

# **The Criminal Debt Collector and the Rage-Murderer**

Exploring the role of attachment, trauma, personality dynamics  
and relational strategies in violence

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD at the Department of Psychology,  
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*Series of dissertations submitted to the  
Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oslo  
No. 924*

ISSN 1504-3991

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Cover: UiO.  
Print production: Graphics Center, University of Oslo.

## Acknowledgements

This PhD project developed out of curiosity, frustration, and fear evoked in me via my encounters with inmates at a high security prison facility where I worked as a clinical psychologist. Aside from trying to help these men to better contain their unruly inner life and tendency to turn violent fantasy into action, I was also curious about the different criminal profiles, the people behind these roles, and the developmental paths that had led these men into their criminal careers. Among these men, I was particularly curious about the criminal debt collector and the seemingly normal man who had committed homicide without an apparent motive. In my encounters with these and other men who had committed serious acts of violence, I also came to the realization that the offender literature provided me with little more than a rough framework for understanding them and their violence. After my graduation from the University of Oslo I stayed in close contact with my supervisor, Professor emeritus Ellen Hartmann. Together with Associate Professor Cato Grønnerød, we developed a research project aimed at exploring the personality dynamics of these under researched and little understood men. The project has finally come to fruition thanks to the help of many people.

I am first and foremost indebted to the incarcerated men that took part in this research project. They have shared their often-tormented history and deeply meaningful, but also frightening, aspects of their inner life and their violence. While some of these encounters were indeed challenging, they taught me valuable lessons about myself, my own fears, vulnerabilities, and my aggressive urges. It is my hope that they may find some peace and comfort in the tribulations of their own lives.

This project has been partly funded by grants from Akershus University Hospital. I want to give a special thanks to my previous leaders; Kerstin Henley at the Jessheim Clinic, and Jean-Max Robasse at Department of Specialized Psychiatry. Thank you for showing an interest in me, this project, and for providing me with the means to get it started.

Several people and institutions were vital to this project during the initial phase and the recruitment process. I would like to thank the directors and the leaders at the different sections at Ullersmo and Oslo prisons for allowing me entry and for facilitating the recruitment process. A very special thanks to my colleague, Irene Kuisma. Some of the more intriguing participants were recruited thanks to their trust in you and your ability to reassure them that the project would not have any negative consequences. Thanks to psychologists Lars Fodstad and Øyvind

Sandsether for your invaluable assistance in recruiting participants. Also, a special thanks to Marianne Teigland for recruiting participants, for your interest and input, and for granting me time to write articles while I worked as a full-time psychologist in Oslo prison.

I wish to particularly thank Ole André Solbakken, Erik Stänicke, Helene A. Nissen- Lie, Frida Gullestad Rø, Vidar Blokhus Ekroll and Sverre Urnes Johnsen for inspiring discussions. My daily workplace at the Department of Psychology would not have been the same without you. Thanks also to all my friends, family members and colleagues at work for your support.

This project would not have come to fruition without the support of a select group of close friends and colleagues. To my brother and best man Nicolay Nørbech and to my other best man Olav Henriksson Bendiksbj: Your emotional encouragement, as well as our discussions, have been invaluable throughout this process. More than that, you also interviewed some of the most challenging participants. To my dear friend Henrik Zachrisson – I have counted on you for many things including methodological advice, academic structure etc. You have been incredibly supportive, and I feel lucky to have had you in my corner. A special thanks to Lars Ekeland for your interest in this project, our discussions, and for interviewing some of the most challenging participants. Thanks also to my friend Nicola Sahhar for support and thoughtful input on paper III. A special thanks to Jim Kleiger for your insights on the Rorschach protocol described in paper III, and to Sveinung Legard for your invaluable help in the final stage of this process.

To my supervisor Ellen Hartmann, you taught me the Rorschach, how to write academic texts and you allowed me to develop my own thinking. To my other supervisor, Cato Grønnerød, your clear thinking and psychometric expertise has been invaluable. To Patricia Crittenden, who taught me the AAI and about the effects of detrimental attachment experiences on personality development. To Sølvi Kristiansen, for your extensive empathic and embodied listening and interpretations throughout the years.

I would also like to thank The National Program for Integrated Clinical Specialist and PhD training for Psychologists (“Dobbelkompetanseprosjektet”) for financial support and for giving me the opportunity to combine clinical specialization with research. A special thanks to Professor emeritus Siri Gullestad for your support and interest throughout this long process and especially for introducing me to the AAI and Patricia Crittenden.

Finally, I would like to express my eternal gratitude to my mother for always supporting me and for teaching me that there is always a reason for why people behave as they do. To my dear father, you are always with me. To my dear ex-wife Sandra, for your help, unconditional

support, and for our friendship. Lastly, to my two loving and cool daughters Leah and Nelia, you are the love of my life and my reason to live.

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## Summary

### **The Criminal Debt Collector and the Rage-Murderer: Exploring the role of attachment, trauma, personality dynamics and relational strategies in violence.**

Perpetrators of violence, such as those who kill, rape, or use violence in a meticulous fashion, are complex and heterogeneous in terms of their psychopathology and their inclination toward violence. This dissertation investigates the psychology and the violence of the criminal debt collector and the rage-murderer. Criminal debt collectors are individuals who have incorporated intimidation and violence as an integral part of their lifestyle and source of income, whereas the rage-murderer is an apparently 'normal person' who commits an explosive act of violence without having a history of serious violence or showing overt signs of mental health issues. Both actors represent under-researched and little understood figures of violent crime.

The aim of this investigation is essentially twofold. First, to gain an understanding of the personality makeup of these individuals, focusing on aspects related to their attachment representations and strategies, trauma, aggression, empathy, and perception of self and others. Second, to explore the role these psychological dimensions play in their violent acts, and to develop some notion regarding the nature of their attachment experiences i.e., the origins of their violence. These overarching research questions are addressed using a multimethod design. The criminal debt collector is examined via a single case study of an incarcerated individual with a history of criminal debt collection, and a between-group statistical comparison of a sample of debt collectors ( $N=27$ ) with two other violent offender groups. Rage-murder is examined by means of a single case study of an incarcerated individual who had committed a murder in a fit of rage without having a history of previous serious violence or displaying visible signs of significant psychopathology. Court summary reports, the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), Rorschach Inkblot Method, and the Psychopathy Checklist Revised (PCL-R) comprised the research material. Specifically, the criminal debt collector single case study included the PCL-R, the AAI, and the Rorschach, while the group comparison utilized the Rorschach and the PCL-R and preliminary AAI data. The single case examination of a rage-murderer used the AAI and the Rorschach together with clinical psychotherapy data.

Relevant research in these respective areas is reviewed. Comparative findings on individuals using threats and violence for secondary gains often show elevations in psychopathy and a dismissive attachment-relational style, thought to remove inhibitions toward use of



violence. Burgeoning research also indicates that some of these individuals have an extraordinary ability to identify signs of vulnerability in others, and that they utilize this acuity with malevolent intent. The limited personality related research into rage-murder typically reveals a mix of narcissistic and dependent traits in a severely overcontrolled personality structure. The latter is described as a constellation of defensive operations whose goal is to maintain psychic equilibrium by a shielding of aggression and internalized representations fused by deep-seated humiliation and shame. The murder itself is often conceptualized as stemming from a collapse in these overcontrolling defenses due to the buildup of intolerable affects instigated by situational factors.

The results on the criminal debt collectors reveal elevated psychopathic traits and behavior (PCL-R). That is, most of these perpetrators presented themselves as omnipotent and invulnerable, and displayed a callous disregard for others' wellbeing. Their criminal records evinced a variety of criminal and violent behaviors not confined to debt collection. Clinically speaking, many also exhibited – during interviewing – a cunning ability to induce fear. Their Rorschach records were marked by signs of severe trauma, an amalgam of aggressive indices, a tendency toward the interpersonal sphere alongside malevolent internalized representations, and extreme attachment strategies (AAI). Based on these findings it is inferred that their invulnerable and callous appearance was undergirded by several complex dynamics involving aggressive urges, fluctuations between extreme victim and victimizer states, deactivation of attachment needs and extreme preoccupation with danger. We suggest that their aggression fueled internal dynamics and hostile relational strategies, were mediated by childhood exposure to repeated neglect, trauma, and humiliation. Moreover, it is proposed that they had developed a relational style that depends on violence as a necessary part of their regular emotional experience, and that they had adopted a self-identity as a fearless and persecuting aggressor in order to deal with a frightening and painful past.

With regards to violence, we propose that the instrumentality of debt collection may be influenced by less apparent motivations such as exhilaration or personal gratification, which are subsequently tied to more basic affect regulatory and identity confirmatory issues. Lastly, the somewhat wide-ranging PCL-R scores among the debt collectors and varying Rorschach protocols illustrates the considerable heterogeneity within this group.

The AAI and Rorschach findings on the man who had committed homicide in a fit of rage revealed a complex personality makeup. The AAI narrative depicted a traumatized, severely emotionally overcontrolled individual who over-idealized his neglectful maternal figure. While his Rorschach showed signs of emotional overcontrol, the overall findings pointed

to an egocentric and very angry individual, with strong sadomasochistic urges and an inclination to bouts of sadistic rage. In integrating the discrepant AAI-Rorschach data, I propose that his personality can be described in terms of a dual personality organization, characterized by a split between a more benign, overcontrolled facade, and a self which was dominated by sexualized urges and sadistic rage. The murder he committed is conceptualized in terms of the sudden buildup of intolerable affect triggered by the victim's provocative and humiliating statements, and the subsequent breakdown of his over-controlled defenses.

The overall findings from this case study is compared to previous work in this area. Based on the discrepancies in personality makeup between this case and the cases described by other authors, it is suggested that the former represents an atypical case of rage-murder. Furthermore, it is inferred that this seemingly homogenous group of homicide offenders may be more complex and heterogeneous than previously thought.

The methodological limitations and implications of my research are discussed in the concluding section of this thesis. Issues related to the assessment of violence risk and treatment are outlined with regards to both groups.

## List of articles

- I. Nørbech, P. C. B., Crittenden, P. M., & Hartmann, E. (2013). Self-protective strategies, violence, and psychopathy: Theory and a case study. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *95*, 571–584.
- II. Nørbech, P. C. B., Grønnerød, C., & Hartmann E. (2016). Identification with a violent and sadistic aggressor: A Rorschach study of criminal debt collectors. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *98* (2), 135–145.
- III. Nørbech, P. C. B. (2020). Sadomasochistic Representations in a Rage Murderer: An Integrative Clinical and Forensic Investigation. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *102* (2), 278–292, DOI: [10.1080/00223891.2018.1506459](https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2018.1506459)



## Prologue

### Two Cases of Violence

*“I had talked with this character a couple of times, but he rebuffed my repayment plan, so I had to pay him a visit. I brought my kit and drove to his house. He opened the door and I tell him straight up, ‘it’s about time to pay your dues’, but he refuses and tries to close the door on me. So, I give him a slap and shoved him on his back. ‘So, this is how you want to play it!’ I open my kit with my battery drill and tell him to put his hand on the floor. I put the drill on top, but he pulls his hand back, right, and screams that you can’t do this. Then I put the drill to his forehead and say, ‘It’s up to you, hand or head?’ He complies and I step on his trembling hand so that most of it sticks out and just drill through it. But while the drill is still on the guy screams and pulls his hand back right, and that ruined all the small bones and shit. Then I tell him ‘Now you have the choice. Pay me, or we continue?’ And then he agrees.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“We were in the living room when X started to make sexually offensive claims. I told him to stop but he kept ridiculing me. So I ... I fetched a knife from the kitchen. And then, I can’t recall that well. He kept laughing. The knife’s in my hand. We fight. I ... stabbed and stabbed, blood spraying into my face, blood all over. Everything went dark. I woke up and the police were there. I had apparently stabbed him 18 times. I had no choice. It was me or him.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from an interview with an incarcerated individual, cited in Ekeland (2008).



## **1. Introduction**

Violence is ubiquitous and widely acknowledged as part of the human experience. It is present at a global level in wars and genocide, and on a more personal level in the form of criminal acts such as homicide, rape, or aggravated assault. While our scientific knowledge on violence risk factors has increased radically over recent decades (Bonta & Andrews, 2017), we still struggle to understand acts of serious violence.

Not only is violence an extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon rooted in numerous factors on multiple levels that don't easily lend themselves to comparison – including the individual, relational, social and cultural (Bjørkly, 2001) – it is also often mystified or shrouded by an intrigue that detracts from the reality of the situation (Cartwright, 2002; Wertham, 1962). The way violence is glamorized in the media and popular culture might be understood in this way. Indeed, many, if not most people, find pleasure in watching movies featuring their favourite star brutalising the antagonist. Yet for most of us the excitement quickly evaporates if we get personally close to violence. Then, rather than pleasure, we are typically left with dread, helplessness, anger, and disgust.

Some violent incidents, such as the brutal homicide and meticulous torture depicted in the prologue, may be so alienating that they become unbearable to think about. Contemplating the minds of people who commit such acts may, therefore, be very testing even for the experienced forensic psychologist. The intense negative emotions evoked in us by their malevolence will color our perception and ability to view the destructiveness from the perspective of the perpetrator (Symington, 1980). But if we allow our negative reaction or countertransference to progress, the risk is that we may come to perceive the people who commit serious acts of violence as ‘evil’ in nature and beyond the reach of scientific study (Hering, 1997). As Cartwright (2002) suggests, *the way we understand and explain violence often reflects an avoidance of what is potentially a part of all of us* (p. 1). Such an approach has often led to simple and reductionist explanations of violence in which violent offenders are treated as a homologous group, creating the impression that all offenders are basically the same and that violence is a unitary phenomenon (Glasser, 1996).

This is not the case. Practitioners in the field of forensic psychiatry and psychology are well aware of the considerable heterogeneity that exists among violent offenders (Day et al., 2020; Polaschek & Collie, 2004). Taxonomic research has cataloged the offender population

into distinct subgroups based on various criteria such as domestic perpetrators (Dutton, 2007), childhood onset versus “adolescent limited” offenders (Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, & Silva, 1996), various types of sexual (Robertiello & Terry, 2007) and homicide offenders (Revitz & Schlesinger, 1981), and so forth. However, this research often shows patterned heterogeneity, such that distinct subgroups may exist within groups often treated in research or treatment as homogenous (Bradley & Westen, 2005; Sjöfstedt & Grann, 2002).

The notion of heterogeneity is also true with respect to the different psychiatric entities outlined in our diagnostic manuals (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems [ICD–10/11], and the Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed. [DSM–5]; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), where the strongest link to violence is found in antisocial/dissocial and borderline personality disorder groups (Yu, Geddes, & Fazel, 2012). Although the people who meet the criteria for these disorders are more prone to violence than other diagnostic groups, the great majority never commit serious violence (DeBrito & Hodgins, 2009; Nathan, Rollinson, Harvey, & Hill, 2003; Yu et al., 2012). Even among psychopathy spectrum offenders (Patrick, 2006) – the ‘diagnostic’ group most closely associated with recidivism and serious violence – subgroups are likely to exist that have different etiologies, risk profiles, and treatment needs (Blackburn, 2009). As Holt (1968) put it, “*diagnoses are not addresses of buildings into which people may be put, but landmarks with respect to which people may be located*” (p. 14).

Not all aggression is motivated by the same mechanisms and identifying the driving force behind a particular outpouring of aggression is imperative for understanding violent behavior (McGuire, 2008). While current offender cataloguing obviously has an important heuristic value useful for differentiation and identifying the level and kind of psychopathology among offenders, these nomenclatures are in themselves of limited utility for explaining serious acts of violence (Stein, 2007). To understand what propels an individual to act violently, there is a need for research endeavors that move beyond the traditional categories applied in much of the current academic literature on violent offenders (McMurran, 2009). Studies targeting the internal world of the perpetrator and the underlying motivation for their violent acts are scarce (Gilligan, 1996). There are also certain ‘types’ of serious perpetrators that have yet to be studied in the research of psychologists and criminologists to any large extent. An examination of these perpetrators may enrich our perspective on the complex behavioral phenomenon we call violence.

With this understanding in mind, this thesis aims to explore the personality dynamics and the violence of two different types of perpetrators: The *criminal debt collector* and the *rage-*



*murderer*. Criminal debt collectors are individuals who have incorporated intimidation, violence, and sometimes torturous acts, as an integral part of their lifestyle and source of income, while the rage-murderer is a person who has committed an explosive act of violence without either a previous history of serious violence or showing overt signs of mental health issues. Both actors represent under-researched and little understood figures of violent crime.

Criminal debt enforcement is a crime that occurs relatively frequently yet often goes undetected and the arrest rate is low.<sup>2</sup> What sets these offenders apart from other perpetrators is their choice of a role that ‘allows’ them to intimidate and hurt others. There are echoes here of what Hall (2012) described as ‘criminal undertakers’– men who sell their propensity to commit violence in order to prosper in society’s shadows. These criminal undertakers grant themselves “special liberty” to get things done and embrace “the brutal and butch solutions to life’s difficulties” (Hall, 2012, p. 203) no matter who might get harmed. In my encounters with these offenders during my work as a prison psychologist I noticed that many had an intimidating presence and an aura of invincibility. Some also displayed a cunning knack for eliciting fear and an ability to pick up on my discomfort. A few kept referring to themselves as violent and as debt collectors, conveying the sense that these labels somehow defined their identity.

The rage-murderer represents a very different type of offender than the criminal debt collector. They are typically described as inconspicuous, sometimes mild mannered, even subservient, and have committed a murder in the context of a highly abnormal mental state that originally was alien to them (Cartwright, 2002). They often have a hard time explaining their sudden violence and the murder is perceived as dramatically out of character by the people around them. It is this contrast between the appearance of normality and the brutality of the act that observers like me find so perplexing.

My impressions from these encounters served as an impetus for the questions raised in this investigation: What is the mindset that goes into ‘working’ as a criminal debt collector? What compels people to engage in this line of ‘work’? What are we to make of the contradiction between an aptitude for identifying signs of vulnerability in others – an apparent empathic capacity – and the chilling use of violence? What sort of previous relationships does their

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<sup>2</sup> Despite their proclivity for violence, criminal debt collectors are rarely sentenced for their use of violence. Debt collection is not codified in Norwegian law, and debt collectors’ use of violence is rarely reported to the police due to the high level of threat experienced by victims, which silences them, and because the victims are often criminals themselves. When there is a court sentence, criminal debt collection is most typically associated with charges such as extortion, loan sharking, kidnapping, and armed robbery. Thus, there is no official data on the prevalence of criminal debt collection in Norway. Nevertheless, its presence in society is well recognized by the police and the justice system given its natural relation to organized crime such as the drug trade, gambling, and loansharking (National Criminal Investigation Service; NCIS; personal communication).

aggressive identity stem from? In the case of rage-murder, how can a seemingly normal person commit a brutal murder? What factors trigger their rage and what type of personality makeup are we looking at in these cases?

I approach these more general research questions by leaning on object relational and attachment theory as my guiding frameworks. A basic assumption of these perspectives is that violence is rooted in attachment experiences and that even the cruelest and most chronic forms of violence may be considered meaningful in terms of serving important psychological functions of regulating the self or interpersonal relations (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Crittenden, 2015; Fonagy, 2001; Taubner, Rabung, Bateman, & Fonagy, 2017). While such an approach would complement and enhance, rather than replace, predominant theories of violence from other fields such as sociology, criminology, and the neurocognitive sciences (Yakeley, 2018), the empirical research body testing these perspectives is thin.

This thesis aims to contribute to the limited empirical literature in this area by an investigation of the psychological makeup of the criminal debt collector and the rage-murderer, utilizing the Rorschach Inkblot Method (Rorschach, 1921/1942) and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1996). Both methods are designed to tap into implicit aspects of personality not easily accessible by self-report personality inventories (Hesse, 2008; Meyer, 2017). While a level of convergence between the AAI and the Rorschach is to be expected, they differ widely in the degree of ambiguity in the test's stimuli. Thus, their combined use may add unique, incremental information on personality functioning. The assessments will be used to formulate an understanding of the psychological dimensions underpinning the perpetrators' violent actions and to develop some notions regarding the nature of their attachment experiences i.e., the origins of their violence.

Note also that this study is limited to males. While studies on rage-murder in females exist (e.g., Verona & Carbonell, 2000), a review of these is beyond the scope here. And because the criminal debt collector has been hardly described at all in the academic literature, more space will be devoted to the outlining of this type of individual than the rage-murderer. Bearing this in mind, we will now take a closer look at the two subject groups and their defining features.

### **1.1 The Criminal debt collector: Defining features**

*The criminal debt collector* is a key figure in the underworld where they operate as debt collectors, 'negotiators', and punishers. While these brutal characters have been widely

portrayed in both popular and historical literature<sup>3</sup> as well as blockbuster Hollywood movies such as *Get Shorty*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Sin City* and *The Tax Collector*, the scholarly research on these intimidating personas is almost nonexistent.<sup>4</sup> In the two studies that I have been able to identify (Ostrosky, Borja, Rebollar, & Galván, 2012; Rahman, McLean, Deuchar, & Densley, 2020), the personality of the criminal debt collector was only a peripheral focal point. Thus, this is likely the first thorough investigation of their psychological makeup.

The label used for a criminal debt collector varies across countries. In Norway and Sweden, they are often referred to as “money-collectors” (my translation of the Norwegian term ‘penge-innkrever’) or by the slang term “Torpedo”. In the US, “criminal enforcer” is commonly used, whereas “criminal debt collector” and “criminal enforcer” are used synonymously in Great Britain (Rahman et al., 2020). I chose the label “criminal debt collector” because it is almost identical to the term used in Norway, but I will occasionally refer to them as “enforcers” or “debt collectors” to shorten passages. Before delineating the role and the broad contours of the criminal debt collector, an account of the world in which they operate is warranted.

### **1.1.1 Organized crime and criminal enforcement**

The label “organized crime” is an ambiguous construct which loosely refers to the more or less organized activity around the provision of illicit goods and services (Antonopoulos & Papanicolaou, 2018). This may include drugs, human trafficking, child criminal exploitation, fraud and forgery, money laundering, the infiltration of business operations, corruption of public officials and so forth (Bjørge, 2017; Rahman & Lynes 2018). These activities are managed by “organized criminals”, a term that may encompass anything from tightly structured corporations such as mafia organizations and cartels, to looser networks of criminals cooperating around certain illicit opportunities (Finckenauer, 2005).

The ability and the reputation for use of violence and threat plays an essential role in organized crime (Finckenauer, 2005). Criminal transactions and businesses are most often trust-based and not regulated by contracts and courts. Disputes and breached agreements are instead typically enforced through strategic violence to sustain the survival and growth of the criminal enterprise (Rahman et al., 2020). Strategic violence is deployed to control, coerce, and punish a difficult workforce, deter informants and witnesses, or to manage market competition and

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<sup>3</sup> Debt collection is older than the history of money itself, and dates back to ancient civilizations starting in Sumer in 3000 BC (Graeber, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> A literature search through the databases PubMed, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar using the terms “criminal debt collector” and “criminal enforcer” in all fields reveal numerous hits. However, aside from the two papers mentioned above, the abstracts of these papers do not mention the targeted words.

resolve disputes about the terms of a deal (Reuter, 2009; Wright, 2006). The criminal group may execute the violence on their own or outsource it to external contractors, insulating themselves from the consequences of its use (Kelly & Caputo, 2005). The perpetrators of this violence are commonly referred to as *criminal debt collectors*, *enforcers*, *sicarios* or *hitmen*.

### 1.1.2 Criminal enforcement as a continuum

Rahman et al. (2020) suggest that enforcement may be viewed along a continuum ranging from simple debt collecting, threats of violence or less serious maltreatment, to brutal physical punishment, malicious torture and – at the dark end – contract killing. The burgeoning research body in this area is largely confined to the characteristics and modus operandi of contract killing and the *hitman* (e.g., Levi, 1981; Macintyre, Wilson, Yardley, & Brolan, 2014; Schlesinger, 2001; Wilson & Rahman, 2015). While this literature is certainly relevant for this investigation, it does not capture the wider span of violence, extortion strategies, and the roles and modus operandi of the criminal debt collector (Rahman et al., 2020).

**Hitmen, enforcers, criminal debt collectors.** Tracing the confines of the criminal debt collector is by no means straightforward. The roles of the *hitman* and the *criminal debt collector* overlap, and these different labels are also poorly differentiated in the academic literature (Rahman et al., 2020). To take one example, in Latin-America and Italy these different labels and their associated roles are subsumed under the umbrella term “Sicario” (Grillo, 2012).<sup>5</sup> That said, there seems to be consensus among researchers in this growing field that the hitman denotation should refer more restrictively to a “person who accepts an order to kill another human being from someone who is not publicly acknowledged as a legitimate authority regarding ‘just killing’” (Macintyre et al., 2014, p. 2). This distinction is also important as it separates hitmen from soldiers and state executioners.

The role of the criminal debt collector is considerably wider than that of the hitman. This diversity is also echoed in Rahman et al.’s (2020) definition of this type of enforcer as “any member or an associate of a criminal organization who engages in an extra-legal approach

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<sup>5</sup> Sicario, the Spanish term for a hitman in Italy and Latin-America, is derived from Sicarii, the plural form of *Sicarius*, meaning “dagger-man” (Martin, 2008). Historically, the Sicarii was a splinter group of the Jewish Zealots who, in the decades preceding Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 CE, strongly opposed the Roman occupation of Judea. The Sicarii carried *sicae* (small daggers) concealed in their cloaks and attacked Romans and Hebrew Roman sympathizers in public gatherings, blending into the crowd after the deed to escape detection. The Sicarii are one of the earliest known organized assassination groups, predating the Islamic Hashishin and the Japanese ninja by centuries (Pichtel, 2011).

to governance which leads to resolving any unsettled dispute that goes against organizational or mutually agreed rules and deals” (p. 4). In less intricate terms, they may also be described as “someone who takes ‘special liberties’ and a position of entitlement, which warrants harmful behavior for expressive and instrumental desires” (p. 4). This added nuance covers jobs that take place outside the realm of organized crime. For instance, a non-criminally associated person may engage an enforcer to collect money due from a private transaction.

A further distinction that perhaps mainly applies to a Norwegian and Nordic context can be made between simple debt collection and what in Norway is referred to as a “torpedo” related assignment.<sup>6</sup> These terms are commonly treated synonymously. However, the objective in criminal debt collection is to extract finances from an indebted party with or without the use of threats and/or physical force. These scenarios often involve ‘conversation’ and negotiation between the two parties to mitigate victimization and obtain finances (Rahman et al., 2020). On the other hand, the goal of a “torpedo assignment” is, as implied by the term, typically about punishment and payback, or the removal of an adversary. Stated differently, a “torpedo” is assigned the role of ‘restoring order’ in the criminal environment or some other context by acting as an executioner who carries out the penalty or the order on behalf of their employer. In contrast debt collection is simply about finances. Of course, an enforcer may act as a debt collector in one instance and become a “torpedo” in the next.

A point of some transnational interest is that the Norwegian criminal debt collector rarely commits hits (professional murder) as part of his role. There is no official data on hits carried out by Norwegian enforcers and contract murder is very uncommon in Norway (NCIS, personal communication, May 2020). Though examples of Norwegian enforcers taking jobs as hitmen abroad have been described,<sup>7</sup> such instances are presumably rare (NCIS; personal communication). Thus, the violence performed by the Norwegian criminal debt collector appears, by and large, confined to the use of non-lethal violence.

This seems not to be the case for enforcers operating in many other countries. The limited data from world regions in which mafia type criminal organizations have a strong hold, suggests that the individuals who enforce payment of debt for their criminal organization (e.g., American or Italian mob enforcers; the sicarios of the Latin-American drug-cartels; the

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<sup>6</sup> This assertion is based on the conversations I’ve had with people who regularly engage in such activities, an autobiography written by a Norwegian criminal debt collector (Frednes & Horst, 2015), and Wikipedia <https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torpedo>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/3jj3p9/>

“hammermen” of the South African gangs etc.) are typically also responsible for carrying out many of their hits (Ostrosky et al., 2012; Shaw & Skywalker, 2016).

Why the Norwegian debt collector steers clear of committing hits is likely due to socio-cultural factors as opposed to psychological ones. Norway is a small and wealthy country with a strong and benign state, strict gun laws and a low crime rate (Korsell & Larsson, 2011). Police authorities appear to have a decent overview of the various criminal networks and their activities, ‘professional’ hits are very rare and nearly all homicide cases are resolved. More to the point, even if violence between criminal gangs or cruelty performed during debt enforcement is a serious matter, the level of violence in Norway is not remotely comparable to the war zone in Mexico, or to countries like Italy or Russia, where organized crime and mafia groups are strongly entrenched (Ostrosky et al., 2012; Sciarrone & Storti, 2014). Thus, in addition to the risk of getting caught, the overall ‘peaceful climate’ in Norway most likely raises the threshold for committing hits in the criminal environment (Kosell & Larsson, 2011).

Yet though the commission of murder constitutes a marked difference between these groups, the Norwegian-Scandinavian torpedo seems to fulfill the same basic role as his foreign counterparts. All perform duties as enforcers, avengers, and soldiers on behalf of their employers, and thus, it seems reasonable to regard them as functionally belonging to the same group.

In summary, though the boundaries between the hitman and the criminal debt collector are fuzzy and there are crossovers between them (e.g., mob-enforcers perform both duties), there are several reasons to suggest that they represent different figures of crime. Many hitmen have murder as their sole ‘specialty’ and never engage in debt collection (Levi, 1981; Macintyre et al., 2014). The prototypical hitman and the torpedo are also portrayed differently in popular culture and myth, as illustrated in the Hollywood movie *Sin City* where the torpedo “Marv” comes across as a physically intimidating brute while the deadly assassin “Kevin” appears harmless and unassuming. From a moral and legal perspective, committing murder is also very different from threatening or abusing others as payback or to enforce debt payment. Psychologically, I will also argue that the two roles or ‘professions’ involve dissimilar operations that require different mindsets and different skills.

### **1.1.3 Classifications of the hitman**

Despite the above-mentioned differences, the research literature on hitmen, especially the works of Levi (1981) and Schlesinger (2001), may serve as a useful framework for characterizing the criminal debt collector. Note also that many of the more prolific hitmen

depicted in the literature, such as the American Richard Kuklinski nicknamed the *Ice Man*<sup>8</sup> and the British hitman James Moody, began their criminal careers as enforcers and progressed to become contract murders or hitmen, most likely because the pay and the status of a hitman within the criminal hierarchy was higher (Wilson & Rahman, 2015).

Levi (1981) posited that there are mainly two types of hitmen. One type is attached to an organized criminal group and commits ‘hits’ not for pay but out of loyalty to their group. The other works as an independent contractor and is hired for a fee. Influenced by Levi’s work, Schlesinger (2001) classified hitmen into three types based on their level of professionalism. The *amateur* carries out hits with little training and in an impulsive, unplanned fashion; the *semiprofessional* has some skills and is typically associated with organized crime and plans the hit; the *professional* has extensive training (military or via violent crime), is associated with organized crime, and is seldom caught as he plans meticulously before committing murder. Whether this categorization may be useful for characterizing criminal debt collectors will also be explored here.

Finally, the work of Shaw and Skywalker (2016) on the lives of South African hitmen or “hammermen” is also worth mentioning as it draws attention to the dangerous position that these individuals occupy within their gangs and in the criminal world. On one hand, they are crucial to the security of the criminal leaders, but at the same time they pose a threat to their leader and may themselves be targeted for assassination as a result of what they know and what they have done. The dangers faced by the hitman, including those faced during their actual ‘work’, may indeed also apply to the life of the criminal debt collector. Several prolific Norwegian debt collectors have been killed at work.<sup>9</sup> The scant but relevant personality research findings on hitmen and enforcers will be reviewed later but I will now examine the defining features of rage-murder.

## 1.2 Rage-type murder: Defining features

*Paul, an articulate, middle-aged man of normal stature, was incarcerated for having stabbed an acquaintance 18 times with a knife in a fit of rage. His sudden outrage seemed triggered by a relatively innocent provocation. Paul had never hurt others physically and the forensic examination revealed no signs of neurologic abnormality, significant alcohol consumption or any severe mental disorder.*

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Kuklinski was nicknamed the Ice Man because he froze the body of a victim to make it difficult for forensic examiners to establish time of death.

<sup>9</sup> [https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eivind\\_Johansen](https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eivind_Johansen); [https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bjørn\\_Arild\\_Skjørsæther](https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bjørn_Arild_Skjørsæther)

Differentiating among the various manifestations of a complex phenomenon such as homicide is challenging (Wolfgang, 1958). Revitch and Schlesinger (1981) developed a motivation-based typology that separates rage-type cases such as Paul's from murders induced by organic, toxic, and paranoid states. Excluding the latter cases which Revitch and Schlesinger (1981) consider rare, they outline five different types along a motivational spectrum ranging from homicides stimulated by exogenous factors to purely endogenous, psychologically-determined homicidal behavior: (1) environmental/sociogenic, (2) situational, (3) impulsive, (4) catathymic or rage-type and (5) compulsive.

In brief, *environmentally triggered homicides* are incidental and typically driven by cultural or political factors and social injustices and would likely not occur if these external pressures were not present. *Situational homicide* may be adaptive and is motivated by fear and anger instigated by overt and realistic threats. Stated differently, both these kinds of homicide are not associated with serious psychopathology or personality disturbance, though such factors may be present. *Impulsive homicide* is carried out by offenders with poor impulse control and often a long history of antisocial acts. *Catathymic homicide*, termed "rage-type murder" by Cartwright (2002), is elicited by "deeper sources of emotional tension and is triggered by overwhelming affect attached to a complex of ideas" (p. 129). Finally, *compulsive homicides* are driven almost entirely by endogenous factors and fantasies, often tied to unresolved sexual conflicts that are acted out in a compulsive fashion. Revitch and Schlesinger (1981) note that overlap between these categories of homicidal behavior is inevitable (p. 49).

*Catathymic homicide* was first described by Wertham (1937) who delineated a process leading up to the act of violence that he coined a "catathymic crisis", a term he borrowed from Maier's (in Meloy, 1992) 1912 work. The term "cathathymia", derived from Greek kata and thymos, is most readily translated as "in accordance with emotion" (Meloy, 1992, 2010). Revitch and Schlesinger (1981) further outlined two forms of catathymia; *chronic* and *acute*. The chronic form involves an incubation period where the perpetrator, over the course of days, months or even years, becomes increasingly fixated on the idea of killing until they feel compelled to act out the idea in order to relieve the immense inner tension produced by this affect driven idea. Conversely in *acute catathymia* – the type of homicide most like that investigated here – there is a very small lapse of time between the eruption of the affective conflict and the violent act itself.

Since Wertham's original work various terms for a similar form of homicide have been used, such as "motiveless murder" (Satten, Menninger, Rosen, & Mayman, 1960), "sudden murder" (Weiss, Lamberti, & Blackman, 1960), "dissociative murder" (Moskowitz, 2004;



Tanay, 1969), “affective murder” (Meloy, 1988), and “rage-type murder” (Cartwright, 2002). While these terms seem, by and large, to refer to the same phenomena, their defining criteria differ. My investigation rests on the last of these – Cartwright’s work (2000, 2002) – and the way he defined what he called “rage-type murder”.

Rage-type murder is triggered by an explosive affect imbued with certain ideational and symbolic meaning that is unconscious at the time of the act, and the murder itself has the characteristics of “overkill” (Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 1992). In most cases, the victim and perpetrator have a pre-existing relationship. Typically, they might be a spouse, a close acquaintance, or a job associate, though several cases exist where there is no previous relationship (Stone, 1993). A classic example would be the seemingly responsible husband who, without any clear warning, suddenly acts out of character and kills his wife in a fit of rage.

Post-event analysis often reveals a situational build-up, with a relatively trivial catalyzing interaction (most often an argument, a threat, or an insult) between the perpetrator and the victim directly prior to the murder. Importantly, though situational factors play a part, the usual biopsychosocial model utilized to explain homicidal behavior is insufficient (Cartwright, 2001; Meloy, 2010; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981). That is, the offender rarely shows any signs of psychosis or neurological anomaly. They are not under the influence of toxic substances, drugs or significant amounts of alcohol, and the situation would not be described as life-threatening by observers. The nature of the offence is also uncharacteristic of the perpetrator. Often some level of dissociation occurs, leaving the perpetrator unsure about their motive. There are no signs of premeditation or instrumental motives, and the offender seldom has a prior criminal record (Cartwright, 2002). Meloy (1992) adds that this form of homicide may be distinguished from other forms of emotional or expressive violence by the symbolic significance the victim has to the offender.

Although several authors have suggested that rage-murder is a fairly common form of homicide (Abrahamsen, 1973; Hodgins, 1993; Hyatt-Williams, 1998), there are no reliable international statistics on its prevalence (Meloy, 2010). This seems also to be the case in Norway. In a comprehensive review of partner homicides committed in Norway from 1990 to 2012 (Vatnar, 2015), there is no mention of rage-type murder or any of its associated terms, though a proportion of these homicides could possibly have been classified as such. Apart from the older work (e.g., Satten et al., 1960; Tanay, 1969; Weiss et. al., 1960) and more recent contributions (e.g., Cartwright, 2002; Hyatt-Williams, 1998; Meloy, 1992, 2010; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981), there is also very little research on this type of homicide. As noted by Meloy

(2010), “Catathymia, despite its discovery nearly a century ago, continues to be rarely understood and appreciated by forensic mental health professionals” (p. 4).

### **1.3 The nature of violence**

Violence is a heterogeneous phenomenon. It takes many different forms and may be triggered and undergirded by various internal and external factors. While identifying its principal manifestations and distinguishing between the various types of violence is a crucial enterprise for science and subsequent prevention (McGuire, 2008), such an endeavor cannot be achieved without some consensus regarding how violence should be defined.

#### **1.3.1 What constitutes an act of violence?**

The word violence is derived from the Latin noun *violentia* which means vehemence. The verb to which *violentia* relates is *violare*, meaning to dishonor, to outrage or to treat with violence. It became an independent word in Anglo-French somewhere around 14<sup>th</sup> century (Schinkel, 2010). The concept of violence is, semantically speaking, confined to the human domain (Stone, 2006) and used to denote aggressive behavior by humans toward other humans. Despite being one of the most important public health problems worldwide (WHO, 2014), there is no consensus in the scientific community regarding how violence should be defined. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that many authors fail to distinguish anger from aggression, and aggression from violence. And other related nouns such as rage, destructiveness, sadism, cruelty and brutality are also often poorly differentiated and defined (Yakeley & Meloy, 2012).

In an effort to differentiate between violence and aggression, de Zulueta (1994) describes aggression as a form of behavior studied by etiologists, biologists, psychologists, while violence is more about the interpretation given to a form of social behavior, a social construct defined by law which may differ across countries, cultures and continents. Echoing Stone (2006), de Zulueta (1994) further states that violence is essentially human and relates more to the meaning we give to destructive forms of interpersonal behavior. This contrasts with the broader concept of aggression which pertains to the animal kingdom in general. The term ‘destructive’ is, however, ambiguous and may include a spectrum of behaviors from theft, vandalism, and humiliating verbalizations to ‘cold blooded’ murder.

Informed by developmental psychology, Parson (2006) suggests that the main difference between aggression and violence is that violence involves a *physical* attack on the body of another person when this is not developmentally appropriate. Central to this definition is the harmful breach of bodily boundaries as well the age-appropriate element, which alludes to the notion that children have only attained a crude understanding of right and wrong, have

not yet acquired the mental capacity to regulate their behavior and should, therefore, not be held accountable for their actions. Thus, following Parson, the toddler who hits a peer is acting aggressively, whereas say an older child, an adolescent or an adult displaying the same behavior would be considered to have behaved violently. Yet what if the physical attack was enacted for reasons of self-defense?

Hamby (2017) argues that a definition of violence should be capable of excluding behaviors such as accidents and self-defense, and including behaviors such as manslaughter, rape, and sexual abuse. A person hitting an attacker to protect themselves or their children is not violent, but rather using physical aggression appropriately to ward off a violent threat. Yet what if the same person ends up killing the attacker? Is he still only being aggressive? What if they mistakenly imbued the other person with hostile intentions, a ‘misreading’ which is typical of many cases of psychotically motivated murder? These are some of the inherent difficulties researchers studying the phenomenon of aggression and violence are faced with.

A common definition within the forensic literature, though one occurring with some variation, can be found in Cartwright’s (2002) formulation of violence as “a physical act that is destructive in intention, whether this intention is conscious or unconscious.” While this definition captures the overall nature of the violence performed by the subjects in this inquiry, it excludes the possibility of violence as an exclusively psychological phenomenon. The psychological dimension is particularly relevant for conceptualizing the criminal debt collector’s use of the fear of violence to coerce uncooperative victims. The threat of violence may indeed, for some, be more devastating than taking an actual beating (Mizen & Morris, 2007). In the words of a debt collector I met (my translation): “The worst you can do to a person is not the physical beatings, but when you take hold of his mind and soul.”

WHO’s (1996) definition of violence includes this important psychological dimension. Their definition of violence is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” Their definition also addresses the issue of threat more directly. That is, through their inclusion of the word “power”, in addition to the phrase “use of physical force”, broadens the nature of a violent act and expands the conventional understanding of violence to include those acts that result from a power relationship, including threats and intimidation. Then again, this definition does not differentiate between self-defensive acts and proactive acts involving the unnecessary use of physical force.

Providing an all-encompassing definition of violence that covers the needs of every researcher may not be feasible. The definitions outlined by Cartwright and the WHO seem, by and large, to capture the different manifestations of violence investigated here. All the participants had engaged in intentional physical attacks on another person. The great majority had also carried out what are often referred to as “serious violent crimes” (McGuire, 2008), meaning that the acts resulted in serious bodily injury (mortality, or requiring medical treatment – cuts, bleeding, unconsciousness, etc.) and were committed in a context where such actions were specifically proscribed by societal norms and codified in formal law.

Finally, Abrahamsen (1973) reminds us of the interpersonal nature of violence. That victim and victimizer may shape each other unconsciously and their roles may switch so that the victim becomes the determining agent, while the victimizer in the end becomes his own victim (p. 35). This observation is often overlooked by the law and forensic practitioners.

### **1.3.2 Situational and contextual factors**

Whilst the focus here is essentially on the relationship between violence and personality related dispositions, the role of situational factors for explaining violence should not be downplayed.

Indeed, the violence performed by the debt collector is predominantly committed against other members of the criminal fraternity, and in a subculture that endorses violence as a way of managing social interactions and disputes (Felson et al., 1994): “If you don’t pay your dues, you know what’s coming.” Many of the debt collectors I met claimed that they never harmed ‘civilians’. Though such statements should be viewed with caution, the threshold for using violence within the criminal world is arguably substantially lower than on the outside. In fact, not retaliating with force when someone breaks the criminal code may be seen as a sign of weakness by other members of the criminal community, which in some circumstances may increase risk of violence (Felson et al., 1994).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, refraining from the use of violence as a means to extort due money from an indebted person may result in a lack of income and be a direct threat to the reputation of the debt collector (Toch, 1992). Thus, while it will be argued here that the violence performed by criminal debt collectors is closely intertwined with their personality makeup, their acts are very likely also influenced by the expectations and social pressures of the subculture they operate within.

Situational triggers may often go a long way to explaining what propels an individual to commit murder (Revitch and Schlesinger, 1981). In the case of rage-murder, the careful

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<sup>10</sup> Felson et al. (1994) says the subculture of violence has two layers. The first is the normative system that defines the subculture. The second is social control, whereby if the rules of the street are not followed as expected, it can result in sanctions for one’s reputation and consequently for one’s physical safety.

examination of the perpetrator's history prior to the actual murder often reveals a build-up of minor or major psychological crises (e.g., relational, financial etc.) that ultimately ends in an act of murder or serious harm (Cartwright, 2002). According to Cartwright (2002), identifying these factors is important in order to determine the psychological state that culminates in murder, and they also serve as a starting point for understanding the intrapsychic factors that may have partly created or precipitated the tragic external situation. In other words, the situation may not only act as a determinant, but *why* and *how* such a situation develops may reflect something about the perpetrator's internal make-up (Cartwright, 2002, p. 56-57).

### **1.3.3 Origins of violence and aggression**

The question of whether our destructive propensity is innate or acquired has been debated for centuries. On one side nurture proponents argue that violence is learnt through the imitation of aggressive models (e.g., Bandura, 1973) or developed in response to frustration and trauma (e.g., de Zulueta, 1994), whereas nature proponents (e.g., Lorenz, 1966) view violence as embedded in our nature and expressed via an aggressive temperament. This latter position is particularly poignant in the study of psychopathy, a condition considered to reflect the most extreme manifestation of our destructive potential (Meloy, 1988), and which many regard as a hereditary, neuropsychiatric disorder (Blair, 2008).

Longitudinal research examining the trajectories of aggressive behavior among children shows that that physical aggression (biting, pushing, hitting) is a normally occurring behavior that peaks between the ages of two and three and steadily decreases thereafter for most individuals (Tremblay, Côté, Salla, & Michel, 2017). Based on these findings, it seems evident that our tendency to resort to physical force in the face of frustration or in pursuit of goals is a part of our nature. Drawing on this inference, Fonagy (2003) has proposed that children gradually learn to inhibit physical aggression through sensitive caregiving experiences, which facilitate the development of language, affect regulation, self-agency, perspective taking, and prosocial strategies for attaining one's needs. However, where the home environment is dysfunctional and the child is unable to form attachment relationships that are stable and comfortable enough to allow the development of prosocial skills, the process of unlearning physical aggression will be disrupted (Fonagy, 2003).

Recent research findings suggest that this interactional model may also be relevant for the development of psychopathy. Precursors to the fearless and callously aggressive interpersonal style characteristic of adult psychopathy (Patrick, 2006) have been described in young children (Frick, Ray, Thornton, & Kahn, 2014) and the biogenetic basis for these traits

is well documented (Viding & McCrory, 2012). However, “pre-psychopathic children” raised by sensitive parents appear not to grow up to become psychopaths (Humphreys et al., 2015; Kochanska, Aksan, & Joy, 2007), and evidence is building that psychopathic tendencies may also be triggered by environmental factors such as harsh and threatening parenting (e.g., Bohlin, Eninger, Brocki, & Thorell, 2012; Rehder et al., 2020). Thus, the etiology of psychopathy is likely best understood in terms of an interaction between genetic and environmental factors (Daversa, 2010).

To summarize, though evidence suggests that aggression forms part of our heritage, with some being more disposed to develop violent behavioral patterns than others, human destructiveness, can rarely, if ever, be reduced to a simple question of nature versus nurture. This is so whether the destructiveness under scrutiny is murder triggered by rage or the more controlled and calculated violence performed during criminal debt collection.

#### **1.3.4 Subtypes of violence and their psychological functioning**

As alluded to earlier, there are many forms of violence (McGuire, 2008). The focus here will be on the existence of two modes of violence, often termed hostile/affective and predatory/instrumental. These modes present distinctive behavioral manifestations and neurobiological underpinnings (Berkowitz 1993; McEllistrem, 2004; Meloy, 2006; Yakeley, 2018), and are of relevance for understanding the type and function of the violence displayed during rage-murder and criminal debt collection.

##### ***Hostile/affective violence***

Hostile/affective violence, variously termed “reactive”, “impulsive”, or “self-protective” violence, refers to acts triggered by a perceived threat (Berkowitz 1993; McEllistrem, 2004; Meloy, 2006). This mode of violence constitutes what Meloy (1988, 2006) has aptly called the “garden-variety” violence present in our society, e.g., male fistfights outside a nightclub, male rivalry over a female, a husband striking his wife after feeling insulted etc. It is associated with increased heart rate, heightened physiological arousal, and is typically accompanied by intense negative emotions; fear, anger, rage (McEllistrem, 2004). The act is often preceded by public rituals and instinctive behavioral signs, i.e., vocalizations or aggressive bodily stances and gestures to ward off an adversary and reduce threat (Meloy, 1992). Internally, the actual violence is thought to reduce the elevated physical arousal associated with the perception of threat, a calming effect that is thought to have self-protective purposes (Meloy, 2006).

Rage-murder is described as a defensive act located at the extreme end of the hostile/affective spectrum (Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 1992; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981;

Satten et al., 1960). In the words of Meloy, “the violence is clearly affective, delineated by intense autonomic arousal, overwhelming anger during the violence, the perception of the victim as an imminent threat to the ego structure of the perpetrator, a time-limited behavioral sequence and a goal of threat reduction and a return to intrapsychic homeostasis” (1992, p. 47). However, the notion that rage-murder is ‘self-protective’ merits further elaboration, especially since the act is usually associated with a trivial provocation (Cartwright, 2002).

Examining the perpetrator’s level of reality testing before and during the act and his or her ‘object selection’ may be helpful in this regard (Meloy, 1997). The level of reality testing denotes variability in the perpetrator’s ability to distinguish between internal and external stimuli, between perceptions of actual objects in the world and non-real objects imagined or hallucinated by the mind (Buchanan, 2010). Object selection refers to the link between the perpetrator’s internal representations and the real attributes of the person who is the target of violence (Meloy, 1992). These interrelated dimensions help distinguish between violence triggered by fantasy-based misperceptions of threat – typically associated with psychotic, highly intoxicated or extremely paranoid states – and acts in which the victim posed an actual physical threat to the actor (Meloy, 1997; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981).

Rage-murder is usually depicted as a “borderline” category (Meloy, 1992), meaning that though the perception of reality is reduced by dissociative processes (e.g., derealization, amnesia, tunnel vision), it is rarely absent or compromised to the level evident in psychotically motivated murder. The prevalence of the dissociative processes noted in rage-murder is unfortunately not well documented, but anecdotal quotes from perpetrators depicting their act as “unreal” and “dream-like” capture the ego-dystonic nature of the experience (Cartwright, 2002). One offender I met who killed his girlfriend stated that he could not feel his arms while strangling her, and that it felt as if something alien had taken hold of his body, even though he knew it was him. Another offender with no history of violence or crime brought a kitchen knife to a relatively innocent conflictual situation and suddenly found himself stabbing the other person. He could not explain why he brought the knife, nor his emotions before or during the stabbings, and was bewildered that there was nothing in the situation that called for violent action.

The link between dissociation and rage is well documented (Howell, 2005; Meloy, 1988, 1997; Moskowitz, 2004). Rage may be defined as an intense negative affective state usually generated by a build-up of discontentment (Cartwright, 2002). Intense rage-reactions are typically seen as “desperate defensive actions” instigated to fend off shame, humiliation, or sudden loss of self-esteem (Kernberg, 1992). Rage may, in extreme cases, produce sensations

of depersonalization and a subsequent inability to mediate the experience through any other means than physical action; the outcome may be a violent physical attack (Moskowitz, 2004). The offenders I spoke with denied any conscious experience of rage before or during their acts of murder. While more research on how unconscious rage may manifest in behavioral action is needed, the general assumption among scholars is that rage directly expressed through violence reflects disassociated aspects of the self (Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 1997).

In sum, rage-murder is broadly speaking located within the hostile-affective violence spectrum (Meloy, 1997). Most authors in this field contend that the murderous rage that ultimately results in murder emanates from an internally threatened part of the personality that is attempting to ward off danger through the annihilation of what is perceived to threaten the individual (Cartwright, 2002; Glasser, 1996; Hyatt-Williams, 1998).

### ***Instrumental/predatory violence***

Instrumental or predatory modes of violence denotes the use of physical force in pursuit of some secondary goal (Antonius et al., 2013). It is conceived as biologically distinct and phenotypically opposite to the affectively charged, *self-preservative type* outlined above (Meloy, 1988, 2006). The perpetrators mindset during the act is typically characterized by lowered arousal, little or no feeling, and focused attention on the target. The objective of this use of violence varies and might include monetary gain, revenge, territorial control, sexual gratification, power, or be underpinned by political and religious beliefs etc., and it usually involves some level of premeditation (Meloy, 2012). Aside from soldiers at war and policemen in the line of duty, most humans do not engage in such types of violence toward other humans due to higher cortical inhibitions (Blair, 2007) – or in Meloy’s psychodynamic terms – an intact conscience or superego (2012, p. 165). Consequently, instrumental/predatory violence is a less researched and more poorly understood form of human violence, thought to have phylogenetic roots in hunting for food (Meloy, 1988).

One archetype of this sort of perpetrator is the hitman whose lethality and earnings are closely intertwined with his or her ability to inhibit potentially disruptive impulses while maintaining focus on the victim. An even more petrifying type is the serial killer, some of whom may travel across vast regions to locate and hunt down human prey that matches their desired script (Holmes & Holmes, 1998). Another horrific example of this predatory behavioral mode is mirrored in Anders Behring Breivik’s planned and systematically executed mass murder, in which he fired an assault rifle intermittently for an hour until 69 innocent people were dead.



While not as lethal, the violence used by the criminal debt collector to coerce indebted victims also epitomizes this mode of violence.

The ability to carry out instrumentally violent acts is usually facilitated by considerable dehumanization of the victim (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromsen, 1975; Meloy, 2012). Dehumanization refers to the denial of full humanness to others (Haslam, 2006) by means of reducing the person or group targeted either to a non-human (i.e. inanimate, as if the humans are objects) or sub-human (i.e. animalistic, as if the humans as lesser beings) status (Cohen, 2015). The reduction of the victim to an object is eloquently illustrated by Levi (1981) who pointed out the way in which the hitman's ability to murder strangers without feeling seems fostered by an active shutting out of information that could potentially humanize the person, i.e., by not paying attention to the victim's facial expressions and by depicting the victim as a 'target' rather than a person. Similarly, Schlesinger (2001) in his analysis of a hitman who admitted to more than a hundred hits, inferred that the perpetrator had an extraordinary ability to compartmentalize or isolate his feelings, so that his 'work' did not interfere with his personal life. Comparatively, the criminal debt collector, one might assume, also utilizes deactivation techniques in their work. What I have noted is that many express strong contempt for their victims, a perception that seems to fit with Cohen's (2015) sub-human categorization.

In sum, the validity of the *affective/hostile - instrumental/predatory* bimodal division of violence is supported by psychometric, neurochemical, and neuroanatomical evidence (Fabian, 2010; McEllistrem, 2004; Meloy, 2006, 2012). Its utility has also been demonstrated in forensic settings as a discriminative marker of offenders at greater risk of reoffending (Antonius et al., 2013; Cornell et al., 1996). Note, however, that this division distinguishes between acts rather than actors, and that some investigators argue that this typology greatly undermines the notion that aggressive acts may have mixed motives or show elements of both modes (Babcock, Tharp, Sharp, Heppner, & Stanford, 2014; Bushman & Anderson, 2001). More so, the notion of instrumental violence as purely unemotional has also been challenged by evidence showing that instrumental acts may be carried out in a state of gleeful exhilaration or may be motivated by a quest for excitement (Howard, 2011). In response to these critiques, Meloy (2006) contended that affective and predatory violence should be viewed as dimensional rather than categorical, with most violent acts being primarily one or the other but some containing elements of both modes.

Finally, Glasser's (1996) psychoanalytic model of violence may also be useful for illuminating aspects of the violence investigated here. He distinguishes between 'self-preservative' and 'somasochistic' violence, where the former is described as a primitive

response to eliminate a perceived threat, much like with the concept of hostile/affective violence. Sadomasochistic violence on the other hand, is underpinned by the desire to hurt and control, rather than eliminating the object (i.e. the person at whom the violence is directed) and is akin to instrumental/predatory violence. The main difference between these two forms of violence involves their relationship to that object. In self-preservative violence, the object is perceived as presenting an immediate threat to the self and must be eliminated but holds no other personal significance for the perpetrator. By contrast, in sadomasochistic violence the object and his or her responses are the focus. This mode may be particularly relevant for torpedo-related violence where the objective is to hurt and punish the victim.

*Attachment is the bedrock of our civilization (Meloy, 2002)*

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Attachment and Object relations**

Attachment and object-relational theory are theories about our innate need to form attachments for comfort and protection, and how early caregiving experiences and internal representations influence personality development and psychopathology across the life span (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Fonagy, 2001).<sup>11</sup> The development of the self occurs through the encoding or internalization of attachment experiences with caregivers to form mental representations (Jacobson, 1964) or internal working models (Bowlby, 1969/1982) of the self and significant others (Blatt, 1974; Fairbairn, 1952; Kernberg, 1975). This internalized self/other model serves as a template for processing and organizing information, and subsequently acts as a guide which influences expectations and regulates emotion and behavior in interpersonal relations (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Fonagy, 2001).

With regards to violence, the assumption of these perspectives is that children's developmental pathways and their disposition toward violence are closely intertwined with the quality of their attachment experiences and their internalized relational model (Fonagy, 2003; Meloy, 2002). More specifically, sensitive caregiving is thought to generate relational models characterized by realistic, coherent self/other representations, which foster affect integration, steady identifications<sup>12</sup> with benign others and empathy, thus promoting prosocial trajectories (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Fonagy, 2001). On the other hand, lack of parental affection, abandonment, neglect, loss, and abuse can give rise to fragmented, unrealistic, one-dimensional, and malevolent self/other representations (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Taubner et al., 2017). These distorted relational models may result in pathological identificatory processes, porous self/other boundaries, and an overreliance on primitive defenses, e.g., splitting, projection, projective identification and acting out to manage intolerable mental states (Yakeley, 2018). This progression may in turn hamper empathy development and increase the risk of aggression, conduct problems and violence, even when controlling for other environmental and biological factors (Bretherton & Munholland, 2008; Fitton, Yu, & Fazel, 2018).

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<sup>11</sup> Despite these convergences, the theories of object relations and attachment are different in important respects. Most significantly perhaps, compared with internal working models of attachment theory, the concept of representations in object relations theory has a more epigenetic developmental quality. That is, objects and object relations may arise from non-experiential stimuli such as internal drives and fantasy (Blatt, 1974; Fonagy, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Identification may be described as a process whereby subjects assimilate an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and are transformed (partially or wholly) after the model the other provides (Meloy, 1988).

While providing a developmental framework for violence, this outline does not explain how adverse attachment experiences and victimization are transformed into the potential for violence against others (Savage, 2014; Taubner et al., 2017). On this point, there exist several less empirically validated psychodynamic/attachment-based models illuminating the key role of attachment in the genesis of violence (see Meloy, 2002; Yakeley & Meloy, 2012; Yakeley, 2018 for reviews). A full presentation of these models is beyond my scope here.

## **2.1 Models of violence**

### **2.1.1 Glasser's model (1996)**

Glasser's model of self-preservative and sadistic violence is rooted in what he terms the "core complex". The "core complex" develops from a pathological mother-child relationship and involves a toxic internal situation in which the child becomes trapped between pervasive yearnings for closeness and union with mother and primitive fears of being abandoned or engulfed (losing the self in the other). An example would be a narcissistic maternal figure that through her preoccupation with her own needs fails to support the child's efforts to establish a stable, independent self.

This toxic conflict between deep yearnings and primitive fears generates excessive rage and is, according to Glasser (1996), also the origin of self-preservative violence. Sadomasochistic violence may emerge at a later stage in development by converting self-preservative aggression into sadism. This resolves the vicious circle of the core complex, as the mother/object is not destroyed but survives to be manipulated and controlled by the child. Self-preservative violence is more likely to be triggered by persecutory feelings of being engulfed and intruded upon, whereas sadomasochistic violence is precipitated by fears of being abandoned. These conflicting anxieties, which provoke the defensive reactions of the core complex, may be sparked by interpersonal situations of intimacy, which may then become potent triggers for violence (Yakeley, 2018).

### **2.1.2 Attachment and trauma**

While exposure to developmental trauma has been identified as an important risk factor for violence (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Widom & Czaia, 2012), the mechanisms that mediate this transformation from victim to victimizer are still not well understood (Haapasalo & Pokela, 1999; Savage, 2014). Developmental trauma – defined as a threatening incident or a series of events which overwhelm the child's existing coping mechanisms (Van der Kolk, 2007) – may have various disintegrative effects on the emerging self. In some cases, memories of early brutalization or abuse and/or its associated affect may become sequestered, dissociated, and

split off from autobiographical memory or mental awareness (Howell, 2005). Accordingly, the risk for violence in such cases lies in these hidden representations being reenacted in a robotic or explosive manner under conditions reminiscent of the threatening past (Crittenden, 2015; Stein, 2007).

Another route links trauma exposure with blunted emotional development and subsequent violence. While research in this area is still limited, studies (Bohlin et al., 2012; Rehder et al., 2020) show that children may be so overwhelmed by fear of threatening parental behavior that they detach from, or fail to develop, feelings or self-aspects associated with vulnerability, with some being more genetically disposed for such a (non-) development than others (Viding & McCrory, 2012). This emotional disconnection may interfere with the child's ability to identify with others' pain and despair, leading to the development of callous-unemotional traits (e.g., lack of empathy, guilt, poverty of emotional expression) and subsequent aggressive behavior. From a more psychodynamic perspective, this progression is akin to what has been termed "identification with the aggressor" (A. Freud, 1936), a process in which the child identifies with, and takes on the frightening attributes of, the parent, thus creating the illusion of control and becoming an aggressor themselves.

Childhood exposure to trauma and abuse has been identified as an important risk marker for future violence (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). This process is likely mediated through mechanisms of dissociation (Moskowitz, 2004) and subsequent failure to mentalize or perceive others as real humans (Levinson & Fonagy, 2002). However, the great majority of victimized people never commit violence. In other words, the relationship between trauma and violence is complex and likely influenced by an interplay between many factors, e.g., genetic, temperamental, the onset and severity of the trauma, the overall quality of the child's internalized relations, contextual triggers and so forth.

Aside from these factors, traumatized children are also prone to develop characterological structures and defenses in order to avoid intrusions and the recollection of dissociated traumatic memories. As Howell (2005) puts it, it is often difficult to distinguish characterological issues from the effects of trauma, and in most cases of "trauma-based violence" there is most likely an interaction between the two (Crittenden, 2015; Stein, 2007).

There are also myriad far less overt forms of 'trauma' that are detrimental to personality growth (Frankel, 2002) and, thus, of relevance for understanding how violence may emerge at some stage (Meloy, 2002; Yakeley, 2018). As touched on earlier, children learn to protect themselves from painful experiences – such as humiliation, rejection, and unpredictable or harsh parenting – by adopting mental-behavioral strategies to regulate their internal state and

cope with their attachment relationships (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Fairbairn, 1952; A. Freud, 1936). When such interactions make up a significant part of children's developmental experiences, the defenses employed become automatized and ingrained in their regular way of regulating the self and relations, which may result in a structuring of traits and interpersonal perception that dispose toward violence (Meloy, 2002). These unconscious procedural repertoires or implicit relational dispositions of how to be with other people (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999) are, empirically speaking, best described in terms of patterns of attachment.

## **2.2 Patterns of Attachment**

Ainsworth and colleagues (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) identified three infant-caregiver attachment patterns in the "Strange Situation" laboratory procedure. Two insecure patterns, anxiously avoidant (Type A) and anxiously ambivalent/resistant (Type C), in addition to one secure pattern (Type B) which will not be addressed further as it is associated with good mental health (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009). Type A patterns (termed "dismissing in adulthood") are associated with predicatively rejecting parenting, inhibition of negative affect to maintain parental availability and an image of parents as protective. Type C patterns evolve out of unpredictable parenting and involve children's strategic use of negative feeling states to elicit parental attention (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). These ABC patterns show consistency from infancy to adulthood and are common in the general population as well as in clinical populations (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009).

Ainsworth's ABC model of attachment has been extended by several of her students. Mary Main and colleagues (e.g., Main, 2000; Main & Hesse, 1990; Main & Solomon, 1986) developed the most widely known and researched model. Based on her work with children and adults at risk, Main added a fourth category called "*disorganized* attachment in infancy" (Type D; Main & Solomon, 1986). This D category was based on the notion that frightening parental behavior led to incoherent or oscillating internal models and a subsequent inability to organize a coherent strategy for coping with fear (Main & Hesse, 1990). Such a breakdown of the attachment system in early childhood can be considered as a precursor of attachment disorganization in adult life, which has been linked to a wide range of clinical problems including mood disorders, dissociative disorders, eating disorders, borderline personality disorder, and schizophrenia (see Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016 for a review).

### **2.2.1 The Dynamic Maturational Model of Attachment and Adaptation (DMM)**

The DMM (Crittenden, 1999, 2000, 2015) will be presented in some detail because it serves as an important theoretical backbone for this thesis. Like Main, Patricia Crittenden developed her

model based on work with populations at risk under Ainsworth's guidance (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). Her extension of the ABC Ainsworth patterns includes six compulsive Type A strategies (3–8), six obsessive Type C strategies (3–8), and alterations between the two patterns (A/C; Crittenden, 1985). The rising numbers denote that the different patterns are imbued by increasing layers of distortion (defenses) of attachment-related information (e.g., from mild to severe inhibition and dissociation of negative affect in the Type A). This proposal is based on the notion that as children mature neurologically, they develop increasingly complex strategies in dynamic interaction with ongoing experience to maximize the protection available from otherwise threatening, inadequate, or unavailable caregivers, thus reducing the likelihood of harm (Crittenden, 1999; Thompson & Raikes, 2003).

While acknowledging that frightening parental behavior may have disorganizing effects on children's mental-behavioral functioning, Crittenden asserts that disorganization is most commonly a temporary state, and that children learn to adapt to frightening danger by organizing self-protective behavior as a survival mechanism (cf. LeDoux, 1996). This adaptation to danger may involve a reduction of the perception of vulnerability (Type A) and/or increasing the vigilance of threat (Type C). Furthermore, when the danger changes as the child develops, but still always remains too daunting for the child's current stage of development, increasingly complex, layered, A, C, or mixed deactivating/hyper-activating *self-protective strategies* (A/C) may arise (Crittenden, 2015). Major change periods include turning two, beginning school, puberty, and the transition to adulthood.

Crittenden's term *self-protective strategy* reflects an expansion of what is usually entailed by the associated terms "attachment style" or "attachment organisation" utilized by most attachment researchers. That is, while originating in the context of early attachment relationships, the strategy and its underlying relational model may, according to Crittenden, also be influenced and refined through exposure to threatening experiences outside the home environment, such as community violence, abuse by other people, institutional placements, delinquent friends and so forth. In other words, the self-protective strategy is not confined to attachment relationships but may be carried over to other settings, and thus become a more generalized coping strategy for regulating arousal, thoughts, and emotion in interpersonal relations and especially for dealing with threats. Moreover, as a result of continuous exposure to pervasive and longstanding threats throughout the developmental period, the self-protective strategy may come to form a more stable part of the individual's overall characterological makeup. In adulthood, this 'overuse' of the strategy may congeal into entrenched traits (e.g., dysregulation of arousal, impulse, affect, distorted perception and thinking) and develop

interpersonally in terms of dysfunctional relations and behavioral patterns, which may create conflict with others, social institutions and the law (Crittenden, 2015).

### *The Compulsive Type A patterns*

Clinical and laboratory observations of abused and neglected children have identified several unusual behaviors that children exhibit when interacting with their parents, including hypervigilance, over-compliance, role-reversal, absence of negative affect (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). Crittenden termed these relational behaviors “compulsive patterns” due to the excessive inhibition of both negative affect and behavior noted in these children. The compulsive patterns are associated with neglectful and potentially dangerous parenting and a development of rigid splits in the psyche to ward off these painful experiences. Children of withdrawn attachment figures might develop a compulsive caregiving strategy (A3; Crittenden, 1999; Marvin, 2003), whereas physically threatening and harsh parenting may invoke a compulsive compliant strategy (A4; Cicchetti et al., 1988; Crittenden & DiLalla, 1988; Lynch & Roberts, 1982).

Compulsive compliant children display little emotion, inhibit unaccepted behavior, and attend to the adult’s behavior and wishes with a frozen, hypervigilant watchfulness in order to minimize abuse (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). This relational stance is akin to what Ferenczi (1933) coined *identification with the aggressor*<sup>13</sup>, a traumatic process in which the child may be said to mold the self to fit the expectations and attributions forced upon them by the abusive caretaker. Self-aspects associated with aggression are encapsulated and denied (Frankel, 2002), yet in some cases children are compliant with parents, but may enact their bottled up anger and fear, both in and out of school or other supervised settings (Galston, 1971; George & Main, 1979; Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 1981; Riedy, 1977).

This enactment of aggression may also be explained as identification with the aggressor (A. Freud, 1936) and motivated either by displaced anger or by increased vigilance in the context of expecting aggression *from* others’. Their vigilance which emerges from internal models of submission and dominance could easily lead the abused child to misinterpret the behavior of others and to respond aggressively. Of course, the response of others to his aggression will only confirm the child’s model (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). And if this

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<sup>13</sup> The term «identification with the aggressor» is used by Anna Freud (1936) and Ferenczi (1933). However, Ferenczi’s (1933) self-defeating aggressor identification is different from Anna Freud’s (1936) use of the term, which refers to the modeling of parental aggression where the child defends against the anxieties of victimhood by identifying with the hostile aspects of the parent and displaces his aggression on a third party. Instead, what Ferenczi (1933) highlighted is how the child adapts to threat by subordinating the self to the attacker (parent).



behavioral sequence is repeated over time, compulsive Type A children with a fragmented sense of self may begin to identify with and take ownership of their violent enactments. Thus they will start to utilize threats and violence in a more calculated manner in order to attain privileges and social status as well the means to regulate painful affect states (Alvarez, 2011).

In the absence of parental support and protection, compulsive promiscuity (A5) and compulsive self-reliance (A6) may emerge during adolescence as a function of increased maturity. At the extreme end are people who block off most of their authentic feelings as the expression of emotion is associated with exceedingly neglectful and abusive parenting. Despite their painful experiences, some of these people idealize their abusive parents. This cognitive-emotional distortion, or masochistic attachment to the abuser (Blizard, 2003)<sup>14</sup> is understood as an illusion of having been loved and protected, hence the term “delusional idealization” (A7).<sup>15</sup> The most extreme pattern, the externally assembled self (A8), is associated with severe and pervasive maltreatment, and often involves frequent changes of attachment figures and multiple foster placements beginning in early childhood and extending into adolescence or adulthood. The strategy develops in adulthood and functions as an attempt to assemble an identity based on reliance on external sources such as official records, the interpretations of health care professionals and/or the negative feedback the person has received about their bad behavior (Crittenden, 2015; Stein, 2007). Some of these individuals turn to extreme behavior such as violence in order to counteract experiences of deadness engendered by the excessive emotional inhibition and lowered arousal that underpins the strategy (Gilligan, 1996).

### *The Obsessive C Type patterns*

The obsessive patterns arise out of enmeshed child-parent relationships, and unpredictable, sometimes deceptive adults. These experiences generate intense anxiety and anger that induces strategies driven by “affective logic” in order to regulate the behavior of the self and others (Crittenden, 2000). These strategies are termed aggressive (C3) or feigned helplessness (C4) in the preschool age. Aggressive C Type children are more prone to develop externalizing disorders (Moss et al., 2006) such that their strategy of controlling and punishing their unpredictable parents is also utilized to dominate their peers (Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989).

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<sup>14</sup> Blizard’s (2003) use of the term ‘masochistic’ refers to a submissive, self-defeating, attachment based relational position developed for self-protective purposes, and is not necessarily accompanied by a desire to be victimized or humiliated, as the term is often associated with.

<sup>15</sup> The compulsive caregiving, compulsively promiscuous and compulsively self-reliant attachment-patterns are based on John Bowlby’s original work (1980).

Neurological maturation and increased language acquisition in the school years enables children to deceive others regarding their intentions (Crittenden, 2015), which subsequently sets the stage for more disturbed developments. Specifically, when these overtly angry and aggressive children are continuously exposed to unpredictable and deceptive parenting, while being ridiculed for their displays of vulnerability, self-aspects associated with vulnerability and helplessness become further detached from conscious awareness. This progression may lead to a more chronic aggressive identification (A. Freud, 1936). The strategy is characterized by deception of others with regards to their own intentions and intense, but more controlled, anger where the focus is on retribution and revenge (C5-6). These conduct-disturbed, affect-driven children and adolescents downplay their contribution to conflict due to their incomplete understanding of causal relations. Thus they run the risk that their aggressive and deceptive behavior leads to situations where they themselves become victims of deceit and severe retribution caused by their own misconduct. This self-endangerment may serve to further reinforce their anger and environmental distrust, which subsequently may open the way for the most ominous C Type patterns.

According to Crittenden (2015), the menacing-paranoid (C7-8) subpatterns may arise in adulthood in response to a history of repeated exposure to unpredictable and deceptive threats, thought to lead to a psychological organization dominated by cool hate and fear, denial of vulnerability, and grossly distorted thought processes (including delusions of revenge and rescue). Individuals using these strategies are preoccupied with power and dominance. Signs of vulnerability evoke strong disdain, not only because such signs mirror their own intolerable states, but also because of their deeply held contention that other people's feelings are false. Some of these individuals may take sadistic pleasure from dominating and hurting others.

### *The A/C patterns*

The A/C denotation refers to the alternation between a Type A and Type C strategy (Crittenden, 1985, Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). Theoretically, the shifts between these unintegrated relational strategies are operated via splitting. The different relational models are stored in separate memory systems, available to consciousness in alternation (Fonagy, 2001). The shifts might reflect specific relationships or different levels of threat. For instance, some children might employ an A4 compulsive compliant strategy to reduce the probability of violence with a threatening father, and then switch to an angry-coercive C type strategy to elicit attention or to control a withdrawn mother. Of specific relevance are the extreme strategies mentioned above. Individuals using these strategies may oscillate between emotionally detached states

(Type A), in which the self and others are dehumanized and experienced as dead objects (Gilligan, 1996), and states characterized by excessive disdain and cold hate (Type C). The primary motivation in these very disturbed psychological defensive organizations (O'Shaughnessy, 1981) is protection and preservation of the self, even at the cost of others. The most ominous of these is termed psychopathy (A7-8/C7-8, AC).

### **2.3 Research Status**

The validity of the ABC-D attachment patterns is well established (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008) and, while less researched, the utility of the extended DMM patterns have been demonstrated in several studies (see paper I, or Spieker & Crittenden, 2018). Regarding the much-debated question about the influence of children's temperament on attachment, a series of meta-analyses (Groh, Fearon, IJzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Roisman, 2017) support the claim propounded by attachment theory, that the characteristics of children's temperaments do not determine attachment classification. Of specific relevance to the relationship between attachment and violence, a recent meta-analysis (Ogilvie, Newman, Todd, & Peck, 2014) shows that the great majority of violent offenders have relational models marked by insecurity and distortions in their perceptions of themselves and others.

Yet while this finding is on a par with both attachment and object relational theory, insecure attachment is common in the general population (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008); thus, insecure or disturbed attachment – or at least how it is conceptualized within the ABCD model of attachment – does not provide an adequate model for explaining violence (Rich, 2006; Rutter, Kreppner, & Sonuga-Barke, 2009). This limitation partly explains why some authors (Fonagy, 2015; Music, 2017) point to Crittenden's (2015) more complex model as a fruitful framework for illuminating the roles attachment strategies and trauma play in the expression of violence.



### **3. Background and previous research**

#### **3.1 Measurement: The Adult Attachment Interview and the Rorschach**

This section provides a brief overview of the AAI and the Rorschach, some relevant findings, and outlines how these measures differ from self-report methodology. Their psychometrics and coding-methodology are addressed in the materials section (see also papers I, II, and III for detail).

Violent offender research is dominated by studies that have applied self-report methodology to sample information about psychopathology and personality functioning (Baumester et al., 2007). While introspective self-reporting provides important information about how people understand themselves and their surroundings, these methodologies are fundamentally limited (Meyer, 2017). Self-reported personality features are only modestly to moderately correlated with the reports from friends and close associates ( $r = .20$  to  $.45$ ; e.g., Achenbach, Krukowski, Dumenci, & Ivanova, 2005; Meyer, 2002) and minimally to modestly with official records of recalled experiences ( $r = .00$  to  $.20$ ; e.g., Hardt & Rutter, 2004; Henry, Moffitt, Caspi, Langley, & Silva, 1994). Thus, as summarized by Mihura (2012), there is often a discrepancy between what people say about themselves and how they behave.

The use of self-report in forensic research is also problematic given the obvious face validity issues of such methodologies (Gacono & Meloy, 1994). People in forensic settings are more inclined to finesse their responses and present themselves in a favorable manner while downplaying concerning self-aspects (Rogers et al., 1998). Following this, some authors have suggested that self-report measures are almost entirely unreliable within the criminal population (Hart & Hare, 1996). In my opinion though, self-report instruments can provide valuable information, but the assessment data should be scrutinized and compared with independent collateral information (Nørbech, Hartmann, & Kleiger, 2017). Nonetheless, there is a pressing need for studies that employ less transparent measurements and that target those areas of personality functioning that cannot be studied through self-report methodologies.

##### **3.1.1 The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)**

The AAI (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; George, Main, & Kaplan, 1984–1996; Main, Goldwin, & Hesse, 2003) encompasses both an interview and a coding method, developed to elicit and classify the examinee's attachment representations, unresolved trauma, and attachment strategy.

The AAI has demonstrated high inter-rater reliability and stability over time, as well as good predictive and discriminant validity in both clinical and nonclinical samples (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van IJzendoorn, 2009; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008).

AAI data is only modestly related to self-report measures of attachment (Jacobitz, Curran, & Moller, 2002). Thus, the AAI is held to tap into unconscious aspects of self, emotion, and relating (Hesse, 2008), whereas self-report measures of attachment only sample adults' *conscious appraisals* of themselves in attachment relationships. These assumed discrepancies have also been demonstrated in an fMRI study measuring brain activity during AAI vs a self-report instrument (Yaseen, Zhang, Muran, Winston, & Galynker, 2016). The AAI was associated with the activation of more subcortical brain structures while the self-report instrument correlated with Attentional/Frontal control areas with little involvement of subcortical structures. The authors inferred that the AAI tapped into more interoceptive, "core self-other templates," while the self-report instrument seemed to assess higher order cognitions involved in attachment (Yaseen et al., 2016).

Several different systems for coding the AAI have been developed. Existing AAI research on violent offenders is sparse and has small samples, and it has largely been conducted using the system developed by Main et al., (2003), which classifies adult AAI protocols according to the more basic ABCD patterns.<sup>16</sup> Consistent with the meta-analytic work of Ogilvie et al. (2014), the AAI protocols from these samples (Levinson & Fonagy, 2002; Van IJzendoorn et al., 1997) revealed a high prevalence of unresolved trauma and abuse, insecure attachment of both Types A, C, and D as well as poor mentalizing capabilities.

Crittenden's DMM-AAI (Crittenden & Landini, 2011) system, the one utilized here, is built on Main et al., but has been expanded to fit the expanded DMM patterns (see Baldoni et al., 2018 for a comparison of the two coding systems). While DMM-AAI research on different psychiatric diagnosis is growing (see Crittenden & Heller, 2017; Crittenden & Landini, 2011), published forensic studies using this method are limited to a few case-studies.

For instance, Haapasalo, Puupponen, and Crittenden (1999) reported on the case of a male perpetrator who had committed multiple rapes. His developmental history revealed exposure to severe maltreatment, early institutional placement and a clinical picture characterized by severe conduct problems, elevated tension and anxiety, and severe constriction

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<sup>16</sup> The AAI (Main & Goldwyn, 1985–1994) adult patterns are termed "dismissive", corresponding to Ainsworth's Type A; "entangled", corresponding to Type C; "free and autonomous", corresponding to Type B; and "unresolved-disoriented" and "cannot-classify" (U/D), corresponding to Type D. For simplicity the ABCD nomenclature is retained throughout the article.

of expressed emotion. The AAI analysis showed a mix of compulsive Type A patterns; *“compulsive caregiving of a weak parent, compulsive compliance to a strong and abusive parent, compulsive self-reliance and isolation in the absence of protective parents, and compulsive promiscuity when true intimacy was impossible and sexual behavior was substituted as a self-comforting mechanism”* (p. 104). The authors linked the sexual offences to the perpetrator’s history, as an enactment of the abuse he had suffered during childhood.

In sum, the AAI is regarded as the most comprehensive measure for mapping attachment representations in adulthood (Hesse, 2008). Yet while sampling significant information on implicit mental processes that cannot be captured via self-report, the AAI enquiry is fairly clear in what is being asked for. Thus, malevolent content may be excluded from the verbal narrative through defensive operations or conscious censorship. However, there are several more ambiguous measures of implicit processes that may circumvent the limitations of the AAI narrative methodology. The Rorschach is the far most recognized among these.

### **3.1.2 The Rorschach Inkblot Method**

The Rorschach (Rorschach, 1942; Weiner, 2003) is a standardized visual task that provides an in vivo sample of how people construe and perceive things (Searls, 2017). Coded Rorschach behaviors provide clues about personality dimensions that the individual may not be aware of or is unwilling to expose (Stricker & Gold, 1999), including external experiences i.e., (in) accuracy in perception of the environment and the social sphere, and internal experiences i.e., management of impulses and feelings, the quality of the examinee’s reasoning, the nature of their internalized relational model and identifications, characteristic ways of relating, and relational expectations and capacities (Bornstein, 2001; Killingmo, 1988; Meyer, 2017).

The Rorschach has been subjected to extensive criticism (e.g., Wood, Nezworski, Lilienfeld, & Garb, 2003), despite ample evidence showing that it has comparable validity to other personality assessment methods (Meyer et al., 2001; Mihura et al., 2019). The Rorschach is now in fact the best documented broadband assessment method available (Mihura et al., 2019). While the Rorschach is only modestly correlated with parallel self-report measures (e.g., Meyer, Riethmiller, Brooks, Benoit, & Handler, 2000; Mihura et al., 2013), it may be more predictive of actual behavior (Hartmann & Grønnerød, 2009). Valid Rorschach scores may, thus, be said to provide unique personality data that add incrementally to information obtained from self-reporting (Meyer, 2017). The Rorschach has been shown to be more robust against attempts to disguise responses than self-report methods (Ganellen, 2008) also in forensic settings (Nørbech, Fodstad, Kuisma, Berge, & Hartmann, 2016). This asset makes the

Rorschach particularly suited for collecting data on incarcerated offenders, as it avoids the typical face-value validity problems of self-report (Gacono & Meloy, 1994).

There are currently two empirically derived scoring systems available; the Comprehensive System (CS; Exner, 2003) and the more recently developed Rorschach Performance Assessment System (R-PAS; Meyer, Viglione, Mihura, Erard, & Erdberg, 2011), which utilizes those variables with the most solid empirical and clinical basis. There is also a substantial Rorschach research body on individuals with a history of violence, which is mainly attributed to the work of Gacono and Meloy (Gacono & Meloy, 1991, 1994, 2009). These authors have applied the CS-Rorschach to describe the psychodynamics of a wide range of offender groups including people with pedophile urges (Huprich, Gacono, Schneider, & Bridges, 2004), serial murderers (Gacono, Meloy, & Bridges, 2000), and individuals with antisocial and psychopathic personalities (Gacono & Meloy, 1994, 2009). They have also developed more refined indices for capturing the complex aggressive phenomenology associated with antisocial individuals: the Aggressive Content (AgC), Aggressive Potential (AgPot), Aggressive Past (AgPast), and Sado-Masochism (SM) variable, each of which is thought to map different aspects of aggression (Gacono, Gacono, Meloy, & Baity, 2008; see paper I and II for an outline of the aggressive indices and the abovementioned literature).

### **3.2 The role of personality and psychopathology in rage-type violence**

Hostile/affective homicidal acts are, broadly speaking, associated with nearly all the mental disorders listed in the ICD/DSM manuals (Abreu Minero et al., 2018; Serper & Sokol, 2017). A review of the disorders seen in persons that have committed rage-induced homicide (Cartwright, 2001) reveals a similar diagnostic picture, including psychosis, mood disorders, autism, brain damage, post-traumatic stress disorder, drug intoxication, and personality disorder. Yet, as previously mentioned, the psychopathology of the kind of offender examined here may not be accounted for by any psychiatric diagnosis (Meloy, 2010). While depressive symptoms are reported to be a common factor in the build-up to the murder in many such cases (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981), depression very rarely leads to violence. Thus, as Cartwright (2001) points out, the rage and subsequent murder cannot be understood without an examination of the offender's personality structure and his or her relationship to the victim.

While rage-offenders rarely manifest symptoms that align with a particular psychiatric diagnosis, some personality characteristics appear fairly consistent across the limited research findings on these offenders (see Cartwright, 2001, 2002 for reviews). Satten et al., (1960) reported on four men who had committed sudden, irrational murder and where the court-



assigned psychiatrist did not find evidence of any overt psychopathology. The overall assessment (interviews, Rorschach, and Thematic Apperception Test) revealed a brittle personality functioning characterized by severe disturbance in affect organization, reflected through a mix of strict emotional constriction and sudden lapses of dysregulated affect. Satten et al. (1960) suggested that the sudden murder committed by these men was triggered by “severe lapses in ego control which make possible the open expression of primitive violence, born out of previous, and now unconscious, traumatic experiences” (p. 48).

Similarly, Tanay (1969) differentiated between three categories of homicide based on an evaluation of 53 homicide perpetrators: *Dissociative, psychotic, ego-syntonic* (e.g., consciously acceptable murder). Offenders who had committed a murder in an altered state of consciousness (e.g., trance state, fugue state; dissociative murder) similar to the type of murder examined here, presented as cooperative and with a benevolent self-image, but like the subjects in Satten et al.’s research, they showed a pattern of severe emotional overregulation. Tanay attributed this finding to a harsh superego “intolerant of any overt expressions of aggression” (p. 1257) due to violent childhood upbringing. Tanay also noted that the small amounts of alcohol that the perpetrators had consumed prior to the murder may have contributed to the fatal outcome through loosening of the perpetrators’ inhibitions toward violence (p. 1254).

Cartwright’s (2000) examination of nine rage-type murders, using several instruments including the Rorschach, largely aligns with the abovementioned findings. Cartwright found no evidence of overt psychopathology. Yet based on their impoverished Rorschach protocols and their denial of aggressive ideation during the interviews, he suggested that these offenders did not process and experience anger on a regular basis, and that their encapsulation of aggression accounted for their conforming presentation and their absence of prior violent behavior. Moreover, beneath this surface of normality, they all harbored feelings of deep inadequacy and dependency. Comparatively, while Cartwright’s subjects appeared better functioning in terms of educational level, job history and seemed less impulsive than the men described by the studies above, they showed the same pattern of emotional overcontrol.

Indeed, in his review of relevant research, Cartwright (2001) highlighted control and over-control as key elements in the personality makeup of this group of offenders. Clarifying how control manifests itself in personality functioning, Cartwright infers that control refers to “the degree to which the individual controls affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects of engagement. Undercontrol, in this respect, would lead to emotional lability and impulsivity. Overcontrol, on the other hand, restricts engagement and inhibits expressiveness, giving an impression of stability (p. 15).” Cartwright points out that his outline of overcontrol in the

personality makeup of rage-type murderers bears similarities to the work of Megargee (1966) and his conceptualization of the “overcontrolled” offender.

Megargee (1966, 1970) formulated an offender typology based on the hypothesis that extremely aggressive individuals can be divided into two distinct personality types: *The overcontrolled* and the *undercontrolled* personalities. The overcontrolled offender has developed extremely rigid defenses against the experience and expression of anger, and aggressive impulses, yet might react with extreme aggression if the sum of provocation experienced exceeds the limits of their excessive defenses (Megargee, 1970, p. 70). This model builds on S. Freud’s (1961) notion of “strangled affect” in which the overcontrol or suppression of anger is maintained until the total amount of experienced provocation strains or exceeds the breaking point of the defenses, at which point the individual acts out in an extremely aggressive manner. In the instance of murder, a single or rare aggressive outburst may culminate in the death of the victim. In contrast to overcontrolled individuals, Megargee (1966, 1970) suggested that undercontrolled offenders typically have a long history of violent and assaultive behavior due to their limited capacity to control their aggressive impulses.

While Megargee’s offender model has not been subjected to the proper empirical testing it deserves, its main premises have been supported in larger sample studies utilizing the MMPI (see Chambers, 2010 for a review). Of some relevance to this study is Blackburn’s (1971, 1986) replication and extension of Megargee’s typology. Like Megargee, Blackburn found that overcontrolled offenders were usually older, had higher mean IQ, and had committed less crime but with more severe violence than the undercontrolled offenders. Their personality profile was characterized by excessive emotional control and repression of conflicts, and they displayed less impulsivity and hostility than under-controlled offenders. More to the point, based on MMPI and other personality data, Blackburn (1986) proposed two types of overcontrolled offenders: A *conforming* type with a ‘normal’ personality profile and a more psychopathologically disturbed *inhibited* type.

The *conforming* offenders produced a profile of affable people without significant anxiety. Though displaying some compulsive and dependent traits, and symptoms of depression and interpersonal difficulties, they rarely evinced signs of hostility or antisocial traits. Anger was characteristically denied and dealt with by redirection of angry material onto more pleasant stimuli. The personality profile produced by these offenders was, in other words, very similar to the personalities described earlier by Cartwright. The *inhibited* offenders on the other hand, were introverted, reported significant depression and moderate anxiety, and were more often seriously mentally disturbed. Most importantly, they often engaged in excessive aggressive

rumination but suppressed the expression of anger (Blackburn, 1986). This distinction has since been supported by other studies (e.g., Davey, Day, & Howells, 2005).

Reviewing Megargee's work, there is little doubt that the identification of an overcontrolled offender subgroup and his understanding of the relationship between violence, personality, and the inhibition of anger and rage, may have important treatment and risk management implications, and thus merits further study. That said, the model has been criticized for not specifying "whether it is angry arousal, its expression or lack of aggressive habits which are problematic in overcontrolled individuals" (Blackburn, 1993, p. 239). Although Blackburn's subdivision of overcontrol lends some clarity to this problem, the emotional overcontrol characterizing these offenders has been noted in various offender samples and non-offenders (Davey et al., 2005; Dutton, 2007; Eckhardt, Samper, & Murphy, 2008; Robertson, Daffern, & Bucks, 2015). Thus, research with greater specificity is required to establish the discriminative validity of this offender subset.

Rage-type murder has so far been linked to a personality constellation of rigid emotional overcontrol of aggression, a benign presentation, and poor anger tolerance. These disturbances in emotional regulation, self-image and relationships may be conceptualized within a personality disorder (PD) framework. Personality disorder is characterized by deviant emotion regulation, interpretation, thinking and behavior, and is associated with psychopathology and risk of violence (Howard, 2015; Stone, 2006). Research linking rage-murder to specific PDs is scarce. While reports of rage-murderers with antisocial traits and a history of violence exist (e.g., Satten et al., 1960), narcissistic, dependent, and borderline traits are most commonly reported. Yet, as pointed out by Cartwright (2000), many of these men do not to meet the diagnostic threshold for a PD. Indeed, in his summary of the field Meloy (1992) states that "the unconscious denial of affect and the use of pre-oedipal defenses (e.g., splitting, projection, projective identification) in a rigid and controlled personality disorder with dependent and narcissistic features are pathognomonic of catathymia" (p. 52).

Cartwright's (2000, 2002) outline of the personality of such offenders merits further elaboration, as it likely represents the most comprehensive account to date. As touched on above, he did not find clear evidence of an ICD/DSM PD diagnosis. Nevertheless, based on Kernberg's (1992) differentiation between neurotic, borderline and psychotic levels of personality functioning, and his findings that these offenders predominantly warded off painful experiences through "borderline level defensive maneuvers" such as idealization, splitting and projective identification, Cartwright inferred that their personality makeup could be described as an overcontrolled borderline personality organization. This proposal is similar to Meloy's (1992)

account and is also anchored in Gallwey's (1985) notion that there exist two different kinds of borderline personality organizations linked to violent acts. One is instable, impulsive, and susceptible to frequent bouts of violence. In the other, the psychopathology is more concealed, but these individuals are vulnerable to violence that is potentially "catastrophically violent or homicidal" (p.142), although occurring much less frequently.

Building on Gallwey's work, Cartwright (2002) proposes that the overcontrolled personality makeup in the rage-murderer is further characterized by a rigid horizontal split between constellations of idealized self and other representations (e.g., stoic self-image) and internalized malevolent representations (bad self-other images). These upper layer representations work together with a set of defensive operations to form a protective shield, a "narcissistic exoskeleton" (p. 113–131) that envelops their underlying bad representations, protecting them from bad internal experiences, and which subsequently enables such offenders to present an ordinary surface appearance. Stated differently, the bad self-images remain split off and dormant in the personality concealed behind the idealized self (Cartwright, 2002). "Bad experience simply accumulates and remains unmodified and unarticulated" (Cartwright, 2002, p.12). Acknowledging the bad experience could alter the idealized self, so the narcissistic individual does not deal with the experience, they merely remove it. This conceptualization is in many ways reminiscent of Crittenden's (2015) description of the compulsive Type A patterns.

In sum, the most common psychopathology in rage-murderers is precipitating depressive symptoms and excessively constricted affect in conjunction with submissive, dependent and narcissistic traits (Cartwright, 2001; Meloy, 1992; Revitz and Schlesinger, 1981), which in many cases falls below the threshold for a DSM/ICD PD diagnosis. The violent act itself is so far best understood as a breakdown of an all-good self-defensive structure usually precipitated by conflict (with a partner, friends, or associates) that might have begun long before the murderous event (Cartwright, 2002). That said, the reader should keep in mind that our current knowledge and the awareness among clinicians and researcher about this form of homicide is low (Meloy, 2010). Research endeavors with larger samples are desirable and the likelihood of unidentified subgroups within this offender subset is high. The latter is attested to by Blackburn's (1986) study.

### **3.3 The role of personality and psychopathology in instrumental violence**

Instrumental/predatory acts of violence are not restricted to any specific type of mental disorder (Serper & Sokol, 2017). To illustrate, among prisoners incarcerated for armed robbery you will find many patients diagnosed with substance abuse. Most of these would not be able to rob

someone at gunpoint unless they were experiencing serious withdrawal symptoms or had altered their state and natural inhibitions through the intake of drugs. Intoxication and withdrawal symptoms aside, the callous mentality undergirding this form of violence is most closely associated with antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) and its more severe counterpart psychopathy (Meloy, 2012; Reidy & Kearns, 2017).

ASPD and psychopathy are often used synonymously. Yet while the two constructs overlap, ASPD as it is listed in the DSM-5 refers predominately to a pattern of antisocial and deviant behaviors, while psychopathy is primarily perceived as a character-based disorder (Ogloff, 2006; Patrick, 2006). To put this relationship into further perspective, a relatively recent meta-analysis shows that only a small proportion of those diagnosed with ASPD actually engage in violence (Yu et al., 2012) and that even within this group there may be great variability in levels of violence, ranging from minor incidents to repeated patterns of aggression (De Brito & Hodgins, 2009; Nathan, Rollinson, Harvey, & Hill, 2003). Among the latter group, many would likely be classified as psychopaths (Hodgins, 2007).

### ***What is psychopathy?***

Psychopathy may be conceptualized as a deviant process or state, or as a specific constellation of characterological traits (Meloy, 1988). Psychopathic states are characterized by ruthless self-righteousness and callous disregard for the wellbeing of others (Meloy, 1988). Psychopathy as a disorder of personality meanwhile refers to a stable affective-interpersonal pattern typified by a malignant and narcissistic self-image, lack of guilt and remorse, and shallow and short-lived emotional experiences (Cook & Michie, 2001; Hare & Neumann, 2008). While not included as a distinct diagnosis, psychopathy may, from a DSM-5 perspective, be perceived as a disorder comprised of selected behavioral and affective features of all Cluster B syndromes – Antisocial, Narcissistic, Histrionic, and Borderline Personality Disorders (Blackburn, 2009; Gacono, Nieberding, Owen, Rubel, & Bodholdt, 2001).

Psychopathy varies along a continuum from mild, moderate, to very severe (Hare & Neumann, 2008; Meloy, 1988). To contextualize, in some cases psychopathy may be confined to specific relationships, say a spouse or certain groups or settings. In its most severe form, psychopathic processes may be said to dominate the person's entire personality (Rosenfeld, 1987), a condition in which self is viewed as all-powerful and others are perceived as objects to be exploited, dominated or even preyed upon (Meloy, 1988).

The recognized gold standard for measuring psychopathy is the Psychopathy Checklist–Revised (PCL–R; Hare, 2003). Factor-analytic work on the PCL-R reveals two main facets:

emotional detachment and antisocial behavior (Hare, 2003). The emotional detachment facet includes interpersonal items, such as superficial charm, grandiosity, lying and manipulateness, affective shallowness, and the absence of remorse or empathy. Offenders with elevated PCL-R profiles are more reckless, often engage in a greater variety of criminal behaviors, are more violent, recidivate at higher rates and are more treatment-resistant than other offenders (Hare & Neumann, 2008; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1996).

Psychopathy reflects at its core an inability to identify with others (Blair, 2008). This failure to recognize others as real is thought to explain why such individuals may act on dissocial and violent impulses without experiencing the fear, guilt, and remorse that normally inhibits such behavior (Hart & Hare, 1996). The empathic void seen in psychopathy seems not caused by an inability to understand other people's state of mind in general (Dolan & Fullam, 2004), but rather to reflect a disinterest in or inability to experience other people (Blair, 2008), and their own feeling states (Wastell & Booth, 2003; Levinson & Fonagy, 2002) with the result that others are treated as objects useful for fulfilling the psychopath's own goals and desires. Shirtcliff et al. (2009) adds that it's not only a lack of empathy per se that's specific to psychopathy, but an active disregard of the perspectives of others, which also underlines the aggressive and sadistic dimension of this disorder (Holt, Meloy, & Strack, 1999).

Of particular relevance to the mindset of the criminal debt collector is the burgeoning research indicating that psychopathic individuals discern fear and distress on the faces of others more accurately (Book, Quinsey, & Langford, 2007; Wheeler, Book, & Costello, 2009), and that they are better than others at detecting signs of vulnerability based on people's body language (Woodworth & Waschbusch, 2007). Considering this enhanced interpersonal awareness, what Meloy (2012) calls a "predatory acuity", coupled with their emotional detachment, makes psychopathic individuals particularly suited for interpersonal exploitation and meticulous use of violence for material gain. Meloy (2012) takes this relationship a step further, asserting that instrumental violence reflects the very nature of the psychopathic process; that is, the urge to dominate one's fellow human and identification with the predator as opposed to the victim. His contention is supported by findings that psychopathic individuals are more likely to have committed instrumental rather than affective homicides (Cornell et al., 1996; Porter & Woodworth, 2006; Woodworth & Porter, 2002).

Despite controversies regarding its scientific status (Edens, 2006), psychopathy is held to be one of the most important constructs within the field of forensic psychology, particularly because it identifies the group at greatest risk of the most frequent and severe acts of violence, which makes these individuals very costly for society (Patrick, 2006; Reidy & Kearns, 2017).

Yet, even if psychopathy is helpful for distinguishing a more homogenous and violence-prone group than other offender groups (Hodgins, 2007), there is growing consensus that PCL-R identified psychopaths are more diverse than first thought (see Blackburn, 2009, for a discussion). Metanalysis of the PCL-R's ability to predict violence has produced relatively conservative estimates (Singh, Grann, & Fazel, 2011; Yang, Wong, & Coid, 2010), and studies show substantial differences in the levels of violence even among individuals placed at the high end of the PCL-R (Camp, Skeem, Barchard, Lilienfeld, & Poythress, 2013; Mokros et al., 2015). Put differently, PCL-R defined psychopathy may represent a group of disorders that vary in aetiology, motivation, and disposition toward violence (Blackburn, 2009; Camp et al., 2013; Mokros et al., 2015).

Among other critiques, Juni (2014) argues that the Hare PCL-R psychopathy paradigm is unsound given its clustering of poorly conceptually-related deviant behaviors and traits into a sum score, which yields little information about the motivational forces of the disorder. In line with other psychodynamic investigators (e.g., Kernberg, 1992; Meloy, 1988), Juni (2010, 2014) proposes instead that the formulation of psychopathy as a character-based disorder should focus on the underlying motivation of behavior, and that, if so, psychopathy may be distilled into two main types; *aggression-driven* and *sadistic psychopathy*. According to Juni (2014), *aggression-driven psychopaths* express their underlying aggression by seeking out conflict and positions which allow them to assert themselves over others. Though exhibiting a characteristic lack of guilt for their aggressive acts, values and morality may be present in other areas (e.g., financial improprieties, sexual mores, and communal responsibilities). *Sadistic psychopathy*, by contrast, involves the personality pattern of a psychopath who simply enjoys committing aggressive acts (p. 82).

While empirically unexplored, Juni's depiction of aggression-driven psychopathy is largely consistent with Meloy's (1988) theory, and Gacono and Meloy's (1994, 2009) Rorschach findings from a sample of severely psychopathic males. Compared to individuals with ASPD, the psychopathic records were characterized by less anxiety and internal distress, hostile and violent object relations, little or no capacity for benign attachments, chronic anger, poor emotional modulation, borderline reality testing, pathological self-focus, and a strong identification with the aggressor. Aside from Hartmann et al's, (2006) Rorschach-psychopathy findings, which were largely on a par with Gacono and Meloy's sample, very few well-designed studies have been conducted to replicate these results, and the findings have not passed without critique (Wood et al., 2010).

The only relevant study that I have been able to identify is a study by Franks, Sreenivasan, Spray, and Kirkish (2009) using the Rorschach to describe 45 incarcerated psychopathic violent offenders ( $PCL-R \geq 30$ ; Hare, 2003). They found, like Gacono and Meloy, that their participants produced records evincing emotional detachment and little interest in others, poor affect modulation, and reduced reality testing. Yet the most noticeable feature of their study was the participants' remarkably high Lambda (L 1.45), indicating a concrete, emotionless manner of processing information. Unlike Gacono and Meloy and Hartmann et al. (2006), Franks and colleagues (2009) found no evidence of chronic anger or aggressive identification/aggressive narcissism in their sample, perhaps because they did not utilize the extended aggression markers developed by Gacono and Meloy to map aggression. Nonetheless, the empirical literature in this area is limited. More research is needed to validate the Gacono and Meloy (1994) Rorschach-psychopathy findings and to determine whether underlying aggression is indeed a key driver in psychopathy.

### ***Developmental antecedents***

Current etiological models of psychopathy suggest that endowed physiological anomalies in the limbic system and subsequent lowered emotional responsivity to other distress signals predispose toward psychopathy and instrumental modes of violence (Blair, 2008; Viding & McCrory, 2012). Recently however, the focus of forensic researchers has started to shift from brain abnormalities and genetic influences to how early socio-environmental factors may impact on adult personality development in psychopathic individuals (Ireland et al., 2020). More specifically, there is growing interest in how early detrimental attachment experiences may contribute to the development of psychopathy (Daversa, 2010; Meloy, 2002; Saltaris, 2002).

The assumption that psychopathy has roots in attachment is not new (Bowlby, 1944). Based on his study of a sample of delinquents and their history, Bowlby (1944) proposed that the emotional detachment observed in these youngsters was caused by an interplay between early prolonged parental separation and some biogenetic vulnerability. While this hypothesis linking early separation to detachment and psychopathy has received some support (e.g., Gao et al., 2010), research applying attachment-related measurements with regards to psychopathy and violence remains rare. The studies investigating this relationship have also been conducted with poorly-related methodologies which prevents comparisons across studies, and hence, more assertive conclusions regarding the role of attachment in psychopathy.



Two recent literature reviews targeting this relationship (Papagathonikou, 2020; van der Zouwen et al., 2018) concludes that insecure attachment is a marker of psychopathy, but that findings are mixed between disorganized-D and the dismissing Type A category, depending on the measure used. The self-report studies (e.g., Christian et al., 2017; Conradi et al., 2016; Craig et al., 2013; Flight & Forth, 2007; Kosson, Cyterski, Steuerwald, Neumann, & Walker-Matthews, 2002) show an association between psychopathy and Type A patterns. This finding is consistent with Meloy's (2002) notion that the emotional deactivation associated with Type A may dispose such individuals to the use of violence in a careless and instrumental fashion. The two existing AAI reports on psychopathic offenders (Frodi, Dernevik, Sepa, Philipson, and Bragesjo, 2001; Schimmenti et al., 2014) found a combination of severe unresolved trauma and a mix of Type A and D Patterns. Unfortunately, these AAI samples were too small to detect true statistical relationships between psychopathy and attachment.

A further limitation of this empirical literature concerns the heterogeneity within the Type A and D categories. They lack specificity, identifying groups containing highly diverse types of psychopathologies as well as lacking any psychopathology at all (Rutter, Kreppner, & Sonuga-Barke, 2009; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008). More to the point, and as to alluded to earlier, these broad attachment categories fail to distinguish between different types of offenders (Rich, 2006). One potentially fruitful avenue proposed by Meloy (2002) suggests that psychopathy could be located at the extreme end of a hypothetical dismissive-attachment continuum. This suggestion is more consistent with Crittenden's (2015) dimensional approach, a notion which will be further explored in this thesis. I will now consider what is currently known about the personality of the criminal debt collector and his closely related counterpart, the hitman.

### **3.3.1 Personality research relevant to the criminal debt collector**

As noted earlier, there appears to be only one study (Ostrosky et al., 2012) that reports specifically on the personality of the criminal debt collector. This study will be explored in some detail. The authors examined the neuropsychological profiles and the PCL-R psychopathy scores of members of Mexican drug organizations. The sample consisted of 82 prison inmates from different hierarchical levels in terms of their positions and functions in their criminal organizations: Kingpins (boss), money launderers, protectors (corrupt government agents), enforcers (debt collectors), and producers (making and selling drugs). Unsurprisingly, the kingpins and the enforcers were found to have the highest mean PCL-R scores. The enforcers also performed lower, but within normal range, on measures of executive functioning.

Contextualizing the Ostrosky et al. (2012) findings, it might be worth noting that the violence in Mexico between competing drug cartels has reached horrific proportions. It is a war-like situation characterized by constant feuds for control over geographical areas where the adversaries engage in continuous killings, mutilations and decapitations of rival members and innocent victims as retaliation, and/or to induce fear and compliance among locals. This violence is predominantly carried out by enforcers, young males (19-25 years), on orders from Kingpins. Paradoxically, these young men are also the most likely victims of the violence to which they contribute. The average working life of a Mexican sicario is no more than three years (Ostrosky & Ardila, 2017). Thus a picture of these young men that may be drawn from the assessment data and their life circumstances is one of a group of emotionally-blunted individuals who execute orders of murder and torture in intimidating fashion without remorse or much consideration for the horror they are part of. They are likely to live in the present and act out primitive impulses on a whim because there might be no tomorrow.

Moving to the more narrowly defined criminal figure – the hitman – Schlesinger (2001) points out that this type of criminal is rarely seen by mental health professionals. They generally shun the idea of participating in research, which is why we have very limited knowledge of their psychological status. Meanwhile, in the absence of group data, there are some case descriptions worth considering. For instance, Revitch and Schlesinger (1981), Schlesinger (2001), and Schlesinger & Miller, (2003) provide illustrative examples of the amateur, the semi-professional, and the professional hitman. According to these authors, amateur hitmen exhibit the most overt psychopathology (alcohol abuse, borderline personality with antisocial traits, no severe mental illness) and may commit murder in a context of personal and financial crisis. Semi-professional hitmen show less overt personality disturbance than amateurs, often have a history of more severe violence, and display ASPD in a more severe form than amateurs. Like the semiprofessional, the professional hitman displays little overt pathology and impulsivity, and has severe ASPD and excellent planning ability. The case of C. C. presented by Schlesinger and Miller (2003) may serve as an example.

C. C. was described by these authors as an independent professional hitman who had killed more than 100 people while leading a stable middle-class life with a wife and kids who were kept separate from his crimes. He was diagnosed with ASPD and presented with hyper-vigilant, orderly, and controlled personality traits. His IQ was within normal range, but he exhibited excellent practical reasoning and social judgement. The authors note that the horrors this man had engaged in could not be accounted for by his ASPD, given that most antisocials never commit murder. It was inferred that C. C.'s decision to pursue a career as a contract killer

was influenced by subcultural values and facilitated by an extraordinary ability to rationalize his actions and encapsulate emotions so that his feelings did not interfere with his murders. *“I don’t think about these murders. It doesn’t bother me. Nothing haunts me. If I think about, it would hurt me, so I don’t think about it”* (Schlesinger & Miller, 2003, p. 151). Note also that C. C. began his career as a criminal debt collector before getting comfortable with killing, and that he got a *“rush out of it, a good feeling of being in control”* (p. 149).

Summing up this section, while instrumental violence may be influenced by environmental factors and intoxication, the callous, predator/prey mindset characterizing this violent behavioral mode is most closely associated with antisocial and/or psychopathic personalities (Cornell et al., 1996; Porter & Woodworth, 2006). The relationship to ASPD and psychopathy in particular is expected to be significantly stronger in groups with a pattern of very severe acts of instrumental violence (Hodgins, 2007; Meloy, 2012). This notion is also consistent with the elevated ASPD/psychopathy markers found among the Mexican sicarios (Ostrosky et al., 2012) and the semi/professional hitman (Schlesinger, 2001). Whether these findings are directly transferable to the Norwegian enforcer will be discussed later. However, a certain level of psychopathy is to be expected, especially among individuals who engage in this type of activity on a regular basis.

Finally, Schlesinger and Miller’s (2003) professional hitman case illustrates the limitations of our diagnostic categories in explaining severe violence and raises some intriguing questions. How can we understand that this man, who apparently got thrills out of regularly carrying out murder and torture, but was only diagnosed with ASPD and not classified as a psychopath? While no PCL-R assessment was reported, C. C.’s early deviancy, varied criminal engagement, and lack of empathy and remorse for his numerous victims would check off on a PCL-R evaluation. Yet the depiction of him as a loving husband/father suggests that his psychopathic behavioral mode was restricted to his professional life and did not interfere with his personal relationships. The authors inferred that C. C.’s dual personality functioning was maintained through defensive operations such as rationalization and an extraordinary ability to compartmentalize emotion. Approaching this functioning from an attachment perspective (Crittenden, 2015), one could speculate as to whether these shifts in state could be explained in terms of unintegrated oscillating Type A and menacing Type C strategies. As will be explored in the following section, a similar type of functioning would be assumed to apply to some individuals who engage in criminal debt collection.

### 3.4 The present investigation

This thesis consists of two separate investigations with similar objectives, one (comprising two papers) exploring the criminal debt collector, the other (comprising one paper) looking at rage-murder. The aim in both is to explore how a delineation of their respective personality makeup may shed light on the cognitive-emotional representations, processes and defenses that motivate and facilitate their violent actions. To be more specific:

*The investigation of the criminal debt collector* involves two parts; a categorization of such individuals and an exploration (paper I and II) of their personality makeup focusing on aspects related to their mindset, motivation, identity formation, level of psychopathy, self-protective strategies, and developmental history. The study consists of a mixed-methods design including a single case analysis and a between groups comparison.

*In paper one*, aspects related to personality makeup and developmental history are examined using single-case research methodology in which the participant was used as his own control to assess conditions under which his performance varies across tests (AAI, Rorschach, PCL-R), content, and relational context (Bram & Peebles, 2014).

*In paper two*, we wanted to examine whether the findings from this single case study could be applied to a larger sample of criminal debt collectors. In order to explore whether these individuals may be said to represent a distinct subgroup within the violent offender population, we compared them to a group of offenders who had committed homicide without a previous history of significant violence and a violent offender group that had committed less serious violent crimes. We hypothesized that the debt-collectors would be more psychopathic (PCL-R) and that they would produce Rorschach records showing evidence of greater exposure to trauma, more aggressive urges, and a preoccupation with aggressive identifications and sadistic control.

*The exploration of rage murder* employs single-case research methodology in which the participant was used as his own control to assess conditions under which his performance varies across tests (AAI, Rorschach), content, and relational context (Bram & Peebles, 2014). The findings were used together with psychotherapy data to formulate an understanding of the participant's personality dynamics and of the murder he had committed. The case findings are then compared with previous research findings in this area.

Subordinately, the dissertation also addresses the understanding of psychopathy from an attachment perspective, and compares the Rorschach and AAI from a methodological perspective. To my knowledge, this is the first study that utilizes both measures.

## 4. Materials

### 4.1 Participants and procedure

The sample in this investigation (paper I, II, III) consisted of seventy-two males (18 to 53 years;  $M = 31.21$ ,  $SD = 7.59$ ) serving a prison sentence for violence. All were recruited from two high-security prisons in Norway over a period of five years (2006-2011). All participants were identified with the help of correctional officers and psychiatric teams in the two prisons and asked whether they were willing to participate. Any inmates with psychotic symptoms, mental retardation, taking psychoactive medications, or unable to read or speak Norwegian were excluded from the study.

The participant in paper I was a 36-year-old ethnic Norwegian inmate who had taken part in an earlier study (Hartmann et al., 2006). He had worked as a criminal debt collector for several criminal organizations. I got in contact with him via his prison psychologist who had known him from his many prison stays. I conducted the assessments (see paper I for details).

Participants in paper II ( $N = 71$ ) consisted of: (1) inmates sentenced for, or who reported having taken part in, criminal debt collection on more than three occasions ( $N = 27$ ); 2) inmates sentenced for a single murder or attempted homicide without a history of debt collection ( $N = 23$ ); 3) inmates sentenced for crimes involving less severe violence and with no history of homicide or debt collection (low violence offenders,  $N = 21$ ). Participants had various ethnic origins (see paper II for more details).

The assessments were conducted over three to four sessions each and took place in the prisons. First, general demographic information was gathered, then the Rorschach and the AAI undertaken, before an interview covering areas of the individual's life including development, social relationships, and criminal and violent behavior, designed to allow rating using the PCL-R and an assessment of the individual's violence. The tests and interviews were administered by the first author and three clinical psychologists who had all received extensive training in administering the PCL-R and the Rorschach. The second author was responsible for the individual training of examiners in administering the Rorschach.

The recruitment and assessment of the criminal debt collectors was challenging in many respects. The majority were not sentenced for crimes associated with criminal debt collection (e.g., extortion, threats, kidnapping, etc.) and were identified by prison wardens who had prior knowledge about them, or by psychologists working in the prison. Twenty-nine identified debt collectors were asked if they were willing to participate in the study. Two declined when they were informed that the assessment also included psychological testing. Some of the debt collectors were challenging to deal with. They could be intimidating during the assessment, e.g., prolonged gaze, relishing in tales about their violent acts, their ability to inflict pain, and their powerful position within the criminal fraternity. We often had to stop for longer breaks during testing and as a result, in order to obtain all the data, we often spent considerably more time with these participants than the others.

The participant in paper III was a Caucasian male in his mid-forties, serving a sentence for homicide. He was referred to the prison psychiatric service where I worked as a researcher and clinician for voluntary treatment. I informed him about the ongoing research project (paper II) and he agreed to participate. The assessments were administered by me but scored by coders with no awareness of the clinical, diagnostic, or forensic information.

## **4.2 Instruments**

*The Rorschach Inkblot method* (Rorschach, 1942; Weiner, 2003) consists of 10 cards varying in composition and emphasis, and a task (“what could the blot be or look like”) that sets in motion a range of perceptual-cognitive-emotional processes in the examinee. Rorschach coding is based on several different aspects of the examinee’s behavior: (1) The visual attributions to the stimuli; (2) verbal and nonverbal communications about them; (3) interactive behaviors with examiner, with the inkblots themselves, and to some extent with the external assessment setting (Meyer, 2017). For our analysis we chose variables that have sound empirical evidence for their interpretation (Meyer et al., 2011; Mihura et al., 2013), and theoretically and empirically have been mapped onto psychological processes and dispositions linked to violence and violent offenders (Franks et al., 2009; Gacono & Meloy, 1994, 2009; Hartmann et al., 2006; see papers I and II for a more detailed description).

The protocols used in paper I and III were coded using the R-PAS (Meyer et al., 2011), whereas the CS (Exner, 2003) was utilized in paper II. While there is considerable overlap between the two systems, R-PAS provides percentiles and standard scores (SS) based on normative reference data for all summary scores and replaces all ratio scores with proportion scores. Thus, Lambda is calculated as Form Percent (F%) and FC:CF + C is calculated as the

Color Dominance Proportion ( $CF + C/SumC$ ).  $Hd + (Hd):H + (H)$  is replaced by Non-Pure Human Proportion ( $NPH/SumH$ ). Form Quality is coded as  $FQo\%$ ,  $FQu\%$ , and  $FQ-\%$  instead of  $X+\%$ ,  $Xu\%$ , and  $X-\%$ . Coding for all papers were supplemented by an analysis of aggressive contents (Gacono, Gacono, Meloy, & Baity, 2008).

The R-PAS protocols in papers I and III were consensus scored by the Norwegian R-PAS group. All protocols in paper II were jointly scored by me and the third author (Ellen Hartmann). A total of 21 records (seven randomly drawn from each subgroup) were co-scored blindly by the second author (Cato Grønnerød). Interscorer reliability (ICC[2, 1]) for the included variables ranged from .83 to 1.00 with an average of .94. (see paper II for further details).

*The Adult Attachment Interview* (AAI; George et al., 1984–1996) comprises a standardized interview made up of queries about the examinee’s relationship to attachment figures, potential experiences of separation, abuse, neglect, and loss designed to elicit the individual’s self-protective strategy. The interview is taped or video-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Coding and interpretation are based on the coherence and the psycholinguistic qualities of the individual’s discourse, focusing on the structure and syntax of language. Particular attention is paid to the representation of attachment relationships within different *memory systems*. By probing the same classes of experience through different memory systems, the AAI reveals the integration or lack of integration of different forms of representation. Discrepant representations (inconsistencies between information contained in the memory system) are suggestive of one of the insecure patterns. Thus, the form of the narrative has precedence over its content (Gullestad, 2003; Hesse, 2008).

The AAIs for this thesis were classified using the DMM-AAI coding system (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Although both the Main et al. (2002) and the DMM-AAI coding systems provide a basis for classifying individuals according to the secure–insecure patterns, the DMM–AAI does not include a “cannot classify” disorganized category. Instead, complex clinical and forensic AAIs are expected to fit the more complex DMM patterns and A/C combinations, thus providing greater differentiation in attachment both between clinical and nonclinical samples and within clinical samples (Crittenden & Newman, 2010; Ringer & Crittenden, 2007).<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>17</sup> The DMM-AAI coding system includes both explicit and implicit memory types. For instance, semantic and episodic memory (explicit) involves generalized statements in verbal form, and event-specific integrations about an event that occurred. Procedural and imaged memory, by contrast, involves implicit knowledge encoded as patterns of behavior, habits, skills and so forth, reflected in the AAI through dysfluencies of speech, expressed affect, the speaker’s relationship with the interviewer (e.g., cooperative, compliant, confrontational), or sensory images that represent affect and includes memories of sounds, smells, visual images and bodily states (see Crittenden & Landini, 2011 for a thorough presentation including psychometrics).

manual describes, in addition, several possible conditions that could render the individual's strategy ineffective. These are termed *modifiers* (for an overview of strategies and modifiers, see Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The AAI in paper I was consensus coded by international AAI coders. The AAI in paper III was coded by two experts who reached the same classification independently. All coders were blind to other personality data.

*The Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* (PCL-R; Hare, 2003) comprises a 20-item list of traits and deviant behaviors. PCL-R assessment involves an interview and file review to obtain information used to rate the 20 psychopathy-related items as 0, 1, or 2, reflecting the degree to which each trait characterizes the individual. The PCL-R in paper I was scored jointly by me and an experienced forensic psychiatrist who had extensive knowledge about the participant. The PCL-R ratings in paper II were conducted by me and the other assessors (when this was not me). Rating was based on participants' criminal file, court documents, their self-reported history of violence, and our impression of them during interview. To assess the inter-rater reliability of PCL-R total scores, an experienced forensic psychologist independently reviewed the information obtained for 20 inmates. The ICC (2,1) was .98.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

The use of imprisoned people as research subjects is a delicate matter. Prisoners are considered a vulnerable subject group with limited capacity for informed consent, due to imprisonment undermining liberty and autonomy and the prison environment being considered "inherently coercive" and interfering with the consent process by undermining voluntariness (Charles, Rid, Davies, & Draper, 2016). History indeed abounds with shameful examples of horrific exploitation of prisoners in the name of science. While regulatory ethical standards for research on prisoners is forthcoming (Appelbaum, Trestman, & Metzner, 2015), the literature in this area is still limited (Ward & Willis, 2010).

This study was approved by the Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics in southern Norway and by the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service (eastern region). All participants were supplied with written information about the study and then gave their written consent to participate. All procedures were in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration. However, there are several ethical aspects of this study that merit further elaboration. I have chosen to focus on three: Informed consent, the potential negative impact of the assessment, and the use of patients as research participants.

*Informed consent.* Prisoners are, as mentioned, housed in a coercive setting deprived of autonomy and personal freedom. This context may impose powerful pressure on inmates to



participate in research projects that the prison finds valuable, such as my own. About 70% of the participants in this study were recruited via prison personnel. A few of the prisoners did indeed express that they had been told by personnel that it would be good for them to participate in this research project, as it would provide them with an opportunity to discuss their lives and their violent acts with a professional. Although I agree with the prison officers, especially in hindsight, some inmates most likely felt pressured to take part, especially those who were serving sentences at a unit where active participation in the unit's activities was required. Thus, to assure that participation was entirely voluntary, we often spent about an hour with each of the potential participants, informing them thoroughly about the purpose of the project (orally and in writing), stressing that the material was strictly confidential, that they could say no and withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences, and that the collected research material would be de-identified. My impression is that the inmates understood the importance of developing further knowledge through research and that they – almost without exception – agreed with this aim and found it meaningful to contribute to it.

As research subjects are in prison, participation is often too good an offer to be refused (Pont, 2008). Thus, to account for this possible hazard to informed consent, participants were not offered monetary compensation or any other incentives for participation besides personalized feedback on the results from the assessments. Many of the participants wanted and were given feedback. My impression is that most, if not all, had never experienced this type of feedback before and seemed to value it. I would also like to stress that we strived to show deep respect to the prisoners and to have a curiosity about them as humans.

*Dual roles.* I acted both as researcher and as the treating psychologist for the participant in paper III. Although the participant was well informed about the study and showed a curiosity toward participation, the difficulty in this type of situation is that allegiances formed in a therapeutic relationship may exert subtle pressures on offenders to agree to participate in research projects without appropriate consultation and reflection (Munthe, Radovic, & Anckarsater, 2010). I was under the impression that the patient and I had formed a therapeutic relationship and that he found the therapy useful – thus, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that his decision to participate was not influenced by a desire to please and/or do me a favor. According to Ward and Willis (2010), these types of complex ethical dilemmas may not be fully resolved, and it is often a question of engaging in an ethical balancing act. They further suggest that researchers faced with such dilemmas should consider whether the solution to include the participant may be “generalized to other people in similar settings” and to “treat the offender involved as someone of equal moral status” (p. 402).

No settings – perhaps other than forensic-psychiatric hospitals that house patients involuntarily sentenced to psychiatric treatment – are directly comparable to a prison. Prisoners in Norway have the same rights to health care as people outside. I worked as a clinical psychologist for a university hospital outpatient clinic situated within the prison to provide prisoners with psychiatric services. Although the psychiatric evaluation and the treatment were carried out in the prison, prisoner-patients were generally treated as patients referred for treatment outside the prison. Treatment was strictly voluntary. Prisoner-patients were referred to us anonymously, like regular patients, via the prison’s medical doctor without interference from the prison. My clinical services as a psychologist were also regulated through the same health care laws and principles as any other outpatient clinic. Simply put, the treatment setting in the prison was in many ways like the regular treatment settings outside. I believe our patients perceived us as independent of the prison. Many stated that their meetings with us felt like a break from the realities of prison life and that they could speak freely because they knew we were bound by confidentiality. With reference to the question about generalizability, much naturalistic psychotherapy research is carried out on patients treated in outpatient clinics. Thus, while the ethical dilemmas in this case are complex and accentuated by the fact that this project took place in a prison, it is common practice to include outpatients as part of research.

Was the patient-participant treated as someone of equal moral status? I met with the patient in my office within the prison. After some negotiating on how I could be of help to him (see paper III), I suggested that we conduct a psychological assessment to better understand his presented symptoms. After conducting the assessments, I told him that I was conducting a study on the psychology of homicide, asked if he would be willing to participate, and stressed that he was free to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences for his treatment. He said yes but I asked him to take the written material about my research to his cell so that he could consider it on his own. In the next session he said he had no queries about participation and signed the written statement. I saw the participant as psychologically competent and able to decide about research participation on his own. The assessment data used to formulate an understanding of him (paper III) was also utilized as a treatment guide for the symptoms for which he wanted help and treatment.

While I have done my best to present the participant in paper III with respect and dignity, my characterization of his personality as *psychopathic* deserves some elaboration (this is also relevant for paper I & II). The term psychopathy is closely aligned with lurid descriptions such as ‘monster’ or ‘evil’ and is most likely the most negative label one may use to describe a fellow human. Taking this a step further, one may say that by labeling someone a psychopath one

engages in a similar kind of reductionist-dehumanizing process to the one that epitomizes the syndrome (Meloy, 1988). Though I could have refrained from using the label psychopathy, the term carries significant heuristic value, and we lack other terms or concepts to denote destructive personalities. I have tried to keep potentially condemning denotations down to a minimum and I have formulated an understanding of his personality and behavior in a manner which I hope acknowledges his perspective and developmental history.

*Harmful research.* Research should not knowingly harm those who participate, and the eventual risk of harm should be made clear to participants (Crighton, 2006). While none of the procedures in the project were considered potentially harmful, both the Rorschach and the AAI can be emotionally very taxing on examinees. Offenders' childhood histories are characterized by disruptions, separations, loss, and violence by carers (Coid, 1992), and a reliving of these experiences with the AAI and the Rorschach may be distressing and painful. During the assessments, my colleagues and I noticed that most of the prisoners had never discussed their childhood experiences before. Some appeared surprised by their poor recall of past events during the AAI. A few seemed a bit shook up by their memories. To illustrate, one participant I interviewed smiled gleefully while describing how he had sliced up his victim with a knife. This was in stark contrast to how he appeared during the AAI, where his t-shirt was soaked with sweat whilst discussing the horrors of his childhood.

All participants were interviewed by clinical psychologists. Participants were offered follow up sessions when needed. Twelve of the 72 men were referred to the prison psychiatric clinic for further evaluation of treatment needs. Though their symptoms may have been accentuated by the assessment, my impression is that most of these men had been harboring substantial emotional pain (dysphonia, anger, confusion over past events etc.) that they had never discussed with others before. In almost all cases we recommended that they could try out treatment. I believe the feedback we provided them with sparked some curiosity in them – about themselves, their symptoms, and the potential gains of psychological treatment.

## **4.4 Analysis of the data**

### **4.4.1 Statistical analysis**

The data in paper II was analyzed using a one-way between-group analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA was used to identify any statistically significant differences between the means of two or more independent (unrelated) groups. In this study, we used three groups: Criminal debt collectors and the two other violent groups. They were compared on selected Rorschach variables and their total PCL-R score. Effect sizes were calculated as eta squared

( $\eta^2$ ) using Cohen's (1988) guidelines for estimation: small (.01), moderate (.06), and large (.14). Post-hoc comparisons were conducted using Fisher's least significant differences (LSD) test, utilizing an alpha level of .05 for all significant tests.

#### **4.4.2 Qualitative analysis**

The data in the single case papers I and III were analyzed using an in depth ideographic approach. Specifically, the AAI was used to identify the two participants' self-protective strategies and signs of unresolved loss or trauma. The two Rorschach protocols were coded and interpreted using the R-PAS (Meyer et al., 2011), supplemented by a response sequence analysis (Bram & Peebles, 2014)<sup>18</sup> and aggressive contents (Gacono, Gacono, Meloy, & Baity, 2008). The AAI-Rorschach data was then compared for convergences and divergences. To develop a comprehensive formulation of the participants' respective personality functioning, the overall data was integrated within an attachment oriented-object relational framework.

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<sup>18</sup> An analysis of the Rorschach response sequence involves analyzing content, determinants, and the specific verbalizations and behaviors used during the test. The analysis provides information about how the examinee copes with, defends against, and recovers from conflicting impulses, relational needs, states, and memories (Bram & Peebles, 2014).

## 5. Results

### Summary paper I

#### **Self-protective strategies, violence, and psychopathy: Theory and a case study.**

Detailed case research on violence prone psychopathic offenders is scarce (Kreis & Cooke, 2011). In this case study of Erik, a severely psychopathic criminal debt collector, AAI and Rorschach data was utilized to formulate an understanding of his psychopathic functioning and violent behavior. Overlapping AAI and Rorschach findings indicated exposure to pervasive past trauma, and ego states characterized by excessive, trauma-related aggression, and that he alternated between multiple violent and invulnerable aggressor representations and paranoid-victim identifications. Integrating the data using an attachment approach to psychopathology (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Crittenden, 2015) we posited that that these shifting states represented hostile survival strategies developed in response to a history of repeated severe trauma, serving multiple functions. The identification with an invulnerable aggressor (A. Freud, 1936) masked intolerable memories of victimization, enabling a fearless stance toward a dangerous world. Conversely, paranoid identifications helped prepare against an imminent attack, yet resulted in the over-identification of danger.

We asserted that Eric's use of violence, threats, and dominance served as an ingrained relational style used to regulate emotional states, providing cohesion to his severely fragmented identity and an omnipotent sense of being in control of his hostile environment. His many human movement and content responses, signaling a mentalizing capacity, (Porcelli, Giromini, Parolin, Pineda, & Viglione, 2013), was suggested to serve an adaptive function in maintaining a criminal lifestyle.

### Summary paper II

#### **Identification with a violent and sadistic aggressor: A Rorschach study of criminal debt collectors**

In this study, we examined how the Nørbech et al. (2013) case findings would relate to a larger sample of criminal debt collectors. To explore whether these individuals could be viewed as a distinct offender group, their PCL-R scores and Rorschach records were contrasted with two other violent offender groups. The overall results were, in many ways, consistent with our

clinical impression of these offenders as comprising a somewhat distinct offender type, with a personality makeup tailored for their line of ‘work’. As expected, the criminal debt collectors had significantly higher mean PCL–R scores than both the other groups. Their Rorschach records were also characterized by significantly more aggressive markers, indices of past trauma, interpersonal interest, and malevolent and damaged human percepts.

Inferring from this amalgam of markers, we suggested, much like in our case study, that their psychopathic appearance was propped up by an extreme preoccupation with danger, that they were consumed by aggressive urges (AgPot), and they likely fluctuated between extreme victim (AgPast) and victimizer (AgC) states, probably mediated by childhood experiences of repeated trauma of intense fear, humiliation, and pain (Crittenden, 2015; Nørbech et al., 2013). To deal with these experiences, we suggested they had developed a relational style that depended on violence as a necessary part of their regular emotional experience (Juni, 2010; Nørbech et al., 2013) accompanied by a self-identity as a fearless, persecutory aggressor (A. Freud, 1936).

Based on these inferences, we proposed that the instrumentality of debt collection may be undergirded by less apparent motivations such as exhilaration or personal gratification (Howard, 2011), subsequently tied to more basic affect regulatory and identity confirmatory issues. Lastly, the somewhat wide-ranging PCL-R scores among the debt collectors and varying Rorschach protocols suggest considerable heterogeneity within this group.

### **Summary paper III**

#### **Sadomasochistic Representations in a Rage Murderer: An Integrative Clinical and Forensic Investigation**

Existing research conceptualizes rage-murder as the interaction between an overcontrolled personality makeup and the breakdown of the perpetrator’s defenses due to a buildup of intolerable affect (Cartwright, 2002; Megargee, 1966). In this clinical-forensic case study of a man who committed a murder in a fit of rage, AAI and Rorschach data were used together with information from the psychotherapy, to delineate an understanding of his personality and the factors contributing to his commission of murder.

In integrating the discrepant AAI-Rorschach data, I proposed that his personality could be described in terms of a dual personality organization, characterized by a split between a more benign, overcontrolled surface, and a self, full of sexualized urges and sadistic rage. The murder he committed was conceptualized in terms of the sudden buildup of intolerable affect triggered

by the victim’s provocative and humiliating statements, and the collapse of his over-controlled defenses. Assessment data was also used to predict scenarios harboring increased risk for new violence and to outline treatment ideas that could potentially reduce this risk.

**Supplementary findings that apply to the debt collector study (paper I and II)**

For the purpose of this dissertation, the criminal debt collectors were categorized according to Schlesinger’s (2001) amateur-semiprofessional-professional typology, and whether they were associated with a criminal organization or worked as freelancers (Levi, 1981). I also added preliminary descriptive AAI data (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Level of professionalism</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>PCL-R score</b>	<b>AAI Classification*</b>
36	Professional	Independent	36	Ul, Utr A8/C7
28	Professional	Gang	30	Utr A7/C5-7
32	Semiprof	Gang	32	Utr A7
53	Professional	Independent	38	Ul, Utr A7C7
34	Amateur	Independent	33	Utr A7/C7-8
19	Amateur	Gang	25	Utr A7
35	Professional	Independent	32	
33	Amateur	Gang	35	Utr A7-8
32	Semiprof	Gang	29	
33	Amateur	Independent	34	Utr A4C7
26	Semiprof	Gang	29	
27	Semiprof	Gang	28	Utr C7-8
24	Semiprof	Gang	34	Utr A7/C7-8
23	Amateur	Gang	29	Ul, Utr A6-7
25	Semiprof	Gang	30	
30	Semiprof	Gang	32	
21	Semiprof	Gang	32	
32	Semiprof	Gang	34	
28	Amateur	Gang	28	
45	Semiprof	Independent	34	
29	Amateur	Gang	21	Utr A7
24	Semiprof	Gang	30	Utr A7
50	Professional	Gang	32	
26	Semiprof	Gang	32	
27	Semiprof	Gang	36	
26	Amateur	Gang	32	Ul, Utr A4-7/C7
37	Semiprof	Gang	32	

\*Ul = Unresolved loss; Utr = Unresolved trauma





## **6. Discussion**

This thesis set out to throw light on two under-researched and little understood figures of violent crime — the criminal debt collector and the rage murderer. I will address the criminal debt collector first (papers I and II), then discuss the findings related to the single case study of rage-murder (paper III) and how these compare to other research in these areas.

### **6.1 Criminal Debt Collectors**

The main objective of this explorative investigation was to get a better grip on the criminal debt collector. I was especially curious about what factors drove these individuals into this line of work, the developmental origin and dynamics of their callous relational style, and the violent identity taken on by some of them. I was also interested in trying to understand the psychological processes, and the specific mentality underpinning the chilling and sometimes horrific violence performed during criminal debt collection. I approached these overarching research questions by examining the personality makeup of a sample of criminal debt collector's using the Rorschach, the AAI, and the PCL-R. Before addressing these questions, I will briefly outline some descriptives.

The criminal debt collector is typically a male, or several males working together, in the age range from late adolescence to mid-sixties. While the statistical support for this claim is limited to this investigation (age ranges 19-53, Table 1) and the two other studies on enforcers (Ostrosky et al., 2012; Rahman et al., 2020), the ability to coerce an unwilling adversary often rests on an imposing physique that few women, and few men past their mid-sixties, possess. Nonetheless, during my prison practice I have encountered a few females who had been engaged in the enforcement of criminal debt. These women certainly exhibited the callous mindset necessary for such work (for a case example, see Nørbech et al., 2017), but were usually accompanied by a male ally for physical support. A study of these women would add value to the sparse academic literature on violently inclined females.

#### **6.1.1 Classifying the sample**

Levi's (1981) hitman typology shows that the majority of the enforcers in our sample performed their duties as members of a criminal network or gang (78%). Three of these were part of small groups of enforcers who worked in pairs or solo depending on the magnitude of the assignment. To illustrate, an infamous group, the so-called "Swedish league"

(<https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svenskeligaen>), consisted of a closely-knit group of enforcers who, for a few years, dominated the underground scene of east Norway. Several of these men had a skillset adapted to their work (e.g., weapon experience; unarmed close combat training) and they used debt collection as their main source of income.

This brings up Schlesinger's (2001) notion of varying degrees of professionalization. While some of these individuals were 'full time' enforcers and approached their 'work' in meticulous fashion, others took on occasional assignments with little forethought or any specific training. This sample consisted mainly of amateurs and semiprofessionals (see Table 1). The low number of 'professionals' is unsurprising given that such individuals are likely better at avoiding attention from law enforcement. 'Fleming'<sup>19</sup> for instance, one of the few debt collectors in this study who was classified as a 'professional', had been arrested for threats and extortion several times, but never sentenced. Police reports revealed that the victims often withdrew their statements, probably due to threats that silenced them. He also told me he had an expensive lawyer who helped him avoid prison time.

### **6.1.2 The Personality makeup of the Criminal debt collector: Findings and Inferences based on the Rorschach, the PCL-R, and the AAI**

Enforcement of criminal debt often involves the use of threats and physical violence. Aside from the violence used during debt enforcement, the debt collectors in this sample also had an extensive record of violence not related to debt collection (see Table XX paper II). Thus, given the empirical and theoretically sound link between violence and psychopathy (Leistico, Salekin, DeCoster, & Rogers, 2008; Meloy, 2012), the elevated level of psychopathy (mean PCL-R) within this sample was expected. Using their PCL-R scores to paint a more vivid picture of these men, those at the upper level of the psychopathy spectrum (PCL-R  $\geq$  30; Hare, 2003) presented as callous and with unconcealed macho bravado.

For instance, Eric, the participant described in paper I (Nørbech et al., 2013), boasted of his invulnerability and depicted himself as one of Norway's most dangerous men. He accompanied his grandiose demeanor with an unwavering gaze, most likely to underline the projection of himself as a powerful and intimidating person. Like most of the other debt collectors, Eric was large and muscular. His body was heavily scarred from numerous fights, i.e., broken nose, knife wounds on his stomach, fists covered by teeth marks from victims etc. He shared his ability to inflict pain and fear with excitement and accompanied his violent tales with sudden gestures and evocative sounds (clapping of hands, knocks on the table), carefully

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<sup>19</sup> Fleming, like the other names of enforcers used in the text, is a pseudonym.

demonstrating the effective use of the sharp end of the elbow for pacifying an adversary during close combat. Though Eric likely engaged in this flashing of his ‘weaponry’ to impress me during the interview, I believe he also wanted to share his world of brutality and fear, thus providing me with a glimpse of his modus operandi during debt collection where fear induction is central to subduing an uncooperative victim. Although he did show some prosocial qualities (see paper I), he seemed consumed by his violent self-image, and personified, in many ways, the cinematic portrayal<sup>20</sup> of the debt collector as a brutal and fearless character.

Although many of the other debt collectors displayed similar traits, the majority were far less blatant in their appearance. Some presented with a stoic, soldier-like attitude, coming across as emotionally blunted and detached. A few displayed a more refined arsenal of threatening nonverbal behavior (e.g., speaking about their violence with lowered voice; slowly intruding body postures). Most of the criminal debt collectors rationalized their violence through victim blaming: “*I have one piece of advice, ‘don’t borrow money’ (laughs).*” Others, meanwhile, seemed unmoved by the pain they had inflicted, or expressed considerable disdain for the vulnerable, unmanly, position the victims had placed themselves in.

Reviewing the debt collectors’ casefiles exposed lifestyles characterized by recklessness, prison stays, alcohol abuse, and the use of stimulants, barbiturates, and anabolic steroids; the last likely to boost their physical power and feelings of invulnerability. In sum, while the level of psychopathy among the criminal debt collectors varied considerably (PCL-R range = 21-38), the majority displayed many of the affective-interpersonal traits and antisocial behaviors typical of psychopathy spectrum offenders (Hare, 2003; Patrick, 2006). This finding is also consistent with the Mexican enforcers (Ostrosky et al., 2012) and the descriptions of cases in the UK (Rahman et al., 2020).

Moving from the PCL-R descriptors to the Rorschach markers associated with socio-emotional perception and ideation, we (Nørbech et al., 2016) found that the criminal debt collectors produced significantly more human content responses (SumH) than the other violent groups. Compared to nonpatients (Meyer et al., 2007), they also showed notably better conventionality in perception ( $X+%$  = .66 vs. .52; see Table paper II) and perceptual (in) accuracy in the average range ( $X-%$  = .22 vs. .19). Stated differently, they seemed more attuned toward the interpersonal sphere, and were likely to have a better ability to accurately judge others and thus blend into social settings than the other offenders, a finding which resonates well with the above-mentioned speculation. To exemplify, Fleming the enforcer referred to

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<sup>20</sup> See the character Marve played by Mickey Rourke in the Hollywood blockbuster movie *Sin City*.

above, was well spoken with an outgoing façade, and gave me the impression that he could fit into most environments. He claimed he could make an average person's annual salary within three months, and brazenly boasted that: "*You know, it's all about marketing and appearance.*"

The debt collectors' Rorschach records signaled further that they were emotionally constricted and that they processed the world in a detached manner (high F%). They were pathologically invested in the self (high PER) as opposed to affectionate relationships (very low SumT). They modulated affect poorly (low FC-CF-C), were preoccupied with aggression (elevated AgC, AgPot, AgPast, SM), and their cognition was characterized by disturbed and idiosyncratic thinking (high WSum6-Lv2). This depiction resembles findings obtained by other Rorschach-psychopathy researchers (Franks et al., 2009; Gacono & Meloy, 1994).

Their elevated production of H and M responses is, however, uncommon in psychopathic samples (Gacono & Meloy, 2009). The ability to envision human movement in the Inkblots (M) is generally viewed as "a type of mentalization that contributes to the capacity for identification with others and for empathy" (Meyer et al., 2011, p. 340). Thus, compared to our subgroups of less violent individuals and two psychopathic samples, these debt collectors seemed more attentive to the social sphere (H) and appeared to have a greater capacity to make inferences about others' perspectives (M). This rather perplexing finding is, however, in line with my clinical experience of these offenders as skilled in judging and picking up on certain aspects of another person's demeanor.

An examination of the quality of these Rorschach markers of empathy and mentalization revealed, however, that most of the participants' H and M responses depicted damaged, part-object, and/or hostile human representations (PHR>GPHR). This finding is consistent with other Rorschach-psychopathy studies (Gacono & Meloy, 2009; Hartmann et al., 2006), psychopathy research utilizing different object relational measurements (Brody & Rosenfeldt, 2002; Gullhaugen & Nøttestad, 2012), and with the preliminary AAI data that was characterized by highly one-dimensional (all good vs. all bad), fragmented, and/or malevolent representations of themselves and their attachment figures.

To illustrate, Eric's AAI-narrative evinced numerous fragmented images of the self as humiliated, abused and neglected (e.g., self in diapers full of shit; self with unattended wounds). Representations of his father, whom he held accountable for his hardship, were suffused with hate ("*the only memories I have is like crush'im, get'im, if I have to take his life*") and spite ("*he is pitiful*"), in contrast to his extreme idealization (all good adjectives) of a distant, powerful male figure. Similarly, Fleming's AAI depicted an overly idealized, powerful, fright-inducing paternal figure juxtaposed with an abusive, humiliating, and manipulative maternal

figure. Taken together, these converging Rorschach and AAI findings provide solid evidence that the internalized models carried by these debt collectors were full of malevolent and hostile representations.

Thus, whereas these debt collectors' elevated H and M responses imply an ability to envision the state of others (Meyer et al., 2011), their internalized malevolent representations, elevated level of psychopathy and low desire for affectional relationships (SumT), suggest that they primarily used their mentalizing capacity for malevolent purposes. That is, these individuals scan their interpersonal sphere with heightened acumen in order to spot weakness or threat.

My experience with Fleming may put this into further perspective. During the interview, he boasted of his position in the criminal environment while keeping his gaze on me. He then slowly leaned forward toward me. I felt a sudden rise of fear as if he was scanning my body language and facial expressions. He then commented calmly: "*You're scared, aren't you!?*" I confirmed. Seemingly pleased by my response, he leaned back again, and eagerly awaited my reaction: "*And now? It lessened right?*" I felt my fear spiraling down and nodded. Smilingly he exclaimed: "*See how you can use your body language.*" In hindsight, my fear was likely triggered by a combination of his ominous speech, intimidating nonverbal behavior, and the fact that I knew that he was a potentially dangerous individual.

The compelling malevolent interpersonal awareness noted in these enforcers is on a par with the burgeoning research on socio-emotional perception among the psychopathy spectrum offenders mentioned earlier. Psychopathic offenders exhibit no deficits in cognitive empathy – the ability to know what the other person is feeling (Blair, 2008) – and some may have an enhanced ability to pick up on cues of vulnerability in others, particularly fearful faces and broken bodily gestures (Book et al., 2007; Wheeler et al., 2009; Woodworth & Waschbusch, 2007). Given the nature of criminal debt collection, one may assume that the knack for identifying signals of fear and vulnerability may be even more advanced among criminal debt collectors than other types of instrumentally violent offenders.

To exemplify, while the hitman may take out his 'target' without personal contact (Macintyre et al., 2014), debt collection involves a closer, and psychologically more intricate, relationship in which the criminal debt collector must work on the victim's psyche by means of manipulation (e.g., persuasion, threat or brute force). As stated by a debt collector: "*It's all about sowing a seed (of fear). And then let it (the fear) grow on its own (my translation).*" Thus, a level of mentalization, i.e., the ability to induce and identify fear, knowledge about when to inflict nonlethal force and when to ease off, may in many cases be essential for successful

collection. Those who master these psychological aspects without causing the victim serious physical harm are less likely to be apprehended by law enforcement.

### ***What motivates these individuals to choose debt collection as a criminal niche?***

There are surely a range of different factors that play into the ‘choice’ of becoming a debt collector, financial reasons being an obvious incentive (Rahman et al., 2020). While this question was not addressed systematically in this enquiry, some explained that they were introduced to debt collection when they joined a gang and were assigned to enforce a debt by a senior gang member. And if they were effective they were given another job and so on. Several of the participants had been recruited by an elder debt collector they looked up to. Peter, for instance, an aloof debt collector who had taken on jobs in the heavy drugs milieu, got in contact with an older enforcer at a local shopping mall in his early adolescence. They developed a bond, and the enforcer introduced him to martial arts. Peter accompanied him on his job, keeping drug addicts out of the mall and beating up those who got caught stealing.

Similarly, Eric (Nørbech et al., paper I) was recruited by local criminals who noticed the teenager’s taste for fighting and figured they could use his skills for a different purpose. Thomas, also an aloof debt collector, told me that he had worked with Eric on his first jobs. Third, Oskar, a talented boxer with a history of physical abuse, was asked to help an acquaintance on a job and discovered he was good at it. I have also been told about ex-military personnel who got involved after coming back from duty and struggled to fit into normal life.

### ***Underlying motivation***

While enforcement can provide a lucrative source of income (Rahman et al., 2020), the brutal nature of this line of work depends on a callous mentality that few possess. Thus, we (Nørbech et al., 2016; paper II) were more curious about aspects of their motivation that they were less conscious of, and/or less willing to reveal. Indeed, the most striking findings from this investigation were the abundance of aggression markers evident in the participants’ protocols. In fact, their Rorschach protocols were considerably more aggression-fused than the forensic norms for male psychopaths (Gacono & Meloy, 1994; see paper II for mean differences), suggesting that these debt collectors were likely more consumed by aggression than other psychopathy spectrum offenders. Based on these findings, we (Nørbech et al., 2016; paper II) proposed that a preoccupation with power and aggression served as a central dynamic in their personalities, and that debt collection provided them with a necessary outlet for channeling their aggression.

Psychopathy, as defined by the PCL-R, represents a spectrum of offenders (Blackburn, 2009; Camp et al., 2013). Based on their aggression-fused Rorschach responses and their behavioral style of interpersonal animosity and violence, we (Nørbech et al., 2016, paper II) found Juni's (2010) conceptualization of the hostile variant of psychopathy a meaningful framework for describing the key personality dynamics of these debt collectors. As mentioned above, Juni's (2009, 2010) hostile variant of psychopathy refers to individuals who depend on violence and dominance as a necessary part of their regular socio-emotional experience. This depiction also resonates well with the case findings on Eric (Nørbech et al., 2013), and the resulting idea that the debt collector represents essentially an aggressive-coercive relational style characterized by dominance through brutality and fear induction. The elevated markers of sadism (SM) in their Rorschach records also suggest that many of these individuals likely find this game of 'cat and mouse/hunter-hunted' quite satisfying.

While the idea that some people might enjoy hunting down others is chilling – and rightfully so – comparative warfare research show that soldiers may experience the hunting of other males as emotionally arousing accompanied by the parallel release of testosterone, serotonin and endorphins, which can produce feelings of euphoria and alleviate pain (Elbert, Weierstall, & Schauer, 2010). I would expect that many of the debt collectors would find that this description resonates with their own experiences. The criminal debt collector is, in many respects, a soldier of the underworld.

***From what type of previous relationship does the callous and aggressive relational style stem from? Developmental pathways, object relations, attachment style and violence***

Attachment has been identified as one of the key processes mediating the relationship between a callous disposition and the development of callous and instrumental violence (Bowlby, 1944; Meloy, 2002; Saltaris, 2002). Burgeoning research also shows that among the most violence-prone adult psychopaths, many have been exposed to severe emotional neglect, humiliation, and often cruel victimization in their early relationships (Lang, Klinteberg, & Alm, 2002; Rubio, Krieger, Finney, & Cooker, 2014; Widom, Czaia, & Dutton, 2008). Yet, as noted previously, how detrimental attachment experiences contribute to the genesis of violence and psychopathic disturbance remains unclear (Savage, 2014).

In our case study of Eric (Nørbech et al., 2013), we utilized Rorschach-AAI findings to describe the psychodynamics underlying his psychopathic functioning and to broaden the understanding of the attachment-based mechanisms that mediate this transformation from childhood victim to an adult psychopath and victimizer. Eric's self-other representations on

both the Rorschach and the AAI were marked by pervasive rage and hate tied to early victimization that seemed to have contaminated his internal situation. In Rosenfeld's (1987) formulation, Eric's internalized relational model was pervaded by bad objects, which formed an internal mafia gang that attacked his benign objects. That is, images of the self as vulnerable evoked intense rage and cold hate, fear was denied and externalized and projectively identified in others, whilst violence and domination were used to fuel a grandiose self-image.

Contrary to most attachment research in this area linking psychopathy to the emotionally deactivating Type A/Disorganized patterns (Flight & Forth, 2007; Frodi et al., 2001; Kosson et al., 2002), we found that Eric oscillated between his use of two extreme Type A and C strategies (Crittenden, 2015). We inferred that his strategies were developed in response to a series of attachment disruptions and trauma (e.g., loss of mother → neglect and abuse by father → institutional placements etc.), that this “pre-psychopathic” self-protective psychological organization was influenced and further refined during adolescence via criminal peers, violent exposure, imprisonment, and self-generated dangers (e.g., violence, criminal behavior etc.), and then cemented in adulthood. More so, we proposed that his psychopathic functioning and use of violence were governed by preconscious, procedurally mediated mechanisms associated with both A and C Type patterns. His extreme Type A strategy rendered him emotionally shallow, enabling him to perform cruel and instrumentally violent acts on indebted victims in an emotionless manner; whereas the chronic anger, feelings of grandeur, disdain of other people's vulnerability associated with his extreme hyperactivating Type C strategy disposed him to act callously with pleasure and no remorse.

The data on the other debt collectors evinced similar features. That is, like Eric, most of the debt collectors produced Rorschach records with malevolent representations and significant trauma markers, and all the classified AAI's (see preliminary AAI data Table 1) were characterized by complex trauma and extreme attachment patterns. While the retrospective design of this study curtails firm inferences regarding development, the converging AAI-Rorschach findings provide a canvas for tentative, but empirically grounded, assertions on the influence of maltreatment on their malignant character disturbance and the traumatic experiences underlying their violence (Crittenden 2015; Fonagy, 2015). Following this approach, the preliminary AAI data designate a group with extreme Type A patterns and a group with the A/C oscillations noted in Eric's case. The latter group appear to be the most disturbed in terms of their level of psychopathy (PCL-R) and the severity of their attachment patterns.



### *The extreme Type A patterns*

Inferring from the AAI to their personality functioning, the debt collectors classified with a Type A pattern developed, we can assume, an emotionally deactivating relational style in response to a history of severe neglect and abuse (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989), which enabled them to perform cruel and instrumentally violent acts on indebted victims without experiencing emotion. Integrating this AAI assertion with their trauma and aggression fused Rorschach responses, it may be suggested that they had reversed their experiences of victimization (Tri%, AgPast) by identifying with an aggressor (AgC; A, Freud, 1936). Debt collection may, as alluded to earlier, have provided direction for this aggressive aspect of their self and identity.

The quality of their aggressive identity and the extent to which these extreme Types A individuals were consumed by their role as debt collectors varied considerably. For instance, the data on Eddie, the youngest debt collector in this sample with only a small number of ‘jobs’ on his résumé, indicated that his personality was very fragmented from severe physical abuse from his father, and over-idealization of his unprotective mother. This split in his personality manifested via a hard and hostile attitude – an aggressive identification (A. Freud, 1936) that he likely expressed through debt collection, and a helpless, more benign part (maternal identification). On the prosocial side, he had decent scholastic abilities, had previously excelled in sports, and could boast a small network of benign friends. From what I know, he got out of the criminal sphere and now has a more stable life situation.

Peter, on the other hand, the debt collector who grew up with his drug addicted mother and who formed a close bond to an older debt collector, seemed more identified with his role as an enforcer. His AAI was classified with the same pattern as Eddie’s (delusional idealization; A7), revealing massive encapsulation and blunting of negative affect tied to severe neglect and trauma, and idealization of the older debt collector, whom he portrayed as a paternal figure. Growing up in a hostile environment without other attachment figures than his abandoning mother to rely on, he appeared to have modelled himself on the older enforcer. Thus, even if Eddie and Peter were similar in terms of their attachment pattern and history with neglect and abuse, the quality of their idealized figure was very different. Peter idealized and seemed to identify with a violent paternal figure expressed through his role of being a debt collector (Rosenfeld, 1987). Note also that Peter appeared more emotionally blunted and habituated to violence, perhaps an effect of having been introduced to violence by the older debt collector from an early age. Eddie on the other hand, idealized his unprotective, but more benign mother,

and showed a fearful and compliant pattern in relation to his violent father. His aggression seemed more alien to him and had less impact on his overall personality functioning.

#### *The oscillating A/C group*

The more psychopathically disturbed AC group would be presumed to have developed along a similar course to Eric, and their violence would also be speculated to be underpinned by both A and C type processes (see paper I for a more specific outline). Existing research on insecure attachment styles and violence, links Type A to instrumental and Type C to affective violence (Babcock et al., 2000; Meloy, 2002; Stovall-McClough & Dozier, 2016). Thus, how Type C states may relate to instrumental acts of violence deserves some clarification (see also paper I for a discussion).

As outlined earlier, the extreme C patterns are thought to evolve from attachment experiences with extremely erratic, abusive and deceptive parents, setting the stage for a coercive, angry and punitive relational pattern utilized by children to manage and control their overwhelming affects and unruly parents (Crittenden, 2015; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999). When such relational patterns progress into adulthood, the individual's experience may become infused by pervasive distrust, cold hate, utter disdain for others, and malignant grandiosity to ward off fear and vulnerability; what Crittenden refers to as a menacing C Type (7-8) mental organization. In paper I (Nørbech et al., 2013), we suggested that the intense malevolent affect and cognition undergirding Eric's functioning, and others with a similar psychological organization, may act as a driver and facilitator for their planning and execution of violence.

While the legitimacy of this proposed link between the extreme C patterns and instrumental violence can only be established by further study, recent comparative research on emotion in psychopathy (Garafalo, Zeigler-Hill, Neumann, & Meloy, 2019; Schriber, Chung, Sorensen, & Robins, 2017) offers some indirect support.

As mentioned earlier, psychopathy and instrumental violence is associated with low arousal and the absence of emotion (Baskin-Sommers, 2017; Meloy, 2012). Yet Garafolo et al., (2018) found that psychopathic individuals may experience emotion, particularly contempt, hate, and spite. Following their findings, they inferred that *“that the harmful behaviors displayed by psychopathic individuals, including those that are more instrumental and premeditated in nature, can be linked to a concordant affective experience involving disdain or contempt for others”* (p. 180). They suggested further that such an affective predisposition may also involve sadistic tendencies, whereby pleasure is derived through demeaning and hurtful interactions with others (Garafolo et al.; Robertson & Knight, 2013).

This inference is on a par with the extreme C patterns outlined above and our suggestions regarding Eric's C Type functioning inferred from his AAI, and his use of violence and intimidation to fuel his image of invulnerability. The fright-yielding cunningness associated with the extreme C Type mode may be captured in the chilling quality of a statement from of one of the older debt collectors in this sample, and whose AAI was classified with a dominant menacing C Type strategy (my translation):

*It's when I enter someone's place and say 'yes, but you've already told me that you don't have the money for me. So that's not why I'm here. But you can, maybe you've got a family and something you would like to say to them? I will grant you that last opportunity'. Then I give them pen and a piece of paper.*

### ***Trauma, Strategy and Violence***

While the debt collectors came across as cool and controlling during interviews, their many convictions for impulsive and affectively evoked violence suggest that they were very easily offended, and in much less control over their aggression than their macho, superior attitude conveyed. Eric, for instance, was indicted for an unprovoked attack on an older man he had never met before. He seemed a bit embarrassed by the whole episode and blamed it on the man who apparently had “*looked at him in the wrong way.*” Based on the converging Rorschach-AAI trauma findings and the solid empirical link between childhood trauma and violence risk (Bonta & Andrews, 2017), we inferred that their tendency to engage in affective violence could be related to breaks in strategic functioning due to the intrusion of trauma-related content in situations resembling their past traumatic experiences (Crittenden, 2015; Nørbech et al., 2016).

For instance, in Eric's case the confrontation with the elderly man may have evoked a past scenario of him being humiliated by his abusive father (see AAI data paper I), which triggered fear and subsequent rage to ward off shame (Gilligan, 1996). This notion of trauma-reenactment and displacement to interpret his ‘unprovoked attack’ is consistent with the AAI-Rorschach indicators of severe trauma, poor emotional control, and labile reality-testing with a tendency to blur past and present realities in emotionally stirring situations.

Whether a history of trauma may also incline certain individuals to engage in instrumental violence is a largely unexplored topic. From a motivational approach, Gacono, Gacono, Meloy et al. (2008) propose that feelings of past victimization may serve as underlying justifications for cruel behavior. This point is further highlighted by Tsytsarev and Grodnitzky (1995) in their description of how criminals who are ordered to kill someone for

the first time imagine that the person targeted was responsible for some past humiliation in order to elicit the anger and loathing necessary for carrying out the murder.

While the supposed link between trauma related anger and instrumental violence was not addresses systematically in this investigation, some of the debt collectors admitted that they occasionally used past victimization as motivation and justification for their use of violence. For instance, Peter explained that, stirred by the memory of his little sister and the sexual abuse she allegedly was the victim of, he took on occasional jobs beating up alleged molesters. A somewhat similar example, but with a different dynamic, is highlighted by Hortemo's (2015) AAI case study drawn from this sample. The participant was a severely psychopathic enforcer with a history of sexual abuse and who occasionally raped his indebted victims as part of his MO. In this case, the raping of victims was hypothesized to be driven by a compulsion to reenact and redress the original trauma by placing it onto the victim, and thus, rid the self of the immense torment (Juni, 2010). Although the instrumental use of sexualized violence by enforcers as part of a punitive regime is likely not uncommon, the legitimacy of the trauma reenactment hypothesis as a driver for violence in some of these instances merits closer study.

Before addressing the specific mindset, I would like to point out another trauma-neglect related factor that may be speculated to influence these individuals' quest for engaging in debt collection. Both the AAI data and the co-occurrence of victim (AgPast) and victimizer (AgC, AgPot) Rorschach responses (sometimes co-occurring in the same response) suggest that many of these debt collectors were susceptible to episodes of deep-seated, unacknowledged shame associated with past abuse, humiliation and neglect (Gilligan, 1996); Heinze, 2017). On the AAI this was evident via episodes of neglect and abuse being presented in a severely disassociated manner, e.g., with no affect or with rage only. One debt collector recalled that he was placed on a hot woodstove by his drunken father. The father was supposed to take him to the toilet but instead placed him on the scalding woodstove. The only sensation he recalled was the smell of burnt flesh. He thought he may have been around three years old. Many hardly recalled any childhood events at all, which is not untypical for individuals with a history of severe abuse and neglect (Crittenden, 2015; Stein, 2007).

While the excitement seeking noted in psychopathy and callous violence is associated with genetic and neurophysiological anomalies (Meloy, 1988; Raine et al., 1998), environmental factors may play a role. That is, lowered autonomic arousal may also be the result of pervasive encapsulation of experiences of gross neglect, abuse, and unacknowledged shame (Crittenden, 2015; Gilligan, 1996). The markers of grossly disassociated trauma and neglect noted in the Rorschach's and AAI's of these individuals may, thus, be speculated to

have had an influence on their gravitation toward the hunting and molestation of other humans to reverse deregulated affect and emptiness. This attachment-based perspective on lowered arousal and violence does not preclude bio-genetic underpinnings. Genetic and neurophysiological data would indeed have been a valuable addition to this investigation.

Finally, the debt collector's cunning ability to induce and identify fear may also have roots in attachment. Repeated exposure to terrifying parents may provide intimate procedural knowledge of the victim position (Ferenczi, 1933) and an acute awareness of the state of others (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989), which subsequently may be used to read the emotional states of potential victims and adversaries with hostile intent (Howell, 2005).

***How can the assessment findings inform us about the mindset and the mental processes involved in criminal debt collection? A formulation***

Pondering the enforcer-mindset, my impression is that the great majority carry a resolute belief in their superiority over their adversary, and an aggressive instilment of obtaining the debt by any means necessary. This assertion is consistent with the data. Many of the enforcers I've met also used some sort of private ritual as part of their preparation before going out on a job, e.g., putting on specific clothing – the most prolific costume among Norwegian enforcers would be a bullet-proof vest and a bomber jacket, an outfit giving them the look of what Dietz (1986) terms a “pseudo-commando.” According to Meloy, Mohandi, Knoll, and Hoffmann (2015), the use of a “pseudo-military” uniform may be means to attain the specific “hunter/warrior” mentality required for the forthcoming task.

As mentioned earlier, most of the debt collectors justified their use of violence by blaming their victim. Some dismissed their brutality as just part of the job. While these more conscious mental techniques certainly help downplay potential feelings of responsibility and empathy for the victim (Levi, 1981), the present findings suggest that the enforcer most likely utilizes a range of mental operations to facilitate the act of violence, many of which he is totally unaware of. These unconscious defensive processes may be inferred from the assessment of the perpetrator's verbal accounts of the violence (Crittenden, 2015; Gacono & Meloy, 1994). Following this approach, I will now review a verbatim description of the violent debt collection scenario presented in the prologue, focusing on markers that may illuminate the debt collector's mindset and violence during the event.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This recounting of violence was given by one of the participants in this study.

*I had tried to reason with this character for some time, but he kept rebuffing my repayment plan, so I had to pay him a visit. He opened the door and I tell him straight up, 'it's about time to pay your dues', but he refuses and tries to close the door on me. I gave him a slap and showed him on his back. 'So, this is how you want to play it!' I open my kit with my battery drill and tell him to put his hand on the floor. I put the drill on top, but he pulls his hand back, right, and screams that you can't do this. Then I put the drill to his forehead and say, 'It's up to you, hand or head?' He complies and I step on the hand so that most of it sticks out and just drill through it. But while the drill is still on the idiot screams and pulls the hand back right, and that ruined all the small bones and everything. Then I tell him 'Now you have the choice. Pay me, or we continue?' And then he agrees. 'What a fucking moron'!*

Exploring the debt collector's chilling depiction for clues about his mindset, note that his speech is coherent, that his sequencing of the events is presented with good temporal order, and that he expresses little emotion besides his last comment and his mentioning of the pain and despair of his victim. Comparing the psycholinguistic speech qualities of this depiction to its content, we can assume that during the dreadful event he was in a state characterized by heightened sense of his environment, a narrowed task-focus, and a strong aggressive resolve to carry through with his malice. Stated differently, our debt collector did not appear distracted by significant discomfort during the event. These inferences about his mindset are largely consistent with the emotionally detached information-processing style (high F%) and the aggressive self-perception and drive (AgC, AgPot) noted on the Rorschach, and the lowered arousal associated with instrumental violence (Meloy, 2012).

Examining the more subtle mechanism undergirding his violence, his speech revealed that he also engaged in an active dehumanization of the victim, via devaluation ("idiot", "moron") and by reducing him to a non-human subject (e.g., a character). This dehumanizing mental operation appears even more prominent in the segment where he describes drilling through the victim's hand. Here he disconnects and isolates the hand from the victim's body, and thus, reduces the victim from a less valued human to a part-object. Hence, there seems to be a succession of dehumanizing processes in the buildup to the horrific act, which ultimately allows the perpetrator to perceive the victim as a part-object, and thus carry out the violence without notable discomfort.

Yet there are several features in this description suggesting that the perpetrator was not completely emotionless, e.g., the accentuation of the victim's pain and despair, the focus on the ruining of the small bones in the hand of the victim, and the expressed disdain ("*what a fucking*

*moron!*”). Contemplating these emotionally evocative aspects, recall that the violence ensued due to the stalemate of the victim refusing to pay. While the situation was obviously most dangerous for the indebted person, the risk to the debt collector should not be underestimated, because the notion of failure is not only a direct threat to his income, but also to his reputation and inflated self-esteem (Toch, 1992). In other words, this is a situation in which the debt collector and his victim may be said to work on each other unconsciously (Abrahamsen, 1973). And, while speculative and morally unjustifiable, one could maintain that our victim played a part in his own brutalization. That is, the perpetrator may, at some level, have felt threatened and humiliated by the victim’s rejection, and that this threat evoked unacknowledged shame and subsequent sadistic rage enacted in a controlled manner in order to punish the victim and protect his fragile self-identity (Glasser, 1996).

Thus, whereas this extract may be emblematic of the instrumental violence of the criminal debt collector, it also shows how the mentality that underpins seemingly cold and meticulous acts of violence may be governed by primitive motives and processes on different levels of consciousness. The episode also demonstrates the importance of considering how the preceding (conscious or unconscious) communication between victim and victimizer may contribute to the manner (e.g., level of severity) in which the actual violence is carried out by the debt collector (Abrahamsen, 1973; Cartwright, 2002). Indeed, from my discussions with the examiner of this interview (Ekeland, 2008), I learned that the perpetrator did not express remorse for the violence he had subjected his victim to, but that he did experience a sense of relief after the episode. Reviewing his AAI, we discovered that he had been subject to severe humiliation by his father throughout his childhood, a finding which fits the notion of felt threat and subsequent cold rage. After the interview the examiner was left with a feeling of dread and the conviction that he would be careful not to offend this man if they met again.

### **6.1.3 Summary and conclusive comments**

The criminal debt collector represents one of the least studied agents of violent crime. Although debt collection is a potentially lucrative business, very few people are cut out for the hazard and brutality that comes with this lifestyle. The mindset required for this line of work is characterized by a hunter-prey relational paradigm in which the self is viewed as an invulnerable, aggressive agent and the victim as an exploitable, devalued subject.

The debt collectors in this study appeared to have reasonable advanced socioemotional skills and the ability to completely dis-identify with their victim. These personality correlates would, in functional terms, allow them to read their victims, and subsequently navigate between

negotiating and the use of threats or violence to manipulate them. Thus, based on this study, there seems to be a strong relationship between the specific behavior of the criminal debt collector and his personality makeup. This personality configuration is conceived in terms of a split between an aggressive, impenetrable surface demeanor and disassociated self-aspects associated with shame and humiliation.

Aggression, or a dependence on domination, violence, and fearful admiration, was inferred as a common underlying dominator. These motivational factors in their personalities were linked to toxic attachment experiences and a developmental process in which their intolerable representations of being victimized were transformed via the denial of vulnerability and identification with a persecutory and violent aggressor (A. Freud, 1936). Based on the attachment data a twofold debt collector typology was proposed; one group using an extreme Type A relational strategy and the other an oscillating A/C pattern.

Using these findings to illuminate their violence, it was inferred that both A and C Type processes may be involved in the instrumentality of debt collection: Some instances reflecting an absence of affect and a perception of the victim as an object – associated with the extreme Type A patterns – and other similar manifestations of violence possibly governed by the presence of highly focused malevolent affect and a view of the victim as despicable – associated with the extreme Type C patterns. The most psychopathically disturbed individual would be presumed to shift between extreme A and C Type states depending on the setting. This model also suggests that the perverted pleasure that some people derive from dreadful acts (e.g., sadism) may have distinct origins and functions. Some acts may be tied to specific traumatic experiences and reenacted with the victim, while the severely neglected Type A offender may inflict pain as a perverted measure to feel alive and counter low arousal and feelings of deadness (Gilligan, 1996).

In sum, I have argued that the obvious instrumentality of debt collection, in many cases, may be undergirded by less apparent motivations such as exhilaration or personal gratification (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Howard, 2011), subsequently tied to more basic affect regulatory and identity confirmatory issues (Nørbech et al., 2013). In other words, the debt collectors' quest for violent domination, excitement, and feelings of omnipotence may regulate and counteract dampening affects associated with neglect, abuse, and humiliation. Moreover, their use of threats and violence may serve to reinforce an identity as an aggressor not a victim. That said, I'm in agreement with Alvarez (2011), who points out that though violence may have begun as a defense against some horror, the infliction of pain and brutality may at some stage become almost motiveless, causal – a habit that no longer bears any relation to the amount of



feeling left in the perpetrator (p. 26). This would perhaps be true for some of the older debt collectors whose violence has become ingrained in a lifelong behavioral pattern.

Importantly, there was considerable heterogeneity among this sample of debt collectors, in terms of their level of psychopathy and professionalism and how often they had engaged in the ‘job’. For instance, the individual rated with a PCL–R score of 21 had only participated in four collections. Though the episodes had involved grave violence, he spoke of these with guilt and reluctance, and explained that he had been under heavy drug influence. Conversely, many of the high PCL–R scorers used debt collection as their main income, often expressing pride in their ‘work’, and disgust toward those who do not settle their debts. As stated by one of the most experienced enforcers, “I have only one piece of advice: *don’t borrow money* (hard laughter).”

## **6.2 Rage-Murder**

Rage-murder represents one of the least studied categories of homicide (Meloy, 2010). In this case study of a man who committed a murder in a fit of rage, I used the AAI, the Rorschach, and psychotherapy process data to delineate an understanding of this man’s personality, explore factors triggering his murderous rage, and to develop some qualified speculations regarding the developmental roots of his violence. I also examined how the findings from this case matched formulations posed by seminal authors in this field (e.g., Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 1992; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981; Weiss al., 1960) regarding the personality structure and relational dynamics of rage-murder.

### **6.2.1 Findings from the AAI, the Rorschach, and the psychotherapy**

Unlike self-report methodologies, both the AAI and the Rorschach provide ‘in vivo’ samples of how people respond to and cope with affect eliciting material (Hesse, 2008; Weiner, 2003). Paul’s AAI was characterized by his excessive inhibition of negative affective material. This inference was based on his poor recall, exoneration of negative parental experiences, near total absence of expressed emotion, compliance with the interviewer, and heavy breathing stuttering and long pauses, signaling intense efforts to minimize and exclude negative affective information from his answers. Converging evidence for the AAI findings of significant overcontrolling elements in Paul’s personality was found in his Rorschach (e.g., low R, very low Afr) and in the clinical setting wherein Paul displayed great difficulties in expressing his emotions. Paul’s AAI was classified with compulsive compliance (A4) and delusional idealization (A7) of his mother, e.g., his presentation comprised a severe split between an all-

good semantic maternal representation and episodic-procedural descriptions of her neglect and threats of abandonment.

To elaborate, during the AAI Paul maintained an idea of a seamless, loving and protecting mother without presenting any benign childhood episodes with her to support his claim, and while his narrative showed evidence of emotional neglect, threats of abandonment, potential abuse and indications that their relationship had been too close. His idealized presentation was thus inferred to reflect an illusion (“delusional idealization”; Crittenden & Landini, 2011) created by himself to protect their relationship. That is, his delusional idealization of his mother was suggested to have provided him with a sense of comfort and cohesion, and thus the ability to keep his aggression in check and present himself as a ‘normal person’.

Building on Cartwright’s (2000) work it was proposed that these overidealized self-other representations constituted the holding aspect in Paul’s personality: A “narcissistic exoskeleton” (Cartwright, 2002) that, whilst both functional and prominent in appearance, was not anchored in any benign internalized caregiver experiences; e.g., absence of comfortable memories on the AAI, no benign human or COP Rorschach responses (see paper III for more detail). Put differently, there was no evidence that Paul’s all-good self-image formed a stable part of his internalized representational model (Crittenden, 2015). Instead, Paul’s ‘goodness’ or self-cohesion seemed to depend on his access to ‘good’ external figures and his projective identifications with such people (see paper III for more detail).

Thus far I have outlined the overcontrolling aspects in Paul’ personality, focusing on how his idealized, ‘all-good’ representations may be understood to uphold his self-cohesion. Yet the overall assessment showed a more characterologically complex profile. Specifically, in contrast to my mild initial impression and the overcontrolled features inferred from the AAI, the Rorschach portrayed Paul as a very angry, self-centered man with strong sadomasochistic urges and an inclination to bouts of sadistic rage. Paul’s divergent responses to the AAI and the Rorschach were accounted for by the differences in methodology and were also consistent with the clinical picture emerging from the therapy (see paper III for detail).

To provide a recap, Paul came across as very self-centered as the therapy progressed. He rationalized the murder, depicted the victim as a menace and himself as a valiant savior. During sessions he often tried to manipulate me into providing him with written statements so that he could get special privileges, was constantly jealous about his girlfriend, and had frequent rage-attacks with symptoms of derealization. This scenario typically unfolded with Paul entering my office complaining about harassment from fellow inmates or prison staff in an

affectless fashion, which triggered intense fear in me of being in danger of imminent attack (see paper III for a detailed account). I connected his statements to what I assumed was anger. He would deny this, but then break into bouts of intense rage after careful enquiry. In one session he only muttered the words “kill, kill”; for the most part his rage was accompanied by prolonged sadistic and murderous retributory statements directed at those who had offended him. These attacks would be particularly intense when I had cancelled the previous session. Note also that Paul for the most part complied with prison rules.

### **6.2.2 A formulation of Paul’s rage-attacks**

Integrating the diverging AAI-Rorschach data and his shifts in self-states and functioning, it was suggested that Paul’s personality makeup could be described in terms of a dual personality organization (Gallwey, 1985), characterized by a split between a fragmented, though more well-functioning surface personality, and a more concealed self, filled with rage and primitive urges. Paul’s front surface personality was inferred to consist of a compliant-idealizing ‘good’ self and a more arrogant-aggressive valiant self. These self-representations were assumed to reflect diverging methods of regulating experience and thought to stem from distinct relational experiences.

First, based on the AAI data, Paul’s arrogant and self-righteous attitude (valiant self) was conceived as an aggressive identification (A, Freud, 1936) arising in childhood as a reaction to the repeated brutalization of himself and his mother at the hands of his father, and then actualized in his adolescent paternal dispute (AAI): *“After that we had established who was boss. And he [his father] was deposed as the head wolf of the pack.”* As noted in his AAI and in his R7- III Rorschach response depicting two male adversaries in a deadly fight over a female body, Paul’s dispute with his father seemed also to involve a toxic rivalry over access to his mother. Regarding his interpersonal function and his outrage, Paul’s identification with his father’s aggression was thought to account for his entitled attitude. Yet, as highlighted in paper III, this defense drastically undermined Paul’s ability to ward off the encapsulated aspects of his aggression due to its close association with past trauma. Following this assertion, it was suggested that some of his breakdowns or in-session rage attacks were connected to ‘insults’ experienced in prison, which evoked primitive rage that he suppressed and denied. Hence, his frightening, emotionless appearance at the start of our clinical sessions.

Second, as touched on earlier and inferred from his AAI, Paul’s ‘good self’ was connected to his entrapping relationship history with his mother where he had to comply with her demands and deny his rage in order to maintain an idea of having been loved and protected

and avoid the threat of abandonment. Glasser (1996) points out how self-development and independence may become crippled by primitive anxieties in cases such as this. On the one hand, the indicators of enmeshment and unclear boundaries between Paul and his mother would give rise to fears of losing the self in the other. This fear of engulfment was also inferred from his Rorschach (see paper III for more detail). On the other hand, the threat of abandonment and being left to survive on one's own will hamper development of autonomy and engender the strong longing to merge with an ideal and comforting mother, as noted through his over-idealized maternal depiction. Trapped in such inconsistency in the relationship leaves the child forever bound, but neither emotionally close to the mother or able to separate from her, which increases anxiety and aggression (Glasser, 1996). Paul's intense anxiety and dependency was expressed directly in his AAI statement: "*There is a void (in me) present all the time, 24/7. It's hell (to be by myself).*"

More to the point, Paul's relationship history with his mother seems to have generated a template for his future relationships in which he felt entirely dependent on relationships to fill his inner void while at the same time feeling caught between fears of engulfment and abandonment (Meloy, 1992). This agonizing internal dynamic generated excessive unconscious and alienating rage mirrored in his many perceptions of mutilated vaginas on the Rorschach. Extrapolating from this dynamic in Paul to the therapeutic setting, it was suggested that some of his rage-attacks were directed at me and likely tied to my cancellation of sessions. While Paul denied any such connection and kept his idealizing stance toward me, recall that his outbursts were most intense in sessions where I had had to cancel our previous meeting.

### **6.2.3 So how do we reconcile Paul's personality and psychopathology?**

It seems evident that Paul's idealized representations provided him with a sense of cohesion and superiority, which subsequently allowed him to project a normal outward appearance. His engagements in sports, his recreational interests, and some longer job periods, indicate that Paul, for stretches in his life, was able to sustain a fairly normal life. However, his lack of education, unstable job history, inability to implement many of his projects, his alcohol abuse, panic attacks, and many girlfriends suggested that his self-structure was highly volatile. This inference was further supported by findings from the Rorschach and his tendency to collapse into bouts of sadistic rage in emotionally stirring situations.

Considering the diagnostic picture, though, Paul's Rorschach responses indicated a susceptibility for psychotic-like lapses in reality-testing (e.g., PEC, DR2), his predominant use of splitting, idealization, and devaluation suggested that he primarily dealt with experience

through borderline level defenses (Kernberg, 1992). In the therapy, Paul's manipulative tendencies, and his sadistic, unceasing rage suggested further that he mainly functioned as an unstable psychopath (Meloy, 1997). He seemed also to be aware of these malevolent aspects of his functioning and stated toward the end of therapy that he thought he was a psychopath. Yet, institutions may have general characteristics that evoke and reinforce a patient's underlying psychopathology (Gallwey, 1985). Psychopathic states, like those displayed by Paul, may be triggered by stress as a defense against more disintegratory anxieties (Hale & Dhar, 2008). An evaluation of Paul should, thus, take into consideration the setting in which his psychopathic-like symptoms manifested.

The prison in which Paul found himself was renowned for its division between prisoners and personnel, its insensitive and suspicious attitude toward inmates, and for housing some of the country's most hardened criminals. I am certain Paul felt intimidated by his fellow inmates, that he experienced the environment as hostile and uncaring, and that he often felt left to fend for himself. His tendency to attribute meaning to situations based on his emotional expectations (DR2), also meant that he often conceived the prison's dismissal of his appeals for enhanced settings as personal (PER) and sadistically motivated. He often told me that prison brought back memories of his threatening father. Apart from me and a few others perhaps, there were few 'benign figures' that Paul could rely on to sustain his image of being a 'normal' individual. Thus, relative to his functioning, Paul's in-session rage and manipulative attempts could be understood as a way of anchoring himself and defending himself against the internal chaos imposed on him by the emotionally stirring prison settings.

Nevertheless, though the prison setting may have contributed to a deterioration of Paul's ability to contain his fear and rage, there are reasons to suggest that the malevolent aspects of his functioning were evident prior to the murder. Through the course of therapy, he did not appear to have any benign attachments and his relationship with his girlfriend centered on sex and dominance. His re-imprisonment for sadistically imbued abuse of a new girlfriend a few years after his release further supports this assertion. Based on the overall data, it was asserted that Paul's personality could be described in terms of a psychopathy spectrum disorder (Hare, 2003; Meloy, 1988), but that he did not display the level of coldness and misbehavior of those at the upper end of this continuum. Instead, Paul's psychopathic and sadistic tendencies were conceived as an effective, though crippling, trauma-based strategy, enacted to manage his shame and fears of loss and abandonment when in intimate relationships (Glasser, 1996).

#### **6.2.4 A formulation of the motives for the murder**

As described in paper III, the murder ensued after Paul's acquaintance had made sexually offensive claims about Paul's girlfriend. Paul fetched a knife and the situation rapidly escalated into a deadly battle ending in Paul stabbing his acquaintance 18 times. Paul claimed that the victim was threatening, and that he acted in self-defense. Though the statements made by the victim obviously were insulting, the excessive and disproportionate discharge of affect strongly suggested that the murder was the outcome of several factors coming together.

Specifically, it was suggested that his murderous impulse was triggered by a massive reenactment of his unresolved childhood experiences. The explosive affect associated with these memories breached his excessive defenses and was acted out on the victim. It was also assumed that the victim and the situation were imbued with certain symbolic features, which revived Paul's childhood representations of his self in relation to his threatening father. In that split second, Paul most likely perceived the victim and the overall situation as extremely threatening, colored by the perception of his father and their past toxic conflict over his mother. The key dynamic and motivation of the murder was, thus, understood to involve an excessive escalation of jealousy under the threat of impending loss (Gallwey, 1985).

#### **6.2.5 Comparison with previous findings**

Several findings appear consistent with previous research in this area. Like most rage-murderers, Paul had not previously engaged in serious violence, and his sudden and brutal murder of an acquaintance was provoked by a relatively innocent incident, and not driven by any psychotic or instrumental motive. Clinically speaking, Paul's initial mild and stoic appearance, his academic aspirations and insistence on being different from fellow inmates, and his dependence on female company, is consistent with the narcissistic and dependent traits noted in such offenders (Blackburn, 1986; Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 1992). His attachment history, comprising a hostile and absent father together with dependence on a neglectful mother in an otherwise intact family, has also been reported in the backgrounds of other rage-murderers (Satten et al., 1960).

Paul's (AAI) idealization of his mother in order to see himself as loved and relatively normal is in line with Cartwright's proposal that such idealized representations form a "narcissistic exoskeleton" that shields the offender's internalized representations of self and parental figures associated with shame and rage. This defensive personality configuration also appears to correspond with Megargee's (1966) overcontrolled offender type.

In keeping with the formulation of these authors (e.g., Cartwright, 2002; Megargee, 1966; Meloy, 1992), I understood Paul's murderous actions in terms of a sequence in which the victim's insults triggered a sudden buildup of fear and rage associated with his toxic and disassociated relational scenarios. These emotions then breached his overcontrolled defenses and were acted out in a violent attack to eliminate the perceived threat to the self.

Given that Cartwright's (2001, 2002) study represents some of the more recent work in this area, a closer comparison between Paul and the subjects described by Cartwright seemed merited. Apart from the mentioned similarities, Cartwright's subjects appeared better adjusted than Paul, with higher levels of education, more stable work histories, and no previous incarcerations, or any history with rage-attacks. Although both 'samples' presented with an all-good "narcissistic exoskeleton", the split-off raging, arrogant, manipulative, and sadistic relational style manifested in Paul's case was not observed by Cartwright.

To elaborate, Cartwright described the personality makeup of his subjects as consisting of a horizontal split between an upper layer of "good objects", which enveloped and concealed the internalized bad objects through splitting and projection of bad experiences. While I understood Paul's personality in similar terms, his self-identity or the "upper layer of his personality makeup" was more fragmented and complex in the sense that it contained an "all-good self," and a more aggressive, perverted, entitled self. In the cases described by Cartwright (2002) this aggressive-narcissistic identification appeared split-off and was inferred to remain dormant in the personality, protected by the all-good object system (p. 116-126).

However, the more perverted-aggressive aspects noted in his personality makeup have been described in other studies in this area. For instance, Satten et al. (1960) observed shallow emotions, violent fantasy life and sexually perverted elements in several of their cases. Similarly, Dicke (1994) cited in Schlesinger (2007), discussed catathymic violence in individuals who like Paul had an attachment history involving abandonment, emotional abuse, or maternal sexual abuse. These subjects exploded often in a dissociative state in a direct assault against intimates or strangers. Thus, the dissimilar findings across studies, including the findings on Paul, may be taken to imply that there could be significant heterogeneity even within this subset of offenders.

### **6.2.6 Summary and conclusion**

In this study I have suggested that the nature of Paul's impulsive and brutal murder of an acquaintance falls within a category of homicide variously termed as "*catathymia*," "*rage-type*," or "*sudden*" murder (Cartwright, 2002; Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981; Weiss al., 1960).

Based on the assessment data and influenced by past formulations in this area, I asserted that Paul's murderous actions occurred as a result of several factors coming together. A threatening conflict between Paul and his victim ensued. The victim and the situation symbolically resembled Paul's past toxically triangulated conflict with his father over access to his mother. The explosive uncontained rage and fear associated with past trauma swamped his overcontrolled defenses and resulted in his murderous actions.

Although Paul displayed many of the characteristics observed in other rage-murderers, these individuals are rarely found to carry out more violence (Meloy, 1997). Comparatively, Paul's low formal education, unstable work history, alcohol abuse, history with rage attacks – and especially the sadistic-psychopathic elements revealed in his Rorschach, his therapy with me, and in his new criminal charge – indicates that he was altogether more disturbed than the subjects described by other authors. Clinicians and forensic examiners should, thus, be mindful of the potential heterogeneity that may exist even within this more homogenous subset of offenders.

### **6.3 Methodological considerations**

The inferences presented in this thesis must be considered relative to various limitations and methodological issues. More specifically, the soundness and generalizability of the presented findings may be affected by several caveats relating to design, assessment instruments, and the statistical and qualitative analyses.

#### **6.3.1 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement procedure (John & Benet-Martinez, 2000). Two different aspects of reliability, e.g., test-retest stability and interrater agreement, seem particularly relevant for the assessment procedures utilized in this investigation. The reliability estimates reported on in the between group study contrasting debt collectors with other violent groups are in concert with those reported elsewhere in the literature (see paper II for details). However, interrater agreement was not calculated for any of the measures in the two single-case studies (paper I and III).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) stress that the reliability of one's findings may be enhanced through a transparent analysis of the material. For instance, a provision of clear examples of the material and its coding criteria allows external evaluators to determine the credibility of the analysis themselves. Relative to the credibility of the analysis in paper I and III, the coding and classification of the Rorschach and the AAI protocols were illustrated via various examples of the raw data. The consensus scoring of the R-PAS protocols was also subjected to an external



evaluation by international experts during the review process, an evaluation which led to an adjustment of our initial scoring. Thus, the transparency of the coded material together with the external coding evaluation provides overall credibility to the reliability of the AAI and Rorschach findings. However, the quality of the psychotherapy data used in paper III is more uncertain given that it was based on my notes from each session.

### **6.3.2 Validity and design issues**

The validity of research findings is not a property of the methods we use, but of the kinds of understandings or knowledge we construct (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Validity means that we can be confident that the concepts and inferences we have constructed account for the phenomena they were meant to describe. There are several concerns about the validity of the findings presented here. These will be discussed with regards to the methodological designs and the validity typology outlined by Shadish et al. (2002).

#### ***Validity in single case studies (paper I & III)***

A case study is a systematic investigation of a contemporary phenomenon at the individual level (Yin, 2013). The use of single case methodology in the field of forensic psychology and psychiatry has been avoided for some time due to misconceptions about its scientific status (Robinson, 2012). Yet even though case-based research is limited – in common with any other methodological design – case studies may generate solid information that may be used to validate previous findings, or generate novel ideas that help nuance, expand or question our understanding of a given phenomenon (Blashfield & Livesley, 1991; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Kazdin, 1981).

In both single cases presented here the key aim was essentially threefold; to delineate an understanding of the protagonist's personality makeup, and then use this outline to develop a formulation of their developmental history and their respective violence. Starting with the first aim, the soundness of the findings and the subsequent inferences about the personality makeup of the two participants examined rest, to a large extent, on how well the measures used capture the underlying constructs of interest.

*Construct validity* refers to the extent to which an operationalization – through some form of assessment procedure – reflects the underlying construct (Shadish et al., 2002). Due to spatial limitations the discussion of this topic will be restricted to aspects of the AAI and Rorschach findings. Although there is a fairly solid empirical AAI basis for the validity of many of the extended DMM patterns (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Baldoni et al., 2018), the most

extreme DMM strategies (A7-8, C7-8) have not been systematically addressed by earlier research to any extent. Thus their validity remains ambiguous.

Establishing validity with regards to a construct may be described as an ongoing process that involves an evaluation of the construct's *reliability, content, structure, and the external aspects* (Messick, 1995). While single case studies are recognized as an important tool in mapping of the validity of a psychopathological construct (Yin, 2013), settling construct validity confidently is a task that requires a range of methodologies including statistical analysis. Hence the single case methodology applied here may only serve as a starting point for examining some of these aspects. This limitation aside, some aspects related to the reliability, the content dimension, and the external aspects of the extreme DMM patterns, are worth considering via the two cases described in paper I and III.

Regarding reliability and content, recall that the participants in paper I and III were both classified with extreme patterns. That is, the participant in paper I was classified with mixed A7-8/C7-8 strategies, while the participant in paper III was coded with an A7 pattern. The content aspect of construct validation concerns whether the measure – in this case the AAI – covers the underlying construct. With regards to the operationalization of the extreme patterns, the DMM-AAI classificatory procedure has been refined to capture the A7-8, C7-8 constructs via specific discourse markers (see Crittenden & Landini, 2011). Relative to this investigation, papers I and III offer several examples of these patterns (or constructs) and the rationale for their coding. This goes to show that the content validity aspects of these patterns are covered by the DMM-AAI coding procedures. The AAI coding examples also provide support for the reliability of these patterns. Taken together, these aspects of reliability and validity provide some confidence in the AAI findings reported here.

The external aspect of construct validity includes convergent and discriminative validity as well as criterion relevance (Shadish et al., 2002). While the AAI and the Rorschach findings were more complementary than convergent, especially paper III, there was considerable overlap in both cases with regards to the level of pathology. These AAI-Rorschach convergences were covered in the discussion section above; in paper I both methods evinced features associated with psychopathic functioning (e.g., defenses and aggressive identifications) and trauma (unresolved trauma AAI; elevated trauma index Rorschach); in paper III the AAI and Rorschach converged with regards to emotional overcontrol and trauma. Though greater convergence could have been expected given that both methods sample implicit mental processes, they also differ widely in the ambiguity of the test stimuli. Regarding external criteria,

the level of pathology displayed on the AAI and the Rorschach aligns well with documented external measures of psychopathology in both cases, e.g., violence and personality disorder.

The major limitations of these two case reports may be summarized in two points. First, the *ex post facto* single-case design used here precludes causal inferences regarding the participants' developmental history and their violent behavior. Such questions may only be tested through longitudinal and experimental designs. Second, aside from making use of independent Rorschach and AAI scorers, the inferences and interpretations of the tests and the description of psychotherapeutic process (only paper III) come from a single researcher who served as both examiner and therapist (the latter in paper III). I cannot rule out the possibility that my inquiry in the test situation, my analysis and my write-up of the data, were influenced by my unconscious expectations. I have tried to be mindful of my vulnerability to biases and cognitive heuristics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), but that is certainly no guarantee. The fact that both papers have been scrutinized by independent reviewers with no personal investment in their publication adds some reassurance to the soundness of the inferences.

### ***Validity in the group comparison study (paper II)***

In paper II we described the personality makeup of a sample of criminal debt collectors and examined how findings on this group compared with two other violent offender groups, using the PCL-R and the Rorschach as independent measures. There are several hazards regarding the validity of this study. I will start by addressing statistical validity, then construct validity, more specifically the validity of the Rorschach markers of aggression.

A study may be said to have *statistical validity* when one can infer that the relationship between variables is statistically significant and not spurious or random (Shadish et al., 2002). To speak not only of statistical, but also of 'clinical' significance, an additional prerequisite is that the relationship should reach a certain magnitude (Jacobsen & Truax, 1991). Doubts over statistical validity increase the risk of rejecting a true null hypothesis (type 1 error) or accepting a false null hypothesis (type 2 error). The level of significance (i.e., p-values) indicates the probability that we can observe the effect in the sample if there is no such effect in the population. Yet lack of significance may be influenced by low power and does not mean there is no covariation between cause and effect (Shadish et al., 2002).

We utilized a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine possible between group differences on selected Rorschach variables and the PCL-R. Statistical validity in this study was maintained through significance testing and calculation of effect size. The sample size in this study was relatively small and the *n* was somewhat unequal across the

groups. Although the statistical test of our major hypotheses yielded significant results and the effect size estimates were in the moderate-to-large range, we observed some non-significant trends (e.g., mean Human Movement responses were larger among the debt collectors than they were in the other group). Thus, a larger sample size would have been ideal.

Based on the amalgam of aggressive percepts (AgC, AgPot, AgPast, SM) in the Rorschach records of these offenders, we inferred that aggression served as a potent underlying motivational factor for their violence and choice of debt collection as a ‘profession’. Yet, while the utility of AgC has been demonstrated (Gacono et al., 2008; Kivisto & Swan, 2013; Mihura et al., 2013), the AgPast, and particularly the AgPot and SM variables, have received less scientific scrutiny. While our inference that many of these offenders enjoyed their malice (elevated AgPot, SM) is clinically sound, more work is needed to establish the validity of these indices, hence limiting some of the confidence that we may place in our inference.

### ***External validity***

External validity refers to the extent to which the presented findings may apply and be generalized to a broader population (Shadish et al., 2002). I will first consider the findings on the criminal debt collectors and then move to the rage-murder study.

#### ***Criminal debt collectors***

First, there is no data on the number of debt collectors in our society, or how many of these are incarcerated and potentially available for study. Our academic knowledge on this offender group is also very limited. In other words, as the population is undefined, there is no way to know whether the sample is representative.

Second, though we recruited nearly all the subjects available to us in a prison context, this was a sample of convenience, not a random sample. There are also several sampling concerns. Debt collection is a daily activity within the criminal environment and most individuals who enforce money due from a failed criminal transaction would not call themselves debt collectors. The inclusion criterion in this study was set to participation in three or more enforcement operations. Whether this number is too liberal or too strict is up for discussion. Moreover, the participants were identified by prison personnel with specific knowledge about their role as enforcers. The participants recruited via psychologists had self-reported such activities. Whether they exaggerated or even falsely admitted to such work cannot be ruled out. The assessment was also conducted in a repressive prison setting that may have influenced their response style and the subsequent findings. Thus, it is not unlikely that the debt collectors recruited for this study differ systematically from other debt collectors.

Random sampling is not the sole rationale for generalization across individuals in between-group designs (Kazdin, 1981), and there are some aspects of this investigation that may enhance the external validity of this study. Informal stipulations offered by law enforcement officers with insight into the criminal environment (personal communication, May 2021) suggest that there are about 30 criminal debt collectors operating in Eastern Norway. If this number is a fairly accurate approximation, the sample size ( $N = 27$ ) could be viewed as quite large, even taking into account that the recruitment and testing lasted for five years (2006-2011). Note also that only two of the identified enforcers declined, and that the sample was heterogeneous in terms of age, ethnicity, level of professionalism, and whether the participants worked independently or as part of a criminal gang. Thus, even if the sampling in this study is permeated by statistical, logic and setting issues that limit causal inferences about the population at large, the findings may hold true for incarcerated debt collectors (in Norway).

#### *Rage-murder*

While the commonly held notion that one cannot generalize based on one case is certainly true with regard to statistical inferences, single-case researchers argue that case findings may be used to build deductive inferences akin to the one studied (Blashfield & Livesley, 1991; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2006, Yin, 2013). However, as pointed out by Gerring (2006), if one is to use a case to suggest something broader than itself, the chosen case must be similar (in some respects) to a larger population. If it is purely idiosyncratic (unique), it will not inform about anything lying outside its own borders. A study based on a nonrepresentative [sic] sample has no (or very little) external validity (p. 248).

Regarding group affiliation, I have argued that Paul may be defined as a rage-murderer. Thus, the question here concerns whether the findings from the case findings on Paul can add to the current conceptualization (Cartwright, 2002) of this offender group. Taking one step back, it's worth considering that Cartwright's theory on rage-type murder is built on evidence from single cases and small sample findings without control groups. Thus research with larger groups is needed to further establish its validity. Nevertheless, case studies with similar outcomes such as this can be said to support the hypotheses and thus serve to increase the overall soundness of the theory (Yin, 2013). In other words, the findings from this case –especially the AAI findings – offer support for Cartwright's concept of a “narcissistic exoskeleton” and its mechanism of keeping aggression in check.

The sadistic and psychopathic elements in Paul's personality are more challenging to conceptualize within Cartwright's framework and imply that Paul represents what Flyvbjerg

(2006) has termed an extreme or atypical case. Such cases may be used to confirm, refute or elaborate on previous conceptualizations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This generalizing principle is based on the premise that the characteristic found in the extreme case may also be valid for other (many or few) cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, the discrepant findings in this investigation may be taken to suggest that rage-type murderers are more heterogeneous than implied by Cartwright's sample. However, this inferred generalization must be weighed against various threats to the internal validity of this study. That is, in addition to the mentioned biases against verification, and the potential influences on Paul's response style caused by my examination and the prison setting itself, the findings may also have been influenced by maturational processes – in this case changes occurring after the murder. While both the Rorschach and the AAI are thought to measure fairly stable features (Hesse, 2008; Mihura et al., 2013), the possibility that the overall assessment data looked different prior to the murder or in a different context cannot be ruled out.

## **7. Implications and conclusions**

Despite various methodological caveats, there are several implications that may be inferred from the study findings. These implications pertain to partly overlapping aspects in the field of violent offender research.

### **7.1 The violent offender population**

This thesis contributes to a further refinement of the offender literature by shedding light on the personality and violence of the ‘criminal debt collector’ and the ‘rage murderer’. These under researched perpetrators belong to separate subgroups e.g., rage-murderers and psychopathy spectrum offenders, who are considered radically different in terms of their personality makeup, their type and proclivity for violence, as well as their criminal careers (Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 2012). Aside from proposing some further nuances to our conceptualization of the offender population, the psychopathic elements in Paul’s case also raise questions as to whether there exists a subset of rage-murderers with a more complex personality makeup. If this assertion is accurate, one may also assume that there might be a subset of rage-murderers who show somewhat similar personality features to debt collectors, and thus, that the distinction between rage-type murderers and psychopathy spectrum offenders may not be as sharp as conceived.

To illustrate, comparing Paul (paper III) to the enforcer Eric (paper I) we find that both displayed core emotional and interpersonal psychopathic features. That is, both came across, to a varying degree, as very self-centered, emotionally shallow and manipulative, with low empathy and no regret for their malevolence. Yet, even though their level of psychopathy and the way they expressed their malevolent dispositions differed radically – with Eric being more psychopathic and violently versatile – the level of psychopathy in Paul’s case is comparable to some of the moderately psychopathic debt collectors in the sample. This comparison illustrates how psychopathic offenders are themselves heterogeneous in terms of the type and the nature of their violence (Blackburn, 2009). More so, it underscores the limitations of the psychopathy construct and its inventories, and thus, the need for a multimethod approach to refine personality assessment (Mihura, 2012).

This investigation demonstrates the utility of the AAI and the Rorschach, and how these measures may be used to map implicit aspects of mental functioning not measurable via self-

report methodologies (Hesse, 2008; Weiner, 2003). The two case studies show that the combined use of the AAI and the Rorschach may offer unique, incremental information on offenders' internal representations, predominant affects and regulation, defensive operations, relational style, self-perception, and identity formation. A synthesis of this data can yield a more nuanced formulation on the relationship between personality functioning and violence than can be gauged through self-report methodologies. An inclusion of AAI and Rorschach data in offender assessment could, thus, have important implications for theory development as well as clinical-forensic practice. Specifically, the Rorschach and the AAI may be used to identify covert violent mechanisms and subtle differences existing within offender subgroups, and thus enhance our understanding of these often misperceived and misunderstood individuals (McGauley, Adshead, & Sarkar, 2007).

## **7.2 Theory development**

This investigation offers novel propositions relevant to the development and understanding of psychopathy, instrumental violence, and rage-murder. These ideas have been outlined earlier, so I will just provide a brief recap. First, based on DMM theory (Crittenden, 2015) and the assessment findings, it was suggested that attachment may influence and underpin psychopathic development and instrumental violence via different processes. Exposure to severe emotional neglect may give rise to extreme Type A self-protective strategies involving emotional detachment and a perception of others as objects; a pattern of unpredictable and deceitful parenting may elicit extreme Type C self-protective strategies characterized by cool hate, spite and contempt for others. Finally, the most extreme expression of psychopathy is expected to reflect the co-occurrence of two developmental histories (those associated with A and C). The instrumental violence used by these extremely endangered and psychopathic individuals is thought to be undergirded by differing mental processes characterized either by emotional detachment (Type A) or cool hate and deeply felt contempt (Type C).

Knowledge of how attachment contributes to shaping of the overcontrolled personality makeup found in rage-offenders is limited (Cartwright, 2002). The case findings on Paul suggest a developmental history in which displays of frustration or anger during childhood evoked severely punitive parental reactions (neglect, threats of abandonment) and a coping strategy characterized by compliance and severe dissociation of anger and negative affect (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). This framework is largely consistent with other research in this area (Satten et al., 1960) and resembles Tanay's (1969) depiction of a sample of men who had committed "dissociative homicides". He described them as having an "overdeveloped"



superego (due to “violent child-rearing practices”) that was “intolerant of any overt expressions of aggression” (p. 151). Needless to say, the legitimacy of this developmental outline can only be established via large-scale and longitudinal research.

### **7.3 Risk assessment**

Practitioners assigned with the task of assessing dangerousness in the two offender types examined here are confronted with different challenges. In case of the *criminal debt collector*, it’s worth a noting that debt collection is not an illegal pursuit per se. Thus, in the cases where criminal debt collectors are under evaluation, the assessment question is most likely tied to the probability of violence generally as opposed to violence tied to debt collection. That said, past or active involvement in enforcement activities is a salient indicator that the examinee has used violence previously given the nature of this line of ‘work’. The empirical link between instrumental violence and psychopathy (Meloy, 2012) also increases the likelihood of psychopathy spectrum pathology in the examinee.

The level of psychopathy is most soundly evaluated via the PCL-R (Hare, 2003). Yet, Rorschach and/or AAI data will provide practitioners with a much richer base from which to formulate hypotheses on how implicit identifications, motives and primitive defenses contribute to personality function and violence. Specifically, a key takeaway from this investigation is that the AAI and the Rorschach may be useful for identifying markers associated with different modes of violent behavior. For instance, AAI-Rorschach markers of unresolved trauma, uncontained anger, and a strong aggressive identification in a criminal debt collector, signal: 1) an easily triggered propensity for violent action to shore up an inflated self-image during interpersonal disputes; 2) a susceptibility to sudden intrusions of trauma-based violence in contexts reminiscent of past threatening relational scenarios; 3), an integration of aggression and violence as part of the examinee’s self-perception and identity.

However, while this picture may hold true for some enforcers, practitioners should be mindful of the heterogeneity within this population in terms of their level of psychopathy and propensity for violence. Some may only use violence during ‘job assignments’ and participate due to their allegiance to the gang, deflecting feelings of guilt via substance use or alcohol. Others may relish in the opportunity to dish out their malevolence on ‘deserving victims’. Highly disciplined debt collectors may utilize enforcement strategies that fall below or on the border of what is sanctioned by law and otherwise live fairly well-regulated lives.

Assessment of dangerousness in the *rage-type offender* is especially challenging given that the typical predictors of violence are absent. In the great majority of the reported cases

(Cartwright, 2002; Meloy, 2010) there is no significant history of violence, aggressive attitudes, serious mental illness, or substance abuse. The assessment is further complicated by the apparent 'normality' of these individuals and their poor awareness of anger and dysphoria during conflict. Thus, in most risk evaluations the offender has unfortunately already committed the act. However, there are some insights one needs to be mindful of. Most importantly, perhaps, is knowledge about the empirical association between depression and homicide (Fazel et al., 2015). Depressive symptoms prior to the homicide figure prominently in most cases of rage-type murder (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981). Enquiries about homicidal thoughts during evaluations of clinically depressed patients, particularly if depression is treatment resistant, may thus save lives (Meloy, 2010). Knowledge of the distinction between acute and chronic catathymia may be helpful. Detecting and preventing chronic catathymia may be easier given that these patients experience homicidal or homicidal/suicidal ideation over the course of days, weeks, months or even years (Revitch & Schlesinger, 1981). Practitioners should also take note of Schlesinger's (2007) observation that some future offenders make threats to explode. Such threats should be evaluated carefully.

There is a commonly held notion among researchers that rage-type offenders rarely carry out new violent offences (Cartwright, 2002, Meloy, 1997). While this notion is overall consistent with the few cases I have seen, there is no statistical evidence to support or refute such a claim. Indeed, Lucas (2008) presents a case of a man with a personality configuration akin to Cartwright's subjects, where the perpetrator committed a second murder 20 years after the first. Both homicides were precipitated by depressive symptomatology. Thus, even if Paul's violent recidivation makes him somewhat of an atypical case, and the risk among rage-type offenders is generally low, the possible heterogeneity among these perpetrators suggests that their potential for violence should be evaluated carefully.

The formulation of risk factors in Paul's case is presented more thoroughly in paper III. The most significant takeaway was how Paul's responses to the AAI and the Rorschach provided a framework for understanding the underlying dynamics of the murder. And more particularly, how his potential for violence in intimate relations and the subsequent enactment of this potential toward his girlfriend post-release, was reflected in his Rorschach responses.

#### **7.4 Clinical implications**

Papers I and III detail specific ideas on therapeutic technique and management related to the two cases examined. Here I will present some clinical observations that apply to the criminal debt collector and rage-type murders more broadly.

*The criminal debt collector* is rarely seen by mental health professionals for several reasons. They are often secretive and shun situations that may expose their ‘work’. They may not experience psychiatric symptoms that would push them to seek out treatment, or they deal with their symptoms via drugs and sedatives. In cases where these individuals show up at the clinic, they are in my experience most often referred for evaluation of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder or issues with aggression, inner tension, or low testosterone levels after steroid-abuse. In these instances, they typically seek medical (e.g., stimulants, sedatives, testosterone) rather psychological treatment. Seeing a psychologist may be perceived as a weakness. Few see their lifestyle of violence and threats as problematic or as a symptom of psychopathology.

Indeed, whether the callous mindset that goes into criminal enforcement is a sign of psychopathology is a matter of perspective. Criminal enforcement is essential for maintaining order within the world of organized crime, even if the enforcers’ intimidation and violence is criminal and viewed as destructive and morally unacceptable by civilized society. In a similar vein, the callous-aggressiveness and the disturbed attachment patterns that underpin their violence may be perceived as a personality disorder (ICD/DSM), and/or as successful evolutionary adaptation to danger and deceit (Crittenden, 2015; Karterud & Kongerslev, 2019; Meloy, 2012). In other words, the criminal debt collector epitomizes cases in which the line between perverted or dubious morality, psychopathology, and adaptation-versus-maladaptation, may not be so easily drawn.

Given these dilemmas, practitioners faced with the task of assessing characterological disturbance in a criminal debt collector may consider using Juni’s (2010, 2014) diagnostic guidelines: Evaluate the level of compartmentalization and motivational forces involved in each case. Are they primarily driven by aggression? What level of entitlement is there? Do they enjoy inflicting pain? Is their aggressive behavioral style confined to ‘work’ or characteristic of multiple settings and relationships? Are guilt and remorse present or absent? How affiliated is the person with their work i.e., how central is criminal debt collection, and omnipotent power, to the person’s self-perception and identity?

Criminal debt collectors are skeptical and paranoid often for good reasons, and the assessor should expect a distorted presentation of their role in criminal activities and their relationship toward violence. Thus, a sound picture of the personality makeup of the criminal debt collector depends on an integration of collateral information with clinical and test-data (Nørbech et al., 2016). Choice of treatment settings and modality should be considered relative to the level of psychopathy and the client’s inclination for violence.

The PCL-R (Hare, 2003) is best suited for evaluating psychopathy, yet it depends on collateral information that practitioners in private practice or a public health service may not have access to. In such settings, clinicians will have to lean on their own countertransference reactions for guidance. Feelings of fear should be taken seriously as a sign of the potential of violence (Meloy, 1988). Administration of the Rorschach and the AAI may provide clinicians with more firm evidence for making treatment decisions. Though not designed for diagnosing psychopathy, these measures sample processes linked with psychopathic functioning that the examinee may not acknowledge or wish to reveal (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; Gacono & Meloy, 1994).

Attempts to treat severely psychopathic individuals are not advised (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014), and should only be undertaken in close collaboration with a treatment-team that recognizes the hazards of working with such patients, and in settings that ensure the physical safety of both parties. Treatment planning is critical for management of threatening and deceitful patients (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014). The plan should be based on a multimethod approach used to develop a comprehensive picture of the patient, their needs, and the risks at play (Yakeley, 2018). AAI and Rorschach data may, in addition to the above, also be used to tailor person-specific therapeutic interventions and provide ideas for how to form a treatment alliance (see paper I and III for more detail). The value of practice in the management of frightening countertransference reactions and boundary setting cannot be overstated. Meloy and Yakeley (2014) outline typical countertransference reactions. Chakhssi, Kersten, de Ruiter, and Bernstein (2014) offer useful treatment strategies designed to deal with such challenges.

Regarding psychopathic enforcers, it's worth noting that burgeoning treatment research on psychopathy implies that prognosis may be less dark than previously assumed (Polaschek & Skeem, 2018). Yet, those few that depend on acts of grave physical cruelty as their main source of pleasure and comfort should likely be considered as beyond the reach of any treatment intervention (Stone, 2009). We have very little in-depth knowledge on these most petrifying individuals. Whether some may 'work' as enforcers is possible. Only two people in this study openly admitted to the occasional abuse and torture of indebted victims for personalized pleasure. Both were severely psychopathic, but probably not at the level of the group referred to above. Moreover, while many of the enforcers in this study likely enjoyed punishing victims, very few had pain as their primary, personalized goal. For Eric (paper I), who was also among the most psychopathically disturbed in this sample, his expressed sadistic delight seemed more based on power than suffering. While his treatment amenability was questionable, there were

some benign features in his personality that might have suggested a potential for change under proper treatment conditions (see paper I for details).

Although elevated psychopathy is to be expected among debt collectors, their violence is perpetrated within a culture that endorses and expects brutality (Felson et al., 1994), and their violence and coercion may be confined to ‘work’. Abuse of drugs and steroids is common and may be a factor in their use of violence (Fabian, 2010). Thus, disaggregating the influence of personality from drugs and contextual factors on violence is an important part of evaluating the level of personality pathology. I have encountered a few debt collectors who sought treatment after experiencing post-traumatic symptoms (e.g., nightmares and anxiety), related to their acts of cruelty. While they typically denied feelings of remorse, these symptoms of unacknowledged fear and guilt (Stein, 2007) suggest a potential for change.

Criminal enforcers are far from ideal patients and practitioners are well advised to evaluate treatment requests with suspicion. These individuals operate in a hidden world characterized by danger and treachery, alien to the ordinary experience of psychotherapists. Their ability to mimic and read emotions allows some enforcers to project a benign image that may sway even experienced therapists. Their unordinary life may also evoke curiosity and excitement that swiftly turns the debt collector into a ‘special patient’. Therapists should, therefore, monitor their own antisocial tendencies and moral compass before proceeding (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014). Note also that the lives of these patients may change on a whim. Thus while the treatment may commence according to plan, events outside therapy could alter the treatment relationship dramatically, and therapist may suddenly find themselves in a threatening situation, having to deal with a hostile and suspicious patient who may have revealed ‘too much’ information. A crisis plan should, therefore, be in place before proceeding.

Finally, a realization of the difficulties involved in changing to fit into normal society is also important. For the debt collector this means leaving behind a lifestyle filled with feelings of excitement and omnipotence. Many have also been the object of admiration and worship and may, for the only time in their lives, have felt a sense of value and ‘respect’. Ordinary life by contrast can be experienced as uneventful. The risk of depression and subsequent relapse should, thus, not be undermined. While some may forever be stuck in a life of danger and brutality, I know of several cases of hardened and brutal debt collectors who have been able to transform themselves, through religious or spiritual awakening, or via psychotherapy. Lastly, the harsh reality of the life of the criminal debt collector is far from the glamorous world depicted in Hollywood movies. Eric suffered the fate of several enforcers in Norway and abroad (Shaw & Skywalker, 2016) and was killed ‘at work’.

*Rage-type murderers* pose very different treatment challenges than those that may transpire in work with enforcers. According to Hyatt-Williams (1998) and Cartwright (2002), the foremost obstacle to any pre- or post-offence therapeutic advance concerns precisely the overcontrolling nature of their personalities, wherein their aggression or internalized system of bad objects (Cartwright, 2002), is denied and kept in check via rigid defense operations. The self is perceived as all good. Badness is externalized and attributed onto situational factors and other people. Engaging people in therapy who don't experience or externalize blame for their anger will prove difficult. And in the case of the rage-type offender it's fair to say that we know more of what not to do, than what actually works.

Cartwright (2002, p. 178-184) outlines some key observations that may be helpful to clinicians. Although rage offenders are most usually mild and non-threatening toward clinicians, their pronounced difficulties with the expression and symbolization of mental states frequently makes therapy a frustrating task. I have spent many long hours eager to help such patients see how the murder may 'logically' have been precipitated by a gradual buildup of shame and rage triggered by several humiliating events, to little or no avail. Some may deny the very notion that they could have had a motive for the murder.

Whereas a healthier integration of aggression and a working through of the murder is the ideal treatment goal (Hyatt-Williams, 1998), sentiments such as the above illustrate the characteristic divide in the psyche of rage-murderers, and how external efforts to connect with the disavowed parts must be shut down instantly to protect their all-good self-image. An early focus on connecting the murder to internal states may trigger overwhelming anxiety and shame that may result in a further encapsulation of aggression (Cartwright, 2002). According to Cartwright, therapists should instead focus their attention on helping such patients build a capacity to identify and tolerate painful mental states in the here and now, and then help them to reflect on their way of communicating and how their interpersonal style may affect others.

In accordance with the general principles of forensic psychotherapy<sup>22</sup> more specific work with the murder (Hyatt-Williams, 1998) is typically reserved for the final treatment stages. Helping patients see the murder in context of their developmental history may promote the necessary means for them to tolerate the dread that may arise during such work (Day et al., 2005). A successful treatment outcome – where patients have been able to take in the painful reality of their act including authentic mourning of the victim – may also serve as a significant

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<sup>22</sup> This step-by-step treatment approach is largely on a par with the general principles of forensic psychotherapy (Welldon & Van Velsen, 1996), a branch of psychotherapy adapted to therapeutic work with offenders.

preventive measure that reduces the probability of future acts of violence. Hyatt-Williams (1998) has eloquently termed this a changing of their *blueprint for murder* (p. 25-26).

Finally, while this treatment sketch may guide work with atypical cases such as Paul, the threatening challenges that transpired in my treatment with him would require an incorporation of the treatment and management recommendations tailored to psychopathically disturbed patients (Meloy & Yakely, 2014). Differentiating between offenders and identifying atypical cases like Paul may not be feasible through clinical interview alone. Indeed, if I had integrated the AAI and Rorschach data with my initial, frightening countertransference before commencing with the treatment of Paul, I would have been more mindful of the challenges ahead. While I am grateful for the experience, I would not have ventured on with the therapy again without the support of a close collaborative team.

## **7.5 Concluding comments**

Our understanding of seriously violent men is still limited. This thesis contributes to the field of offender research through an exploration of the psychological makeup of men who take on a role as criminal debt collectors and men who kill in a fit of rage without previous violence or overt signs of mental illness. Both are enigmatic figures of violent crime that evoke fear and alienation. The criminal debt collector is even admired in the public eye.

The overall findings from this investigation suggest that the characterological disturbance evident in these men and the processes underpinning their respective violence, are rooted in human emotions and an attachment history of trauma and humiliation. The legitimacy of these inferences can only be established by further study and the attachment-object relational approach taken here does not, by any means, replace other theories of violence (Yakeley, 2018). However, this offender perspective contains a particular asset in that it allows for an understanding of cruel acts, such as rage-murder and predatory violence, as meaningful for regulating self and interpersonal relations. Such a perspective may be especially important for maintaining a perception of these offenders as human. Yet while the ability to see violence as human (Abrahamsen, 1973) is essential for understanding, we cannot ignore the fact that some people are dangerous to others, and that society needs preventive measures to protect its citizens. The development of more specialized offender treatment will reduce the potential of violence for some, but the main preventive effort should be aimed at improving child safety and the quality of their attachment relationships.





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