenes, such as the Otero home, he masturbated (Douglas & Doddy, 2008). He was well-practiced in his murder techniques. According to testimony of Detective Clint Snyder, Rader practiced squeezing a rubber ball to strengthen his hands so that they would not go numb while he strangled victims (Coates, 2005). In addition, he spent lengthy periods of time preparing for his projects. He used a specific type of knot on all his victims and each of the victims shared specific piercings and locations of injury because of Rader's actions. These are indicators that Rader was trying to replicate a fantasy scheme which he had created in preparation for the murders (Gray, 2010).

## B. *The Return*

After nearly twenty-five years, Rader's need for public attention brought him out of the shadows. On January 17, 2004, the *Wichita Eagle* published a story commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the first BTK murders. Journalist Hurst Laviana reported that many Wichitans had not heard of BTK, interviewing a lawyer who said that when he spoke about the murders at a local high school, many students were surprised to know that such crimes had been committed in Wichita. This outraged Rader. In March, he sent a letter to the newspaper to set the record straight. In it, he took credit for the killing of Vicki Wegerle, an unsolved case that was not publicly attributed to BTK at the time. He included a photocopy of three pictures of Wegerle and a copy of her missing driver's license, the only thing reported missing at the scene of the crime (Eagle Staff, 2019).

In another communique, Rader asked police if they would be able to catch him if he used a computer disc to communicate with them, to which they replied in the classified section of a local newspaper that they would not be able to. He fell for their lie (Hansen, 2006). Rader's final communication was in the form of a floppy disk (a type of disk storage for digital data) filled with puzzles and taunts, which he sent to a local TV station (Magnus, 2005). The disc contained the name "Dennis" in the metadata and the police were able to trace it to Rader's church. A quick Google search revealed that "Dennis" was Rader (King, 2012; Magnus, 2005).

When Rader reemerged in 2004, he let his guard down. After a long period of silence, he believed that police investigators were his "comrades and colleagues," and that they would tell him the truth if he asked for it (Douglas & Doddy, 2008, p. 6). Ultimately, this false belief led to his downfall. After narrowing in on Rader, police subpoenaed a DNA sample from the medical records of Kerri Rawson, Rader's daughter. They matched this sample to DNA found under Wegerle's nails as well as DNA found at the Otero and Fox crime scenes (Eagle Staff, 2019).

### C. *Arrest and Legal Proceedings*

Rader was arrested in February of 2005, eleven months after resuming contact with the media and police (Coates, 2005). He was 59 years old when he was captured. At that time, he lived in Park City, Kansas and had been married for 33 years (Douglas & Doddy, 2008). Rader was booked on suspicion of 10 counts of first-degree murder (Eagle Staff, 2019). After his arrest, Rader's wife was granted an emergency divorce and a judge waived the normal 60-day waiting period based on the circumstances (Greene, 2005; Effron et al., 2019).

During the initial interrogation Rader expressed shock that police investigators would intentionally deceive him regarding the computer disc. He felt that he had built a good rapport with Lieutenant Ken Ladwehr of the Wichita police department, in particular (Hansen, 2006). Ladwehr recalled that Rader, "couldn't get over the fact that [he] would lie to him" and that, after bringing up the floppy disk several times, said "I really thought Ken was honest[...] when he gave me the signal it can't be traced" (as cited in Hansen, 2006, para. 12). Rader was angered the police would lie to capture him. Despite this, he enjoyed discussing his crimes and was proud to confess to police what he had done (Magnus, 2005).

Rader stood silent during his arraignment on May 3, 2005, which caused Judge Greg Waller to enter pleas of not guilty for all 10 counts of murder on his behalf (Strongin & Laviana, 2005; Eagle Staff, 2019). However, on the scheduled trial date Rader changed his pleas to guilty on all counts and subsequently described his crimes in detail (Eighteenth Judicial District Court of Kansas, 2005; "Anger over confessions," 2005). Listeners, including attorneys, journalists, victims' families, and members of the public, described Rader's courtroom account of the murders as "emotionless," "cold," and "heartless" ("Anger over confessions," 2005).

After a pre-sentencing investigation was conducted, the court convened for sentencing. Over the course of an arduous two-day hearing, Judge Waller heard from Rader as well as families of the victims. In Rader's 30-minute allocution address, he rambled about the Bible, his gratefulness for family and friends, and the praise he had for the law enforcement officials that caught him (Coates, 2005). Victims' families passionately argued for harsh sentencing and expressed the emotional pain that Rader's actions caused them. By the end, Waller found "no evidence of mitigating factors" and sentenced Rader to ten consecutive life sentences, a minimum of one-hundred-and-seventy-five years in prison without the possibility of parole—the harshest sentence permitted (Coates, 2005, p. 1; "Anger over confessions," 2005; Magnus, 2005). Rader was ineligible for the death penalty because between 1972 and 1994, the state of Kansas did not utilize it; he ended his killing spree three years prior to Kansas' reintroduction of capital punishment (Eagle Staff, 2019; Coates, 2005).

After sentencing, Rader was transported to El Dorado Correctional Facility in Butler County, Kansas where he remains incarcerated as of the publication of this article (Kansas Department of Corrections [KDC], 2019). He lives in an 8-foot-by-10-foot cell under special management and is granted only one hour a day, five days a week, to shower and exercise. Less than a year after

sentencing, Rader was granted special privileges of TV and radio usage for good behavior; however, unknown recent disciplinary infractions may have jeopardized those privileges ("Jail perks," 2006; KDC, 2019). Although Rader appealed his convictions, his attorney later withdrew the appeal for reasons unknown ("Killer abandons appeal," 2006). It is likely that Rader will spend the rest of his life in prison.

In addition to criminal charges, Rader also faced lawsuits from the families of all 10 of his victims (Magnus, 2005). The lawsuits were filed for a variety of reasons, including wrongful death and emotional distress experienced by the victims' families. Some families expressed that their primary concern was preventing Rader from profiting off the sale of his story (Finger, 2005). Rader and the victims' families eventually reached a settlement, which called for the families to receive 75% of the royalties from any future sale of books, movies, or appearances that Rader may pursue related to the murders ("Relatives settle lawsuit," n.d.).

## 7. RESULTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Dennis Rader was interviewed following his guilty pleas by Psychologist Robert Mendoza and was diagnosed with narcissistic, antisocial, and obsessive-compulsive personality disorders. Mendoza highlighted Rader's excessive need for attention, his lack of empathy for his victims, and his preoccupation with rigid structure and order (Ramsland, 2016). To expound upon Mendoza's diagnosis of Rader, diagnostic criteria for narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) and ASPD are reviewed and features of psychopathy exemplified by Rader are discussed.

### A. *Psychopathy*

Dennis Rader is considered by many experts to be a quintessential psychopath ("Anger over confessions," 2005; Bonn, 2019). Psychologist Howard Brodsky, who consulted with Wichita police on the case, categorized Rader as a goal-oriented psychopath because he operated methodically and purposely surrounded himself with relatively naïve people who would not catch on to his secret life ("Anger over confessions," 2005). While Rader clearly exhibited many features of psychopathy, in some important ways he was an unconventional psychopath.

The affective factor of psychopathy is comprised of four items: lack of remorse, shallow affect, callousness or lack of empathy, and failure to accept responsibility. Rader demonstrated shallow affect, lack of remorse, and lack of empathy throughout his court proceedings. He listened to the judge read the details of the crime with a blank look on his face, interrupting at points to correct minor details. When it was his turn to speak, he delivered the details of his crimes to the court in a cold, matter-of-fact manner, sparing no detail and shedding only few insincere-seeming tears. He expressed hope that God would accept him after all that he had done—a sign of selfish concern. This type of cold, rational explanation of one's actions is characteristic of a psychopath's tendency toward shallow emotion and lack of empathy (Gray, 2010). Since the trial, Rader has expressed no remorse or regret regarding his crimes and takes little



responsibility. He views himself as a “natural born predator” who is driven to kill by an urge that he cannot understand or conquer (Bonn, 2019, para. 12). In a letter to his daughter while in prison he claimed that life before he began murdering was good and that “the dark side took [him] away” (Effron et al., 2019, p. 2). The same person that craved attention and credit for the murders took little blame for what others viewed as wrongdoing.

In addition to Rader’s affective features of psychopathy, he demonstrated interpersonal features of superficial charm, pathological lying, manipulateness, and a grandiose sense of self-worth. While Rader was not particularly smooth or charming and he did not have the handsome quality of a serial killer like Ted Bundy, he was known in his community as an upstanding, dependable person (Sexton et al., 2005; Gray, 2010). One news outlet covering the court proceedings reported that Rader “looked eerily normal for the crimes he was about to confess” and a child of one of his victims said he looked “very upstanding and respectable” in the courtroom (“Anger over confessions,” 2005, para. 15; Strongin & Laviana, 2005, para. 12). His persona was unassuming and innocent: a church president, Boy Scout leader, and blue-collar worker. Although there are no direct accounts of Rader being a pathological liar or a particularly manipulative person, one can assume that to successfully live a double life for 30 years, Rader would have had to lied on numerous occasions to family, friends, and coworkers. Lastly, and most importantly, Rader possessed a grandiose sense of self-worth. This is most evident in his communication with law enforcement and news outlets. In his letters, Rader demanded media attention and gave suggestions for what people might refer to him as, eventually settling on “BTK.” He desired infamy for his crimes.

While Rader exhibited nearly all the affective and interpersonal features of psychopathy, there is mixed evidence regarding lifestyle features. For example, three lifestyle features of psychopathy are a need for stimulation or proneness to boredom, a lack of long-term goals, and irresponsibility. While it is unclear whether Rader exhibited these in his daily life, the pattern of his crimes suggests he was patient and methodical. He waited months and years at a time between crimes and seemed to plan them with exacting detail. In addition, Rader maintained steady employment and was involved in his community throughout his adult life. These factors suggest that Rader was goal-oriented, occupied his time well, and maintained several commitments for long periods of time. Rader also did not seem to live a parasitic lifestyle. He provided for his family financially and there is no evidence to suggest that he maintained parasitic personal relationships.

The final lifestyle feature of psychopathy, impulsivity, is comprised of four distinct facets: urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance, and sensation seeking (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). Rader’s crimes were not indicative of a sense of urgency, nor do they lack premeditation or perseverance. The opposite is true: Rader waited for months and years between crimes, planned them well, and saw them through even in the face of adversity (e.g., killing Kathy Bright despite an unexpected struggle). However, the nature of Rader’s crimes is indicative of sensation seeking. His fantasies were intense, and he derived

great pleasure from enacting them on his victims. This reflects an element of risk taking present in psychopaths like Rader after they have considered the likely outcomes or consequences (i.e., anticipation and planning). Indeed, evidence suggests that interpersonal and affective features of psychopathy, which Rader displayed, are only strongly associated with the sensation seeking facet of impulsivity (Poythress & Hall, 2011). Taken together, these results suggest that Rader did not exhibit many lifestyle features of psychopathy, but that he was a sensation seeker.

The final factor of psychopathy is antisociality. This factor includes poor behavioral controls, early behavioral problems, juvenile delinquency, revocation of conditional release, and criminal versatility. This factor is the most difficult to evaluate Rader on due to a lack of evidence. Since his arrest, Rader has never been conditionally released. In addition, there is no evidence that Rader used or misused substances, engaged in risky sexual behaviors, or gambled. He had no record of juvenile delinquency, and the only evidence of early behavioral problems is self-reported animal cruelty. Although Rader may have abused animals in his adult life (e.g., tranquilizing dogs unnecessarily), his known crimes are limited to sexually charged murder.

### *B. Antisocial and Narcissistic Personality Disorders*

ASPD is characterized by a “pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others” (APA, 2013, p. 659). For this diagnosis to be given, an individual must be an adult and have a history of conduct disorder symptoms (i.e., repetitive or persistent pattern of behaviors that violate others or are inconsistent with age-related societal norms) during childhood or adolescence. Rader clearly meets most criteria for ASPD, including a lack of conformation to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors (e.g., his crimes), deceitfulness (e.g., his use of aliases, living a double life), aggressiveness (e.g., the violent nature of his crimes), reckless disregard for the safety of self or others (e.g., killing others, putting himself at risk of death or arrest), and, perhaps most importantly, a total lack of remorse (e.g., his indifference toward the suffering he caused his victims and their families). As discussed previously, however, Rader was not irresponsible (e.g., he maintained steady employment and community involvement) and he was not impulsive in the sense of failing to plan ahead. Although it is unclear to what extent he exhibited symptoms of conduct disorder in his youth (e.g., evidence only substantiates Rader fulfilling one criterion: physical cruelty toward animals), it is reasonable to conclude that Rader meets criteria for ASPD.

NPD is characterized by a “pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (APA, 2013, p. 669). Rader meets nearly every diagnostic criterion. As discussed previously, he demonstrates a wide variety of narcissistic traits, including a grandiose sense of self-importance, a preoccupation with fantasies of power, a belief in his own “specialness,” a need for excessive admiration, a sense of entitlement, interpersonal exploitation, lack of empathy, and heightened arrogance. Interpersonal exploitation was the central characterization of Rader’s crimes: he bound, tortured, and

killed for his own pleasure—to satiate his sexually motivated desire to inflict pain. He had no regard for his victims' pain and suffering. He saw them as "projects" not people (Eagle Staff, 2019, p. 7). In addition, Rader believed that his form of murder was unique. Criminologist Scott Bonn communicated with Rader via letter mail from 2011 to 2013. In his letters to Bonn, Rader expressed his pride in the fact that he did not just kill one demographic—the usual young, white woman—but rather he killed men, women, and children with equal pleasure. He believed this made him better and more important than the average serial killer: while he was free, no one was safe (Bonn, 2019). Rader enjoyed feeling special and wanted others to fear him.

His sense of self-importance and need for excessive admiration were evident in his communications with the press and police, which ultimately led to his arrest and conviction. Rader sought public recognition for his crimes and felt entitled to receive it. He believed that he could get away with his crimes; he was so confident that he incriminated himself by sending law enforcement identifiable information. Rader admitted to Bonn that he "eagerly contributed to the social construction of his own gruesome public identity when he instructed his pursuers to call him 'Bind, Torture, Kill'" in his October 1974 letter (Bonn, 2019, para. 8). Rader created his own public image via his letter-writing campaign. He wanted to be identified in a particular way using a title that was terrifying. He knew that the letters were not just engaging journalists and authorities, but that they were engaging a public audience. He chose his words carefully in each letter to craft a self-gratifying and fear-mongering narrative. His desire for recognition of his actions is most evident in the letter he sent after his seventh murder, in which he asks, "How many do I have to kill before I get a name in the paper or some national recognition?" (as cited in Bonn, 2019, para. 10). He also enjoyed the attention he received after his arrest. In his interview with Robert Mendoza, the first words out of Rader's mouth were "I feel like I'm a star right now" (as cited in Magnus, 2005, p. 1). Rader believed that "ego is the key" for a serial killer like himself (Ramsland, 2016, p. 23). Without ego, he claimed, there is no motivation to kill.

## 8. DISCUSSION

Dennis Rader was a seemingly ordinary man with a dark obsession. He fantasized about sexually gratifying violence from the time he was a boy. In binding, torturing, and killing 10 people while living his double life, Rader demonstrated his severe antisocial personality and psychopathy. By demanding attention from law enforcement and news media outlets through his letter-writing campaign, he demonstrated his narcissism. Motivated by fantasies and sustained by a detail-oriented style, he killed over several years and managed to allude capture for decades. It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which each aspect of Rader's life (e.g., genetics, socialization) contributed to his violent behavior from a review of literature alone; however, it appears that his behavior was motivated primarily by intense, violent sexual fantasies and that a desire for admiration and lack of empathy were sufficient mechanisms of disinhibition.

Many relevant aspects of Rader's life remain unknown or unsubstantiated. For example, his claim of early

childhood brain injury is unreliable, but if confirmed, would provide a possible explanation for his behavioral pathologies. Other, better understood aspects of his life, such as his childhood experience of watching chickens be slaughtered, provide insight into how Rader's early life experiences shaped his fantasies and behavior. Witnessing the graphic violence of animal slaughter at a young age intrigued Rader and may have desensitized him to violence. Given the commonality of this type of experience in the United States, it is likely that cognitive or affective pathologies (e.g., enjoying the sight of pain or death) may have influenced Rader's perception of what he saw. This early experience was clearly salient given the feeling he reported feeling in response and the subsequent development of violent sexual fantasies.

In addition, Rader developed an extremely narcissistic personality. He was arrogant and craved attention for his crimes. After years of silence and no reason to believe that law enforcement officials suspected him, Rader began writing letters again. This decision was inherently risky and served him no purpose other than the potential of more infamy. In this way, his premeditation and perseverance were betrayed by his narcissism.

This case study widens the scope of inquiry into an individual psychopath, providing a unique example of psychopathy and advancing public understanding of Dennis Rader's life and crimes. Many accounts of Rader's crimes exist, but little work has been done to synthesize these with psychopathology literature to gain a better understanding of how his life and crimes are related and how he exemplifies psychopathic characteristics. This case study demonstrates the possible impact that early life events can have on an individual's psychopathology, but also reveals how little is known about the causes of certain behaviors.

Examining Rader's life also contributes to an enhanced public understanding of how psychopathy can be manifested in an individual and may help to dispel some myths related to the popular conception of the term. According to Skeem et al. (2011), "psychopathy remains a poorly understood concept reflecting some combination of our childhood fears of the bogeyman, our adult fascination with human evil, and perhaps even our envy of people who appear to go through life unencumbered by feelings of guilt, anguish, and insecurity" (p. 96). This lack of understanding is troubling since it is estimated that two to three people per 100 may be psychopaths (Hare, 1999). Dennis Rader provides a counterpoint to some of the misconceptions generally held regarding psychopathy. Rader's case demonstrates that psychopathy manifests in heterogenous and unexpected ways. It is not caused by childhood abuse or neurological trauma alone, nor is it an exclusively genetic syndrome. Most importantly, Rader demonstrates that psychopaths are not immediately identifiable; they are not a caricature of evil as seen in the movies. Rader was able to successfully live a double life for decades – his public image was well-groomed. According to Gray (2010),

The notion of a perfectly ordinary serial killer is baffling. The enormity of these acts demands that the people who commit them *must* be monsters. We are given to believe we should be able to identify the monsters... we

expect monsters to wear their evil plainly, on their faces and in their flesh. We want to think of them as insane, or possessed, or something dark and different, but we come to understand that the monsters appear as we do and walk among us with the appearance of respectable citizens. (p. 191).

Rader's life and crimes provide an example that, if understood, allows for a more accurate understanding of psychopathy, how it may manifest, and to what degree it can be hidden.

The life and crimes of Dennis Rader provide a strong example in a growing case for why further research on risk factors, clinical manifestations, and factors of psychopathy, as well as serial murder and sexual sadism is necessary. Review and analysis of similar cases should be conducted on other serial killers and identified psychopaths to gain a better understanding of the risk factors that underly psychopathy and the motivations that underly serial murder. In addition, a more holistic approach is required to better understand the way that biological and sociocultural factors interact to produce psychopathy and violent behavior.

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. James Calvert for his guidance on the writing and editing of this manuscript and for his mentorship throughout my undergraduate career. His engaging lectures and caring nature have been an inspiration to many students, including me. Thank you to the faculty and staff of the Department of Psychology, the Hamilton family, and the staff of the Office of Engaged Learning for their generous support of my undergraduate research.

## 10. REFERENCES

- [1] American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). American Psychiatric Association.
- [2] *Anger, relief over BTK confessions*. (2005, June 28). CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/anger-relief-over-btk-confessions/>.
- [3] Arrigo, B., & Shipley, S. (2001). The confusion over psychopathy (I): Historical considerations. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 45(3), 325-344.
- [4] Bartol, C. R., & Bartol, A. M. (2018). *Introduction to forensic psychology: Research and application* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [5] Bonn, S.A. (2019, February 18). Inside the mind of serial killer Dennis Rader, aka BTK: Insights from my correspondence with him. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/wicked-deeds/201902/inside-the-mind-serial-killer-dennis-rader-aka-btk>.
- [6] *BTK killer abandons court appeal*. (2006, September 18). The Associated Press. <https://www.apnews.com/2bc5365d225813bbd9aea881e230615e>.
- [7] *BTK Killer Gets Extra Jail Perks*. (2006, April 24). CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/btk-killer-gets-extra-jail-perks/>.
- [8] Coates, S. (2005, August 19). Rader gets 175 years for BTK slayings. *The Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/08/18/AR2005081800201.html>.
- [9] Cleckley, H. (1941). *The mask of sanity: An attempt to reinterpret the so-called psychopathic personality*. Mosby.
- [10] Cleckley, H. (1976). *The mask of sanity: An attempt to clarify some issues about the so-called psychopathic personality*. (5th ed.). Mosby.
- [11] Crego, C., & Widiger, T. (2015). Psychopathy and the DSM. *Journal of Personality*, 83(6), 665-677.
- [12] Dargis, M., Newman, J., & Koenigs, M. (2016). Clarifying the link between childhood abuse history and psychopathic traits in adult criminal offenders. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 7(3), 221-228.
- [13] Debowska, A., Boduszek, D., Hyland, P., & Goodson, S. (2014). Biological correlates of psychopathy: A brief review. *Mental Health Review Journal*, 19(2).
- [14] De Brito, S., Forth, A., Baskin-Sommers, A., Brazil, I., Kimonis, E., Pardini, D., Frick, P., Blair, R., & Viding, E. (2021). Psychopathy. *Nature Reviews Disease Primers*, 7(1).
- [15] Diaz, F. (1995). Traumatic brain injury and criminal behavior. *Medicine and Law*, 14, 131-140.
- [16] Douglas, J. & Doddy, J. (2008). *Inside the mind of BTK: The true story behind the thirty-year hunt for the notorious Wichita serial killer*. Jossey-Bass.
- [17] Eagle Staff. (2019, January 25). Who is Dennis Rader aka the BTK serial killer? *The Wichita Eagle*. <https://www.kansas.com>.
- [18] Effron, L., Smith, J., & Dooley, S. (2019, July 26). *BTK serial killer's daughter shares letters he wrote her from behind bars: 'The dark side took me away.'* ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/btk-serial-killers-daughter-shares-letters-wrote-bars/story?id=60730932>.
- [19] Eighteenth Judicial District Court of Kansas. (2005). *Record of trial or plea* (Case No. 2005-CR-

- 000498-FE). Kansas Office of Judicial Administration. <https://www.kansas.gov/countyCourts/search/records?executio n=e2s1>.
- [20] Fazel, S., Philipson, J., Gardiner, L., Merritt, R., & Grann, M. (2009). Neurological disorders and violence: A systematic review and meta-analysis with a focus on epilepsy and traumatic brain injury. *Journal of Neurology*, 256(10), 1591-1602.
- [21] Finger, S. (2005, July 2). Victim's family files suit against Rader. *The Wichita Eagle*. <https://www.kansas.com>.
- [22] Forth, A. E., Hart, S. D., & Hare, R. D. (1990). Assessment of psychopathy in male young offenders. *Psychological Assessment*, 2, 342-344.
- [23] Graham, N., Kimonis, E., Wasserman, A., & Kline, S. (2012). Associations among childhood abuse and psychopathy facets in male sexual offenders. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 3(1), 66-75.
- [24] Granacher, R.P. and Fozdar, M. (2020). Acquired psychopathy and its assessment. In A. R. Felthous & H. Saß (Eds.), *The Wiley International Handbook on Psychopathic Disorders and the Law*. Wiley.
- [25] Gray, R.M. (2010). Psychopathy and the will to power: Ted Bundy and Dennis Rader. In S. Waller (Ed.), *Serial killers: Being and killing* (pp. 191-205). Blackwell Publishing.
- [26] Greene, J. (2005, July 27). Paula and Dennis Rader's divorce granted. *The Wichita Eagle*. <https://www.kansas.com>.
- [27] Hare, R. D. (1999). *Without conscience: The disturbing world of the psychopaths among us*. The Guilford Press.
- [28] Hare, R.D. (2003). *The Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (2nd ed.). Multi-Health Systems.
- [29] Hare, R. D. (2005). Structural models of psychopathy. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 7, 57-64.
- [30] Harpur, T. J., Hare, R. D., & Hakstian, A. R. (1989). Two-factor conceptualization of psychopathy: Construct validity and assessment implications. *Psychological Assessment: A Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1, 6-17.
- [31] Hickey, E.W. (2012). *Serial murderers and their victims* (5th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- [32] Hansen, M. (2006). How the cops caught BTK. *ABA Journal*. [http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/how\\_the\\_cops\\_caught\\_btk/](http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/how_the_cops_caught_btk/).
- [33] Heath, G.A., Hardesty, V.A., & Goldfine, P.E. (1984). Firesetting, enuresis, and animal cruelty. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy*, 1, 97-100.
- [34] Hensley, C., & Tallichet, S.E. (2009). Childhood and adolescent animal cruelty methods and their possible link to adult violent crime. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24, 147-158.
- [35] Hensley, C., Tallichet, S.E., & Dutkiewicz, E.L. (2009). Recurrent childhood animal cruelty: Is there a relationship to adult recurrent interpersonal violence? *Criminal Justice Review*, 34, 248-257.
- [37] Heinzen, H. Köhler, D. Godt, N., Geiger, F., & Huchzermeier, C. (2011). Psychopathy, intelligence and conviction history. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 34(5), 336-340.
- [38] Johansson, P., & Kerr, M. (2005). Psychopathy and intelligence: A second look. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 19(4), 357-369.
- [39] Joubert, D., Welsh, K., & Edward, L. J. (2021). Validity of the MacDonal triad as a forensic construct: Links with psychopathology and patterns of aggression in sex offenders. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 26, 103-116.
- [40] Kansas Department of Corrections. (2019). Kansas Adult Supervised Population Electronic Repository: Rader, Dennis L. <https://kdocrepository.doc.ks.gov/kasper/search/results>.
- [41] Kiehl, K., & Hoffman, M. (2011). The criminal psychopath: History, neuroscience, treatment, and economics. *Jurimetrics*, 355-397.
- [42] King, G. C. (2012). Criminal profile: Dennis Lynn Rader. K.P. Allen (Ed.). *Investigation Discovery*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20121231133739/http://investigation.discovery.com/criminals/serial-killers/dennis-rader.html>.
- [43] Langevin, R. (2003). A study of the psychosexual characteristics of sex killers: Can we identify them before it is too late? *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 47, 266-382.
- [44] Magnus, E. (2005, August 28). 31 years of the BTK killer. NBC News. <https://web.archive.org/web/20151026145742/http://www.nbcnews.com/id/8916264/page/6>.

- [45] Miller, C. (2001). Childhood animal cruelty and interpersonal violence. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 21, 735–749.
- [46] Neumann, C. S., & Hare, R. D. (2007). The superordinate nature of the Psychopathy-Checklist revised. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 21, 102–117.
- [47] Neumann, C. S., Hare, R. D., & Pardini, D. (2015). Antisociality and the construct of psychopathy: Data from across the globe. *Journal of Personality*, 83(6), 678-692.
- [48] Parfitt, C., & Alleyne, E. (2020). Not the sum of its parts: A critical review of the MacDonald Triad. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 21(2), 300-310.
- [49] Poythress, N. G., & Hall, J. R. (2011). Psychopathy and impulsivity reconsidered. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 16(2), 120-134.
- [50] Prentky, R., Burgess, A., Rokous, F., Lee, A., Hartman, C., Ressler, R., & Douglas, J. (1989). The presumptive role of fantasy in serial sexual homicide. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 146, 887-891.
- [51] Preszler, J., Marcus, D. K., Edens, J. F., & McDermott, B. E. (2018). Network analysis of psychopathy in forensic patients. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 127(2), 171-182.
- [52] Ramsland, K. (2016). *Confession of a serial killer: The untold story of Dennis Rader, the BTK Killer*. University Press of New England.
- [53] Rushton, P. J., & Templer, D. I. (2009). National differences in intelligence, crime, income and skin color. *Intelligence*, 37, 341–346.
- [54] Sexton, M., Shaw, M., & Smith, L. (2005). Dennis L. Rader: BTK – bind them, torture them, kill them [PDF document]. Retrieved from Radford University website [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiRoOeL8J\\_IAhUJWK0KHRo1DO0QFjAAegQIABAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fmaamodt.asp.radford.edu%2Fpsyc%2520405%2Fserial%2520killers%2Fradr%2C%2520Dennis%2520-%25202005.pdf&usg=AovVaw3MG0ylzCHO3Vy8ke1bLO36](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiRoOeL8J_IAhUJWK0KHRo1DO0QFjAAegQIABAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fmaamodt.asp.radford.edu%2Fpsyc%2520405%2Fserial%2520killers%2Fradr%2C%2520Dennis%2520-%25202005.pdf&usg=AovVaw3MG0ylzCHO3Vy8ke1bLO36).
- [55] Skeem, J. L., Polaschek, D. L. L., Patrick, C. J., & Lilienfeld, S. O. (2011). Psychopathic personality: Bridging the gap between scientific evidence and public policy. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 12(3), 95–162.
- [56] Slavkin, M.L. (2001). Enuresis, firesetting, and cruelty to animals: Does the ego triad show predictive validity? *Adolescence*, 36, 461–466.
- [57] Sylvester, R. (2007, March 14). Investigators tell of grisly crimes, Rader’s delight. *The Wichita Eagle*. <https://web.archive.org>.
- [58] Strongin, D. & Laviana, H. (2005, May 5). Families of BTK victims prepare to wait. *The Wichita Eagle*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20180321130940/http://www.kansas.com/news/special-reports/btk/article1003691.html>.
- [59] Timonen, M., Miettunen, J., Hakko, H., Zitting, P., Veijola, J., von Wendt, L., & Rasanen, P. (2002). The association of preceding traumatic brain injury with mental disorders, alcoholism and criminality: The Northern Finland 1966 birth cohort study. *Psychiatry Research*.
- [60] Verschuere, B., van Ghesel Grothe, S., Waldorp, L., Watts, A. L., Lilienfeld, S. O., Edens, J. F., Skeem, J. L., Noordhof, A. (2018). What features of psychopathy might be central? A network analysis of the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) in three large samples. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 127(1), 51-65.
- [61] Victims’ relatives settle lawsuit against BTK serial killer. (n.d.). WIBW-TV. Retrieved from <https://www.wibw.com/home/headlines/6665757.html>.
- [62] Visser, B., Debow, V., Pozzebon, J., Bogaert, A., & Book, A. (2015). Psychopathic sexuality: The thin line between fantasy and reality. *Journal of Personality*, 83(4), 376-388.
- [63] Vitacco, M. J., Neumann, C. S., & Jackson, R. L. (2005). Testing a four-factor model of psychopathy and its association with ethnicity, gender, intelligence, and violence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73, 466–576.
- [64] Walters, G.D. (2012). *Crime in a psychological context: From career criminals to criminal careers*. Sage.
- [65] Walters, G.D. (2013). Testing the specificity postulate of the violence graduation hypothesis: Meta-analyses of the animal cruelty-offending relationship. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18, 797–802.
- [66] Walters, G. D. (2017). Animal cruelty and firesetting as behavioral markers of fearlessness and disinhibition: Putting two-thirds of MacDonald’s triad to work. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, 28(1), 10-23.
- [67] Whiteside, S. P., & Lynam, D. R. (2001). The Five Factor Model and impulsivity: Using a structural

model of personality to understand impulsivity. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 20(4), 669-689.

- [68] Wilson, M. J., Abramowitz, C., Vasilev, G., Bozgunov, K., & Vassileva, J. (2014). Psychopathy in Bulgaria: The cross-cultural generalizability of the Hare Psychopathy Checklist. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 36(3), 389-400.
- [69] Woodworth, M., Freimuth, T., Hutton, E., Carpenter, T., Agar, A., & Logan, M. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 36(2), 144-156.
- [70] Wright, J. & Hensley, C. (2003). From animal cruelty to serial murder: Applying the graduation hypothesis. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 47(1), 71-88.

**11. APPENDIX: FOUR FACTORS OF PSYCHOPATHY**

Factor	Behavioral Description	Factor Label
Factor 1	Glibness and/or superficial charm Grandiose sense of self-worth Pathological lying Conning and/or manipulative	Interpersonal
Factor 2	Lack of remorse or guilt Shallow affect Callous and/or lack of empathy Failure to accept responsibility	Affective
Factor 3	Need for stimulation Parasitic lifestyle Lack of realistic, long-term goals Impulsivity Irresponsibility	Lifestyle
Factor 4	Poor behavioral controls Early behavioral problems Juvenile delinquency Revocation of conditional release Criminal versatility	Antisocial

*Note.* These are the four factors of psychopathy as operationalized by the Hare Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (Hare, 2003). Table adapted from Bartol & Bartol (2018).