

Personality of the Murderer

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Research initiated by Megargee (1966) as to the personality of violent criminals suggests that this population, including homicidals, can be divided into two large groups: (a) those with strong behavioral brakes who need extremely intense direct stimuli to commit crimes, and (b) those of poor socialization who, due to weak behavioral brakes, are characterized by overt, but less severe acts of aggression. This approach has been confirmed by many inventory based studies which verified the existence of such groups both in normal and psychotic populations (e.g. the four groups offered by Blackburn (1986): the primary and secondary psychopaths, the controlled and the inhibited types). These studies employed serious mathematical statistical methods to support that such groups really exist. The problem in Hungarian psychiatric practice is that though the examinations are mostly based on projection tests, publications with statements and conclusions relying on such tests are poorly available. Reports on personality dynamics of violent criminals are also sporadic. In the present paper I intend to validate Megargee's proposals by means of projection tests. Mathematical statistical methods I use, namely the Mann Whitney and the χ^2 tests, may not be as «strong» as those commonly employed in inventory studies, still I think they fit the purpose. Detailed description of the results of personality and mathematical statistical tests will be omitted in the lack of space. My conclusions and inter-

pretations are based on these comparative data and the ability of particular tests to grasp the personality as a whole.

1. METHODS

My data processing has been focused on information supplied by projection tests, such as Rorschach, Szondi, Luscher and P.F.T.. These tests have been interpreted in consideration of principles routinely in Hungary. I have kept in mind that arrest, court hearings, the severity of the crime, the consequences of the sentence, changes of former life, the disintegration of family life, the narrowing of social space, and prison life would provide an altered personality pattern to the examiner. I think the main advantage of projection methods is that conscious distortions, so characteristic in inventories and explorations, can be avoided. Resistance may appear only in the refusal of the examination, but this did not happen in my material.

2. SELECTION OF TEST SUBJECTS

The main inclusion criterion was the legal opinion. Males committing wilful homicide were in the center of the study. The opinion of the forensic psychiatrist was also considered. Psychotic status, mental disease or limited moral responsibility due to severe nervous damage were regarded as exclusion criteria. On the base of the above pattern, the study included a total

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TABLE 1
Age

Age	18-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	Total
Murderers	5	7	5	5	6	3	36
Non-violent criminals	4	6	3	2	6	4	25
Sine morbo	2	10	9	2	1	1	25

TABLE 2
Education

	4-6	7-8	Secondary School	GCE	Higher education
Classes					
Murderers	14	20	—	1	1
Non-violent criminals	12	8	2	1	2
Sine morbo	4	14	4	1	2

of 36 wilful murderers who were over the final sentence, i.e. their criminal act had undergone evidence, and were in the position to clarify their future possibilities for themselves.

To clarify the main distinguishing personality traits between murderers and other criminal groups, I selected subjects sentenced for embezzlement, theft or fraud as a non-violent control group (25 subjects). The comparison of criminals to criminals was important because the study was performed under similar conditions, i.e. in prison, after the lower court judgement, etc., so the test indices were less apt to reflect the distorting effect of the sentence and the prison environment in this context. In the present study I intended to depict the personality pattern of subjects sentenced for homicide. Naturally, this personality pattern is valid in itself on the base of global information supplied by the tests, but certain features gain more emphasis from the comparison with the control group, and will indicate the main differences.

To reveal antisocial personality traits, the test results of murderers were compared to those of non-violent controls in whom no psychic ano-

malies could be expected. This control group consisted of 25 sine morbo subjects, streetcar drivers and conductors by profession.

3. PERSONAL DATA OF SUBJECTS

The age, education and job of subjects are shown in the Tables 1, 2 and 3.

4. MURDERERS' GROUP VERSUS SINE MORBO GROUP

Violent criminals are characterized by intensive aggressivity, stubborn opposition, induced by internal tension, explosibility and sensitivity. The appearance of overt aggressive behavior is motivated by egocentric attitude, direct dependence on external stimuli, suggestivity, incapacity to control emotions, weakness of behavioral brakes and reduced sense of reality. In «normal life situations», the internal equilibrium of the personality is maintained by aggressive acts. The

TABLE 3
Job

	Murderers	Non-violent criminals	Sine morbo
Unemployed			
unskilled worker	10	14	—
Semi-skilled worker	4	2	—
Employee	6	4	—
Engine fitter	3	2	—
Miner	4	—	—
Butcher	4	—	—
Herdsmen	2	—	—
Car driver	2	—	—
Surgeon's assistant	1	—	—
Technician	—	3	—
Total	36	25	25

subject's last act, the extreme brutality, has led him to a crisis of self-esteem, associated with incapacity and general suspicion. The sense of danger can be regarded as a prison response, but also as a fear that the hard-to-control coherence of personality can fall apart at any time.

5. MURDERERS' GROUP VERSUS NON-VIOLENT CRIMINALS' GROUP

In this comparison our attention was focused on the predisposition background of overt aggression. Delinquents of antisocial acts were studied who had manifested their inclinations in different ways. The relevant literature suggests that the dynamism of behavior control systems and aggressive affects may help the underlying problem. Regrettably, there are little studies available where extreme physical aggression and non-violent criminal acts are compared. Interpretation becomes even more difficult, since, as it can be seen later, the group of murderers can be subject to further typologization, so the presence or absence of certain personality traits proved to be non-relevant in mathematical comparison due to reasons of calculation technique (e.g. overlaps). It can also be assumed that the

group of non-violent delinquents is not homogeneous as to their personality dynamics, either.

The test data suggest that in the murderers' group the kernel of the conflict initiating the deviant career is the aggression-saturated, irresolvable relationship between attachment and detachment. In this respect the murderer has experienced accumulated failures, and his act is not else than a new, inadequate attempt to solve his conflicts. He is in the status of severe anxiety because of the ambivalent nature of the act, the court sentence and the frustrating prison environment, and is characterized by dysphoria, sensitivity, internal and external tension of accommodation, personal and affectual attitudes. In this situation it seems to him an insoluble task to produce adaptive behavior. But which factors had elicited the realization of the murderous affect, why had it not remained at the fantasy level or as repressed into the unconscious? The test data suggest that overt aggressive tension of the personality. Thus, the person committing homicide can be regarded as more aggressive than the non-violent delinquent. This statement can be labeled as triviality. Aggressivity features paroxysmality and the frequency of motives of direct physical offense, whose intentional nature supports the destructive form of conflict solution. In case of mur-

derers, the overtness of aggression can be explained by the exhibition tension and by the desire to self-complacency in certain roles. The narcissistic Ego leads to self-centered thinking, the internal opinions, attitudes, the hostile emotions are sharply demarcated, affects are rationalized by thinking, while the direct aggressive tendencies are attributed to the other by the mechanism of projection. A positive feedback relation develops with the direct environment, where the aggressive affects mutually intensify each other, become rightful, and so their realization starts to gain moral acceptance. The theatrical, scene-making Ego will accept his own aggressive affects, conceives and focuses them, and at the same time uses projection to get rid of responsibility, and that is why he is able to play the role of the murderer, whose act is now deemed as internally rightful.

The sadistic affects of the extremely offensive person are ambivalent, as well. There is increased desire for tenderness, dependency, or sometimes feminine sexuality in the background. The renitent person express accusation toward his environment, but at the same time he tries to detach, separate and thereby run away from his own aggressive wishes originating from frustrated desire for love. However, as soon as he had detached from the object, he starts to have doubts about his decision, and makes endeavors to restore the original connection. This, however, will recreate the original problem. Finally, there is only one possibility remains for the solution of the conflicting desire of dependency and freedom, and this is the destruction of the Other. The most common root of jealousy affects is that the person is not able to accept detachment. He denies the condition of desertion, and that is why he is aggressive toward the deserted-deserter. Such persons are deeply disappointed as to attachment connections. Finally, this conflict so unbearable that the person gives up his attachment.

At the level of everyday behavior the murderer features very low frustration tolerance and unsuccessful social accommodation. He will develop extreme reaction of guiltiness: it is either present or completely missing. He pretends to be indifferent, but is unable to accept the situation, is helpless to new frustration, and becomes unresponsive toward them. At the same time, the

non-violent control group tries to counterbalance their accommodation difficulties by increased bagatellization, but this cannot succeed because of high irritability and touchiness. The most common behavioral pattern in murderers is that they expect others to solve their situations, are demanding, and this means that they do not undertake responsibility, are fatalists, unable to control their emotional household, and deny their reactions of guiltiness.

6. TYPES WITHIN MURDERERS' GROUP

6.1. *Principles of typologization*

In the previous part I tried to grasp murderers' personality traits in respect of differences from the normal, and as distinguished from non-violent delinquents. When processing the data, I found marked differences between the protocols. This called my attention to the fact that the realization of the homicidal act can be imagined also on different personality bases. My attempt to typologize was based on my own observations in Rorschach protocols, the studies which grouped homicidals according to different levels of behavioral regulators, furthermore on diagnosable psychopathological patterns (neurosis, psychopathy). Accordingly, my bases for differentiation were test indices which, in terms of interpretational conventions, referred to the colorfulness or vanishing of imagery stream, the function of behavioral brakes, the inhibition element of perception and the relation of the person to the external world. (Pakesch (1961) called attention to the fact that the fourth year spent in prison is critical to homicidals, because a coartative process starts in the personality at this time. However, only four of my test subjects had spent more than 3 years in prison, so no observation of prisonization was possible in my material.)

6.1.1. Analysis

Type I

The person is unable to control his behavior, is extremely influenced by his affective life. The mental level moves around the average, ranging from undisciplined thinking to slight mental

deficiency. The weakness, uncertainty, indefinitude of the Ego, the driftability, the cynicism, the amoral attitude, the surfacial nature of attachments, the interest-mindedness, the very poor memory and intellectual capacity promote the manifestation of antisocial behavior, the destructive nature of which is determined by irritability of biological level, low tolerance and mainly by internal tension and explosivity. In frustrated situations the behavior will regrediate, the accumulated affects, anger, jealousy will result in overt aggressivity, since the intellectual and behavioral brakes are inadequate, too loose, and so are unable to support accomodation. Impulsive, brutal, inadequate behavior can be expected in conflituos situations. This personality pattern indicates the use of the diagnosis of the antisocial psychopath, or, in more upto-date term, the sociopath. Thus, Type I is characterized by the low level of behavioral regulators, and antisocial affects. It can be termed the disinhibited-amoral type.

Type II

The most marked element in the personality pattern is the overstrength of behavioral brakes. Resulting in rigid, conformist behavior, the psychological event can be regarded as defense mechamism. The personality activates his energy against the aggressive affects, but mostly against the external impacts followings the criminal act. The marked aggressive tension is no longer present, but panic, increased suspicion and coartative tendencies are seen. The rigidity of mental function, conformity, the seemingly calm behavior indicate that extremely intensive affects are controlled. This process employs dangerous defense mechanisms. The coartative effect of depression is exerted, as associated with dysphoria, fatigability, and may even lead to giving up personality as a whole. Thus, Type II is characterized by strong disinhibiting factors of behavior, caused by intensive defense mechanisms. The question is to which degree this process reflects the premurder personality. It can be conceived as a response to the criminal act, to the court process and the prison life. This group can be termed depressive-inhibited type.

Type III

This is the type which can be the most sharp-

ly demarcated by test indices. The data coincide with significant differences calculated in the Murderer versus Sine Morbo comparison. The richness of protocols, the frequency and variety of responses show a personality pattern markedly different from the former group. The test indices show that the behavioral brakes may allow normal adaptative behavior, accomodation, normal social life. The activation level is very high, but the adequate intellectual capacity, the possibility to control emotional and affective life explains that the personality is able to behave in a conform way, is apt to express behavioral manipulation, dissimulation, double life course. The opinion of others is very important for him, his attempts to accomodate himself to such opinions are motivated by high level of anxiety. Nevertheless the behavioral brakes are able to fulfill their regulating function only on a temporary basis, the explosion of aggressive affects is a permanent menace. The sense of inhibition increases the intensity of the internal tension, and facilitates a mode of abreaction which cannot remain within the socially tolerated range. The aggressive affective life saturates the fantasy life of person, and the intentious ideas to offense induce homicide on acting out basis. The explosion of affects will be very dramatic, since they have to get over normal behavioral brakes, intense internal inhibition and anxiety. The cause of high anxiety and explosive aggressive tension lies in the neurotization of the personality. As it has been mentioned above, the affective household is saturated with memories of a series of unsuccessful attachment. Early traumatization resulted in the ambivalence of detachment and attachment. The desire for grasping in itself obliges the person to behave adaptively, and pretend to be normal. Regrettably, the unsolubility of the conflict favors the realization of destructive desires.

The prisoner protects himself against the affects of his own and those from the external world, he has already lost his self-confidence, he is disappointed and suspicious. He tries to show stubborn resistance, but the compensation, the pretending to be something else can no longer be successful.

This types of murderers can be characterized by anxiety, internal inhibition, normal behavio-

ral brakes and extremely strong aggressive affects.

About the personality characterized as disinhibited and amoral we can also say that his victim come from the periphery of the circle of acquaintance. Problems of occasional meetings and encounters will explode in the homicidal act, the direction of which is impersonal. In most cases it cannot be known who is going to be the victim or the offender. Both belong to the same subculture, living with similar norms.

Victims of anxiotic, inhibited-aggressive murderers are to be sought in their close environment. They often kill kinspersons. Aggression is always addressed to a definite person, with a prolonged of the cumulation of affects.

Our results suggest that three types can be distinguished within the group of homicidals — supporting the suggestions of Megargee and Blackburne —, where the homicidal act resulted from different psychodynamical mechanisms: (a) disinhibited, amoral — 13 persons; (b) depressive-inhibited — 8 persons; (c) anxiotic, inhibited, aggression-saturated — 15 persons.

7. A PROGNOSTICAL SCALE OF THE REALIZATION OF HOMICIDE TENDENCIES FOR CRIMINAL PERSONS ON THE BASE OF THE RORSCHACH TEST

The evaluation and statistical results of the study have allowed us to make a scale which may prognose the realization of homicide tendencies in criminals. It is to be kept in mind that in case of depressive-inhibited subjects attention should be focused on the response, i.e. this condition is hard to bring into connection with the precriminal personality pattern, so it is not suitable for prognoses.

Accordingly, the basis for prognosis will be whether or not the person can be ranged into either of the two extreme types. Consequently, two scales should be made, which allow us to range a criminal into some type. Since the test data of non-violent criminals are also known, we can decide whether the scores of the test subject reach the limit of performance of persons having realized homicide tendencies. When the forensic psychologist examines a criminal,

and recognizes that the patient reaches a score limit in a particular scale (a simple addition of the indices), he can assume that the homicide tendencies have approached the boundary of their realization. (Version A: sensitive to Type I; Version B: sensitive to Type III).

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with wilful homicide committed by males. The analysis of personality actors was conducted on the basis of tests, such as Rorschach, Szondi, Löscher and P.F.T..

These tests turned out to be suitable: (a) to reveal by comparison of murderous and *sine morbo* persons the traits of the criminal personality; (b) in the cases of the persons committing homicide and non-violent offence, to delimitate the traits which are responsible for the openly aggressive behaviour.

The results of our research showed that three types can be distinguished within the group of murderers: disinhibited — amoral
depressive — inhibited
inhibited — aggressive.

RESUMO

Este trabalho centra-se no perfil de homicidas do sexo masculino, estabelecido a partir de testes projectivos, tais como o Rorschach, Szondi, Löscher e P.F.T..

O estudo conclui pela existência de: (a) traços de personalidade anti-social, através da comparação de um grupo de homicidas com um grupo de indivíduos *sine morbo*; (b) traços de personalidade responsáveis pelo comportamento violento, através da comparação de um grupo de homicidas com um grupo de homicidas com um grupo de delinquentes não agressivos.

A análise dos resultados revela três tipos de homicidas:

- desinibido — amoral
- depressivo — inibido
- inibido — agressivo.