

## CASE STUDY

# The Flawed Interview of a Psychopathic Killer: What Went Wrong?

FRANK S. PERRI\*

*Criminal Legal Department, Rockford, IL, USA*

### *Abstract*

*The flawed interview of convicted killer Christopher Porco illustrates what occurs when a suspect's psychopathic traits are not considered in formulating an interview strategy. Specific areas of the dialogue between Christopher Porco and law enforcement demonstrates that traditional methods of interviewing may not produce a confession or valuable information when it comes to psychopathic suspects. Although the traditional goal of an interview is to obtain a confession or valuable information, law enforcement will have to display flexibility in the interview process by implementing alternative interview strategies and redefining what a successful interview is composed of when these suspects are unwilling to confess to their crimes. Failure to remain flexible, as displayed in the Christopher Porco case, which yielded neither a confession nor valuable information, can jeopardise the strength of a homicide case that ultimately may go to trial. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

**Key words:** interview; interrogation; psychopathy; homicide; Reid technique

## INTRODUCTION

From a law enforcement perspective, the psychopath can be described as one of their greatest challenges because they are more likely to encounter this group than any other professional; unfortunately, courses designed to study psychopathy are not a traditional part of basic law enforcement curriculum or for social, behavioural, and forensic professionals (Herve & Yuille, 2007). The psychopathy literature strongly suggests that it will often be necessary for police detectives to interview suspects with psychopathic characteristics, and therefore, an understanding of these characteristics and how they may impact investigations would be valuable to police interviewers and those who advise them (Quayle, 2008). Not understanding the psychopathic nature of an offender can result in a

\*Correspondence to: Frank S. Perri, County of Winnebago, State of Illinois, PO Box 5411, Rockford, IL 61125, USA.

E-mail: frankperri@hotmail.com

flawed interview strategy that can compromise the strength of a homicide case and result in a miscarriage of justice at trial (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008).

One of the most devastating pieces of evidence that law enforcement has the ability to obtain from suspects is a statement they make concerning an offence. Obtaining statements are crucial because they reveal motives, their emotional state or lack of one, facts inconsistent with the physical evidence, and factual implausibility even though they do not confess to a crime. A question that is being raised is whether the traditional methods of interviewing are applicable to psychopathic suspects, or whether there needs to be more flexibility in developing a strategy on approaching suspects that at times goes against the grain of commonly used techniques because traditional techniques may actually be counterproductive to the goal of collecting information.

Often, traditional methods encourage that law enforcement control the interview through certain techniques that are taught at interview/interrogation seminars. However, if the interviewer does not understand whom he or she is interviewing and apply a one formula fits all technique, the probability of obtaining useful information may decrease especially with a psychopathic suspect. An interview cannot be reduced to a singular formula because people are just not predictable; at best, one can learn a variety of strategies and techniques that can be used. It is up to the interviewer to analyse a situation and to decide what strategy is most appropriate, and part of this assessment understands that psychopathic suspects have different behavioural traits that propel them to engage in conversation differently than the interviewer may be used to.

In this paper, important portions of the interview of Christopher Porco who used an axe to kill his father and attempted to murder the mother are analysed to illustrate how a traditional interviewing format may produce no confession or important homicide facts. Case facts are outlined to give the readership an understanding of the antisocial behaviours that pre-dated the murder that reveal the traits of a psychopath. An overview of psychopathy is outlined to illustrate what these traits are composed of and why they are important for law enforcement to understand. Understanding the traits are important because in many respects, they guide the interviewer's strategy of whether to take a traditional approach or whether they may have to modify their strategy to take into account the behavioural traits of a psychopath and how the suspect would react to a particular type of interview.

It should be emphasized that the goal is not to determine if the interviewee is in fact a bona fide psychopath because a qualified professional administering the Hare Psychopathic Checklist Revised (PCL-R) would be required to assess whether the suspect can be classified a psychopath for clinical purposes. Rather the goal is to consider whether the interviewee displays psychopathic traits that will assist the interviewer in determining what interview strategy should be broached to insure that valuable information can be gathered from an individual who could potentially be a psychopath.

What is traditionally defined as a successful interview by law enforcement may have to be modified without any diminishment to the goals of the interview; it is simply an alternative method to collect information without necessarily jeopardising the strength of the case. The importance of the interview is not just in the collection of facts. One must keep in mind that the interview may be the only time a jury may have to view a defendant's personality for truthfulness, arrogance, lack of emotions, selfishness, and manipulation especially if the defendant decides not to testify and all there is is a videotaped interview. These are the intangible qualities of an interview that have nothing to do with the evidence per se but with how human nature interprets certain behaviour that speaks volumes to a jury.

## HOMICIDE CASE FACTS

During the early morning hours of November 15, 2004, Christopher Porco, then 21 years old and a student at the University of Rochester, entered his family home in Delmar, NY where he brutally murdered his father, Peter, and attempted to murder his mother, Joan, both with an axe while sleeping (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). When the authorities found her, they found her brain exposed, her jaw had been dislodged, and she eventually lost one of her eyes. The study of the behavioural data yielded warning signs of Christopher's psychopathic qualities. Specific examples of this deceitful behaviour include that Christopher was known to have manipulated college transcripts from a local community college, reflecting false grades so he could be readmitted to the University of Rochester after he was forced to withdraw for poor grades (Karlín, 2006). In addition, during the course of the murder investigation, authorities determined that Christopher had a history of antisocial behaviour that included burglarising his parent's home, stealing and selling their computer equipment on eBay.

Interestingly, 1 month prior to the murder, the parents froze their eBay accounts after Christopher never sent the items sold on eBay; during the investigation, it was revealed that Christopher posed as his brother sending emails to customers explaining that his brother had died and was unable to send the purchased items. He was also known to have broken into his former employer's place of work stealing cellphones, cameras, and computers. He fraudulently obtained loans using his parents as co-signers without parental knowledge after obtaining his father's relevant personal and tax information. Christopher had told his parents that he only needed a co-signed \$2,000 loan for school, yet he fraudulently took out a loan for more than \$30,000 (McNiff & Cuomo, 2006). Moreover, to keep up with the appearance that he was from a wealthy family, he accumulated more than \$40,000 in debt from lavish spending and Internet gambling (McNiff & Cuomo, 2006).

The parents eventually confronted Christopher on his fraudulent behaviour and threatened to go to the authorities to take action against him. In one email, the father wrote: 'Did you forge my signature as a co-signer? What the hell are you doing? You should have called me to discuss it ... I'm calling Citibank this morning to find out what you have done and am going to tell them I'm not to be on it as co-signor' (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008). Citibank notified Peter Porco that Christopher had also obtained a line of credit over \$16,000 to purchase a new Jeep Wrangler (McNiff & Cuomo, 2006). Again, Christopher used his father's name as co-signatory to secure the auto loan. The parents tried to contact Christopher via the phone, but Christopher would not talk to them. In another email, the father wrote: 'I want you to know that if you abuse my credit again, I will be forced to file forgery affidavits in order to disclaim liability and that applies to the Citibank college loan if you attempt to reactivate it or use my credit to obtain any other loan' (McNiff & Cuomo, 2006). Less than 2 weeks from the time the father warned Christopher that he would not hesitate going to the authorities for his son's fraudulent behaviour, Christopher executed his plan to negate the threat.

Several Albany, NY area psychologists and mental health professionals familiar with the case stated that 'Christopher Porco fits the profile of a psychopath' (Grondahl, 2006). They focused on his continued pattern of lying and deceitful behaviour. Furthermore, these professionals also pointed to his pattern of grandiose perceptions centring on himself as a member of a wealthy and influential family. Christopher was known to have lied to friends and acquaintances about a fictitious inheritance from his grandmother of millions of dollars. Whilst awaiting trial, many found him to be strangely arrogant, drinking in

bars, attending concerts, going out to entertainment establishments, and driving around the yellow Jeep that witnesses state was the Jeep used to drive to his parent's home on the night of the murder. This behaviour fits the traits of an individual in need of grandiosity and embellishment in his life, which is one of the psychopathic traits (Grondahl, 2006). As forensic psychologist Wulfert stated, 'There's an overlap between psychopathic and narcissistic tendencies . . . He (Christopher) believes that the rules do not apply to him and he has a need to show off in front of people' (Grondahl, 2006).

It is interesting to note that during an interview with CBS, while visiting his mother at the hospital, Christopher stated, 'I saw her—she was swollen and covered in tubes and my reaction was I burst into tears. I fell on the floor right there' (Bell, 2007). Yet, a former youth leader minister named Joseph Catalano who went to the hospital to be with Christopher claimed to be 'struck by Christopher's odd behavior because he did not seem to exhibit any grief' (Bell, 2007). The psychopaths' use of the 'chameleon strategy' is not surprising in that they attempt to read a situation and determine what the appropriate emotional response others want to hear to make them appear sympathetic to outsiders (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). Psychopaths learn how to mimic emotions by watching how others behave given a set of circumstances (Meloy, 2000).

## PSYCHOPATHY OVERVIEW

According to Dr Robert Hare, international psychopathy expert from the University of British Columbia, the term or concept of 'psychopathy' has had a long and sometimes confusing history. Dr Hare states part of the conceptual confusion stems from the use of multiple terms to describe similar personality traits and behavioural patterns (e.g. moral insanity, psychopathic personality, sociopathy, antisocial personality) (Hare, 1993). The concept of psychopathy refers to a specific cluster of traits and behaviours used to describe an individual in terms of pervasive dominating personality traits and behaviours (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). Whilst psychopathy has similarities to antisocial personality disorder, which is characterised by a disregard for societal rules including criminal behaviour, it is not synonymous with or should be confused with criminality or violence in general. However, those that have psychopathic traits are more at risk for committing crime and acting out violently (Herve & Yuille, 2007).

According to clinical neuropsychologist and Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Clinical Neurology at Northwestern University Dr. Robert Hanlon, psychopathy is a personality disorder that can also be considered a mental disorder, but it is not considered to be as functionally disabling as a more commonly known mental illness such as schizophrenia (Hanlon, 2010). Personality disorders such as psychopathy are not comparable to mental illnesses that display psychotic disorder traits where there is irrational and disorganized thinking resulting in not being able to appreciate the criminality of their actions (Hanlon, 2010). Moreover most psychopaths are mentally capable of appreciating the criminality of their actions and can be rather methodical and strategic regarding their crimes even though they may display an impulsive lifestyle (Hanlon, 2010) characterized by thrill seeking activities, a parasitic lifestyle, being irresponsible and displaying anti-social traits (Hare, 1993). Personality disorders can be characterised by a class of personality types that deviate from societal expectations of what is appropriate behaviour. Research has proven that those that have personality disorders display a rigidity or inflexibility in their thinking, feeling, and behaviours that impairs them from functioning with others in

a larger societal context. In contrast to personality disorders, mental illness is characterised by a probability of a biochemical imbalance that may act as a catalyst for the individual to behave in an inexplicable, erratic behaviour that has no connection to logic such as cause and effect. Psychopaths, however, are more likely than non-psychopaths to feign mental illness and to engage in deception during insanity evaluations (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). It is a common belief amongst law enforcement and forensic professionals that people who commit violent incomprehensible crimes must be crazy, psychotic, or they ‘just snapped’ (Herve & Yuille, 2007). Moreover, the fact that an individual may have a mental illness does not mean that they cannot also be psychopathic; they are not mutually exclusive and do co-occur (Murphy & Vess, 2003).

Unfortunately, many are capable of fooling professionals who observe ‘abnormal behaviour’ and equate it to a mental illness issue when the same professionals ignore the calculating, manipulating, and planning beneath their schemes that are not the symptoms of someone who is mentally ill. Dr Hare described psychopaths as an intra-species predator that uses charm, manipulation, intimidation, and violence to control others and to satisfy their own selfish needs. Lacking in conscience and in feelings for others, they cold-bloodedly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret (Hare, 1993). Dr Hare notes that psychopathy can be distinguished from officially recognised personality disorders, ‘... on the basis of its characteristic pattern of interpersonal, affective and behavioral symptoms’, (Hare, 1993). Some of the major personality and behavioural traits identified by Hare are noted in the table in the next section (Herve & Yuille, 2007) (Table 1).

Psychopaths are not disoriented or out of touch with reality, nor do they experience the delusions, hallucinations, or intense subjective distress that characterises most other mental disorders. They are rational and aware of what they are doing and why. Their behaviour is the result of choice, freely exercised but coupled with a distorted sense of reality (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). As Edelgard Wulfert, forensic psychologist and professor at the University of New York at Albany, stated, ‘A psychopath invents reality to conform to his needs’ (Grondahl, 2006). Psychopaths also have difficulty projecting into the future, that is, understanding how their actions play themselves out in life and they also have deficits in reflecting upon their past; ‘[t]hey are prisoners of the present’ (Meloy, 2000).

Psychopathy appears to be one of the strongest predictors of aggression and violence and the distinct psychopathic traits of lack of empathy and lack of remorse are the best indicators of aggression especially in unprovoked aggression (Reidy, Zeichner, & Martinez, 2008a). Motives for psychopathic aggression may include the need to control situations/persons, hate of others, and restoring the false narcissistic self that has been damaged by criticism or threats by others (Martens, 2003). Expanding on Martens (2003), research has shed light on the fact that the narcissistic sub-dimension of psychopathy is linked to

Table 1. Psychopathic personality traits

Interpersonal	Affective	Lifestyle	Antisocial
Superficial charm	Remorselessness	Impulsivity	Poor behavioral controls
Grandiosity	Shallow affect	Stimulation seeking	Delinquency
Lying	Callousness	Irresponsible	Criminal versatility
Conning and manipulative	Failure to accept responsibility	Parasitic lifestyle	Early behavioral problems
		Lack of realistic goals	

the probability that a psychopath will resort to violence (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2006) and those that displayed traits of extreme entitlement and exploitation of others to achieve their goals were more likely to resort to extreme forms of aggression and deleterious violence against innocent people even in the absence of provocation (Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008b).

Psychopaths tend to engage in violence, especially homicide, in a more predatory, instrumental manner and are willing to take their time to plan the kill as contrasted to non-psychopathic killers (Herve & Yuille, 2007). The absence of emotion actually assists them in the planning the kill and not killing reactively because a time requirement for predation is not necessarily present (Meloy, 2000). For a homicide to be rated as instrumental, the offence had to have been clearly goal-oriented in nature with no evidence of an immediate emotional or situational provocation; the motive for the homicide has to be for something other than hot-blooded, spontaneous anger, or frustrated behaviour and that is what is illustrated in these cases (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Psychopaths' overwhelmingly engage in instrumental violence when committing murder by almost a two-to-one margin over non-psychopaths and they did not display a state of heightened emotional arousal at the time of the murder as contrasted to non-psychopaths whose murders exhibited an emotional discharge such as 'jealousy, rage or a heated argument during the offense' (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Thus, the rage displayed by a psychopath should not be confused with the emotion-based rage that Woodworth and Porter refer to and that law enforcement erroneously concludes when they do not have any insights into the behavioural profile of a suspect. Quite the opposite holds true; the psychopath's display of rage in the context of instrumental violence represents a dispassionate expression of their devaluation of others (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2010) where murder is a viable solution to satisfy their motives (Woodworth & Porter, 2002).

Furthermore, although psychopathic impulsivity that is displayed in Table 1 under the heading 'Lifestyle' can mean 'unpremeditated', 'acting before thinking' or the 'spur of the moment' behavior as well as parasitic behaviors, being irresponsible and thrill seeking, one should not extrapolate this to mean that somehow psychopathic aggression is always random and lacking in reflection. Woodworth and Porter's (2002) research on the instrumental nature of psychopathic homicidal violence is further supported by Dr. Hanlon's observations and clinical experience assessing psychopathic homicidal offenders that their violence can be methodical and strategic. The fact that psychopathic criminals get caught should not necessarily be interpreted as the result of a 'spur of the moment' decision to offend or lack of planning because of an impulsive behavioral disposition.

In contrast, for reactive violence to be present, there must be strong evidence for a high level of spontaneity/impulsivity and a lack of planning surrounding the commission of the offence; thus, a rapid and powerful affective reaction prior to the act with no apparent goal other than to harm the victim immediately following a provocation/conflict (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Reactive violence is more illustrative between family members and acquaintances, whilst instrumental violence is more illustrative of violence between strangers, but what is interesting in the Porco case is that it was instrumental violence and not reactive violence that was used to murder family (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Because their violence is often instrumental and committed without intense emotion, they would be less distraught and immobilised with fear or confusion in post-offence behaviour (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). Post-offence behaviour is an important indicator of whether psychopathy traits are present and that interviewers cannot ignore in formulating an interview strategy.

## THE INTERVIEW

Despite little empirical research on the interviewing of psychopathic suspects and offenders, many criminal investigators are well aware of the issues and problems that they have in working with these persons. Law enforcement has shown interest in psychopathy for understanding criminal behaviour particularly in criminal investigation, crime scene analysis, and interviewing (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). Law enforcement faces a formidable challenge attempting to evaluate explanations by these persons, and the task is even more daunting when it has to deal with the glib, grandiose, and egocentric individuals who are usually adept at dissimulation, blame externalisation, and who are not embarrassed or shaken at being caught in a lie (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009).

The Porco case is an important illustration of how not to conduct an interview and the transcript of the interview should be used as a teaching and training tool by law enforcement agencies (Transcript of Christopher Porco's Interrogation, 2004). Too often, violent crime investigators attempt to overwhelm the suspect by playing into his or her emotional mindset to obtain a confession whilst neglecting preparation and planning of an interview because of the belief that a suspect's distraught emotional state of mind will not make interview preparation necessary. Approaching interviews with suspects that display psychopathic traits by attempting to appeal to an empathic format may prove to be fatally flawed. When interviewing a potentially psychopathic suspect, however, this not only means ensuring great familiarity with the case under investigation (i.e. all evidence, antecedent history, and current condition of the suspect) and the strategy to be employed (with specific objectives) but also anticipating how the interviewee is likely to behave in response to aspects of the strategy or lines of questioning (Quayle, 2008). This aspect of the interview was woefully lacking in the Porco case, and it is apparent in the interviewer's frustration when they realised that trying to emotionally overwhelm Christopher did not work and they had no alternative strategy to implement.

Using an emotion-based approach might be effective with a non-psychopathic suspect; however, it probably is not transferable to a psychopathic suspect who does not have the ability to bond with others who produce emotional responses. Throughout the interview, the investigators elicited answers that to a trained interviewer would have revealed psychopathic traits and would have accordingly given the interviewer time to gauge a strategy to approach the suspect differently. For example, during the interview, Porco admitted that he was impulsive, irresponsible, a liar, had an inflated view of himself, engaged in grandiosity, and enjoyed impressing others with fictitious facts coupled with those intangible qualities such as showing no emotion about the death of a parent just hours before the interview. It is suggested that an understanding of how psychopathic characteristics can manifest themselves in criminal behaviour and during investigative interviews is important to those advising on police interviewing and to those conducting interviews with suspects (Quayle, 2008).

Psychopathic suspects believe that they are capable of creating factual scenarios that others will accept because of their embellished views of their manipulative abilities. Even though they may be talking to a trained investigator does not diminish their deceitful ways, and in fact, they may enjoy the interview and experience 'duping delight' (Hare, 1993). The fact that these offenders will not be truthful is not as important as getting these suspects to talk (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008). However, interviewers must be aware that interviewing the psychopath may prove to be challenging if the interview is not advanced with the goal of eliciting inconsistent, implausible information as opposed to getting the

suspect to speak the truth. According to interviewing expert Donald Rabon, 'Confronting the pathological person with facts and details that are contrary to his assertions is like nailing Jell-o to a wall' (Rabon, 2006). When dealing with the pathological interviewee, give him the facts and details that will refute his assertions, but do not expect him to acquiesce or recant previous statements. Furthermore, even if the suspect is confronted with evidence that contradicts his assertions, do not expect the pathological suspect to display anxiety or emotional discomfort (Rabon, 2006). Yet, by getting the psychopath to talk, a trail of statements that are contradictory to undisputed facts coupled with a lack of proper emotional affect produce a powerful image of deception and lack credibility at trial.

Just as interviewers modify their interviewing style when speaking to minors, the same flexibility is required when confronting psychopathic suspects. Psychopathic characteristics may be suggested in a suspect's mode of interacting with others, his history and manner of offending, and in other information concerning his lifestyle, relationships, educational, and employment history, etc. (Quayle, 2008). It is crucial for an investigator to attempt to observe whether there are psychopathic traits because the assessment will guide the strategy, and if the strategy is flawed, it is highly probable that important information will not be gathered as evidenced by the Porco interview. Moreover, if the interviewer observes that his or her strategy is not working because he or she did not take the psychopathic traits into account when a strategy was implemented, the suspect may see through new strategies and possibly refuse to co-operate with the interview and invoke the right to counsel, which is exactly what happened in the Porco interview.

Many non-psychopathic murder defendants might break down emotionally because they experience a sense of remorse. Yet, this was not observable in the Porco case. Assuming that it was not too late to do so, once the interviewers suspected that Christopher had strong characteristics of a psychopath, their strategy should have reflected a non-confrontational approach. One observes the interviewers attempting to turn 'up the heat' on Porco with a barrage of questions aimed to break him down emotionally so that he will confess to the murder. Though the questions and answers outlined here do not reflect the order in which they were asked, they illustrate how the investigator's strategy of attempting to overwhelm him emotionally was not as efficient as it could have been.

Detective: Listen to me. It's not—it's not—it's a crime of passion, okay? Like an emotional thing. You know, that's what it is.

Porco: That's not the (inaudible one word)—

Detective: An emotional flare up or something, you know, maybe. That's what I'm looking for. Give me something to grasp here. Let me get through the night.

Porco: Nothing happened.

Detective: And you understand what I've been telling you, that this is not a robbery. This is a crime of emotions.

Porco: I know what you are telling me. I—I don't know. I have absolutely no idea.

Detective: I mean, like I told you, in my estimation, that situation, the way I'm seeing it, was something that happened out of a passionate moment.

Porco: You told me they were in bed, so I don't know how passionate that could be, honestly.

Detective: And then afterwards, those emotions subside and the thought is, what's happened? What have I done? What has happened here? What an awful thing.

Porco: I agree it's an awful thing.



Detective: Sometimes your emotions get the best of you, overtake you.

Porco: True.

Detective: Your stomach is going to burn a hole in it. The only way to stop it is to be a man.

Porco: I can't help you.

The investigator attempted to play into Porco's emotions and manhood as a strategy to elicit a confession, but the strategy got him nowhere. Interviewers must avoid belittling the psychopathic suspect (Quayle, 2008). Porco gives bland answers, absent of emotion; neither do his responses offer any insight into the murder itself. Instead of attempting to get him to feel guilty about his actions in the hope of a confession, the investigator should have remained calm, similar to Porco, to ask questions. When Porco's responses did not match the evidence collected, the investigator should have—calmly—confronted Porco about the inconsistency and further allowed him the opportunity to bury himself with more lies that could be revealed at trial together with his lack of emotions just hours after he killed his father. The investigator incorrectly transferred a non-psychopathic explanation onto the murder by attempting to inure an emotion to the killing to suggest that somehow Porco's anger was the impetus for the killing. The investigators failed to understand that the issue was not about anger or any other emotion but about using murder as a solution to a problem. Another error made by law enforcement in developing an interview strategy is that they equate the horrific manner in which a murder was performed to the amount of anger or rage the offender experienced at the time of the act. Interviewers must not project their emotions to the disturbing nature of the offence (Quayle, 2008).

In addition another mistake that many in law enforcement make when they learn of a homicide that is between family and/or acquaintances is that the offender must have been angry by the intense manner they appear to have killed; yet, the intense manner of the murder may or may not have anything to do with the behavioural composition of the offender, who may not inure any emotion to the murder (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008). The fact that their murders appear to be reactive, which is with sudden and intense passion, does not mean that the intense manner of their murder should be linked to an emotion; in fact, research indicates the exact opposite when psychopathy's link to homicide is examined (Herve & Yuille, 2007). Psychopaths who overwhelmingly commit instrumental violence do not display a state of heightened emotional arousal at the time of the murder as contrasted to non-psychopaths whose reactive murders exhibit an emotional discharge such as 'jealousy, rage or a heated argument during the offense' (Woodworth & Porter, 2002). Thus, the rage displayed by a psychopath should not be confused with the emotion-based rage that Woodworth and Porter referred to and that law enforcement erroneously concludes when they observe crime scenes. Quite the opposite holds true, the psychopath's rage is a dispassionate display of conscienceless behaviour to control others. Because they lack empathy, do not have the ability to anticipate remorse coupled with devaluation of others explain why psychopaths partake in dispassionate instrumental violence given their motive to kill is not necessarily emotionally driven (Meloy, 2002).

Moreover, given that psychopathic violence is often instrumental and committed without intense emotion, they would be less distraught and not immobilised with fear or confusion in post-offence behaviour (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009). This research of post-offence behaviour is extremely important for law enforcement to consider when evaluating whether the suspect displays psychopathic traits or not. This post-behaviour

observation of lack of trauma, lack of affect is clearly evident when Christopher wanted to talk to law enforcement. In fact, the videotaped interrogation of Porco recorded within less than 24 hours of the homicide illustrates a controlled manner, never wept for the news he received about his parents condition yet desired to want to engage the police to see what information they had that revealed evidence of his culpability (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008).

About midway through the interview, a detective from the New York State Police was brought in. He was very matter of fact in his inquiry and non-threatening in his approach. He questioned Porco about his trait of grandiosity.

Detective: I'm still not quite understanding why you go around telling people that you have all this money. That kind of baffles me.

Porco: No, I—

Detective:—you put on this façade.

Porco: It is. And I've done it for a couple of years now.

Detective: What does that say about your character—

Porco: Exactly.

Detective:—Chris? Seriously. What—no tell me, what does it say about your character?

Porco: I guess it's insecurity in a way.

Detective: Does it tell you that you're an honest person?

Porco: Not in that respect, no.

Detective: Trustworthy?

Porco: I think of myself as trustworthy, I guess. If we're going to respond in reference to this, no, I guess I'm not.

Detective: I mean, if I—if I'm a student and I meet you and you're telling me you're going to buy a house because you've got millions of dollars from your grandmother.

Porco: True.

Detective: You're basically lying to these people, right?

Porco: Well, it kind of steamrolled away.

Detective: No, let's not color code it.

Porco: I know it's wrong.

Detective: Do you consider it lying?

Porco: Oh, definitely, yeah. You know, I'm telling them something that's not really true.

Detective: Are you a pathological liar?

Porco: I don't think so. I mean, maybe in that respect.

Detective: What other things have you lied about?

Porco: Really one thing. I'm trying to think of anything else. Just money. I don't really know why I got started on it. It was in high school.

This non-confrontational style the detective should have continued with Porco. The detective did not have to browbeat Porco into the admission that he lies. Yet, as the interview progressed, he, too, fell into the same strategy the other detectives followed, which was to use an emotional and confrontational approach. The interview also failed because the detectives did not understand the workings of fraud to know how to adequately question him about the white collar crimes that predated the murder, which would have revealed a fraud detection homicide motive where one kills to silence those that are in a position to detect and disclose their fraud schemes to the authorities (Brody & Kiehl, 2010;

Table 2. Interviewee psychopathic trait identification checklist

Psychopathy traits	Christopher's responses
Superficial charm	Complements that the detectives on doing a good job.
Egocentric	Christopher wanted to know why the police took so long in calling him about participating in the interview.
No affect/emotion	There was no emotional display by Christopher of knowing his father is dead or mother; his reaction at the hospital observing his mother and none at the interview just hours after Peter's murder.
Lack of remorse	Christopher displayed no signs of remorse during the interview.
Pathological lying	Christopher admitted on several occasion to lying to family and friends.
Manipulative	Christopher took advantage of family members and former employer, forging school transcripts.
Grandiosity	Christopher bragged about coming from a wealthy family, which was false.
Impulsivity	Christopher admitted to being impulsive.
Poor planning	Christopher admitted that he does not know what happens to his finances in terms of not having money available and does not know or care about how his behavior contributes to his financial problems.
Criminal behavior	Police knew of his history of theft and fraud.

Perri & Lichtenwald, 2007). Perhaps, in the planning stage of the interview, the detectives could have included a detective who has experience in fraud to be part of the interview team if the evidence suggests that fraud detection by the parents was the motive for the murder. Although other types of physical evidence may assist in developing possible suspects, professionals who understand fraud may be in a unique position to uncover a motive that the physical evidence does not reveal. A white-collar crime detective could have inquired into the fraud that Christopher downplayed. For example, what was Christopher's reaction when he learned that his father would go to the authorities? Why did he buy a new Jeep when Christopher indicated that he borrowed money for school expenses? Although such questions had nothing to do with the murder, the answers might have displayed volumes about his character that the jury could consider and a possible motive the prosecution could advance.

As one can observe, Christopher revealed traits that would have alerted the interviewers that he had traits reflective of a psychopath and that a non-traditional interview approach should be considered as an initial strategy (Table 2).

### MODIFICATION OF THE INTERVIEW STRATEGY

Many law enforcement agencies use the Reid Technique as a method of interviewing and interrogating suspects. Supporters of the technique argue that it helps to extract information from unwilling participants. The technique detectives used in the Porco case appears to be the Reid Technique, and although it may be useful, there are limits to its success depending on the type of individual being interviewed. The Reid method includes nine steps of interrogation, but some of these techniques can backfire when dealing with psychopathic personalities. Techniques are often anecdotally endorsed by those who can point to success stories; however, there are times when a technique can fail as it did in this important homicide case. One of the premises of the Reid Technique is that the interviewer should be in control of the interview, preventing the suspect from denying guilt by cutting off unsatisfactory explanations and ultimately working towards a confession.

The interrogator offers two contrasting motives for some aspect of the crime. One suggested motive might appear to be socially acceptable, such as to call an act ‘a crime of passion’ and then contrasting to a morally unacceptable motive suggesting that ‘one kills for the money’. The detective builds up the contrast between the two alternatives until the suspect gives an indication that he has chosen one. In the Porco case, the detectives initially gave Chris the option to choose the crime of passion motive for the kill that produced no confession. Next, the detectives pitched the morally repugnant motive for the murder.

Detective: Let me guess, there’s an insurance policy?

Porco: I would kill my parents for money. Brilliant.

Detective: Chris, you have no alibi. Do you understand that?

Porco: Inaudible statement.

Detective: You have a motive.

Porco: I don’t understand what you think my motive is.

Detective: Well, money.

Porco: I’m going to kill my parents for \$300,000? I mean, come on.

Detective: Yeah.

Porco: Why?

Detective: People do it all the time.

Porco: That’s horrible.

Detective: You know what I’m saying? You got to get this off your chest . . . This is going to eat you up. You know that, don’t you? Your hair is going to fall out.

Porco: I can’t help you.

The problem with attempting to confront Chris with these two different motives is that neither motive is applicable or matters to Christopher. Specifically, Christopher does not reactively kill because of an argument he had with his father or mother nor is Christopher bothered by the morally repugnant reason to prove motive because his pathological narcissism reflects a highly entitled, highly exploitive person. He does not have a problem with taking advantage of others for self-gratification reasons nor does he engage in a moral debate about the rightness or wrongness of a given behaviour. In cases where the interviewer suspects that he or she is in the presence of a true psychopath, it is reasonable to begin the interview using tactics appropriate for a psychopathic suspect. If the interviewer begins using a strategy more appropriate for a non-psychopath, upon realising that the strategy is not working, he or she may not be able to switch strategies midway through questioning the suspect.

What is clear about this interview is that Christopher wanted to participate in the interview and that should have been a clue to the interviewers of the type of person they are dealing with when Christopher complained about why it took the police so long to call him to have him participate in an interview. Christopher already knew that he was under no obligation to co-operate because the law protects one against self-incrimination, thus Christopher did not have to wait to be interviewed to invoke his right to remain silent; he could have refused to speak with the police when he was asked to come in for questioning. In addition, Christopher’s father was a lawyer who understood criminal law and procedure and probably discussed these concepts with his family even if on an informal basis. For example, when the police start becoming aggressive in their approach in trying to overwhelm him, he invoked his Miranda Rights, which meant that the police had to cease

questioning. Yet, we see even after he invokes his rights, the detectives continue to question him because of their frustration.

Detective: Listen, all right. I've known you for a long time? For a long time, all right? I'm not going to ask you anything. We'll take a ride and let's try to straighten this out, okay? We're going to go up to—we'll go and take a polygraph and make sure you're—at least exonerate you.

Porco: Do I have to have a lawyer present for that?

Detective: No, Well, at least it will exonerate you from—from this.

Porco: Right. I want to have a lawyer present for that.

Detective: Why is that?

Porco: Because I'm not sure that I'm being treated fairly.

Detective: You are being treated fairly.

Porco: Well, I'd like to make sure of that.

Detective: Well, if—are you accepting to take the polygraph? Are you accepting to take it?

Porco: I will take one.

Detective: M-m h-m-m.

Porco: After I've spoken to a lawyer.

Detective: Why do you need to speak to one first?

Porco: Inaudible statement.

Detective: Well, look it, Chris. Why would that be?

Porco: Because I want to make sure that my rights are protected. I feel I have done nothing wrong.

Detective: Well, I'll tell you what. I'm not going to run the test.

Porco: I'm not saying you're biased. I don't think you are. I—

Detective: No we don't do that test.

Porco: I hope you don't. I know you don't.

Detective: Well, look it. I'm just going to throw this at you real quick. I had a rape case some years ago, all right? The person went in and took the polygraph—

Porco: M-m h-m-m.

Detective:—And passed it. I shook his hand and bid him a good day. I'm serious. I'm dead serious right? Afterwards, I found out through further investigation, in fact, he was innocent, all right?

Porco: That's good.

Detective: This is what I'm telling you. Keep-us like I said, give us a baseline here.

Porco: After I've spoken to a lawyer, I'd be happy to take one.

Detective: Well, I'm going to tell you this too. No lawyer I've ever met has allowed their client to take a polygraph, and I'll tell you why. It's because they feel as though it's never going to be good for them. If you're innocent though, it will indicate that. I'm telling you right now it does indicate false or true.

Porco: Okay. I know they work very well.

Detective: We don't do it. So, that's why I would hope that you would take it just to eliminate you, please.

Porco: After I have spoken to a lawyer, I will be happy to take one.

Detective: As I said, I don't know of one—

Porco: I'll talk to a lawyer about it and make a decision. I don't feel I have anything to hide, but I—

Detective: Well you know what? If I felt as though it was still incriminating of evidence I have right now, I wouldn't be asking you to take it because I wouldn't need it. You know what I mean?

Porco: I understand that.

Detective: Okay. All right.

Porco: I would hope there wouldn't be. I honestly believe that if my mother told you that I killed her husband, you would already have—you'd have me in handcuffs.

Detective: No—I'm dead serious.

Again, we see Porco agreeing to take a polygraph with a lawyer present and the detective questioning him about why he wants an attorney. We also observe how much bolder Christopher becomes with the detective on criminal matters. Initially, during the 'get to know you stage' Chris was more subdued, but once he called the detectives' bluff, his egocentrism could not be contained. Although the entire 6-hour transcript cannot be transcribed, the unfortunate aspect is that the detectives offered little in terms of sophistication, no indication of a planned interview and how to conduct follow-up questions with information Christopher disclosed. They appeared chaotic, spoke in vague generalities and were no match for Christopher who pressed the detectives for information as the interview progresses. What was observed are detectives constantly being apologetic to Christopher and trying to win Christopher's approval of who they are and then switching strategies by trying to make him feel guilty about what he did. Police interviewers are often drawn into answering questions that, in the eyes of a psychopath, diminish their credibility or authority, and this is evident in this case (Quayle, 2008).

It is the culmination of the lies that eventually expose a suspect's culpability. It is easy to explain away a certain number of inconsistencies in statements they disclose during an interview. Yet, how many innocent explanations can explain away the inconsistencies and deceit? Visualise the jury hearing that he forged his transcripts, forged his father's signature, lied to his friends about money he never had trying to impress people by telling people that his grandmother owned property in Connecticut, which was false, stole from his parents, and did not shed a tear for his parents during the interview. Keep in mind that these facts have nothing to do with the homicide facts. Imagine in the Porco case if a jury was allowed to view 6 hours of illogical, manipulative, deceitful, inconsistent, and implausible testimony from the defendant. Furthermore, if a defendant decides to testify on his or her own behalf, those statements can be used to further impeach his or her credibility in the event he or she gives further inconsistent testimony in court. In court, the defendant is not in a position to avoid those he or she believes he or she can not manipulate. If a defendant is willing to lie about the most mundane and innocuous facts, what is he or she willing to lie about when it comes to important facts about a murder?

Unfortunately the prosecution was not allowed to disclose to the jury Christopher's statements made during the interview or display the videotape that revealed his emotionless, deceitful and manipulative qualities for the jury to consider in their determination of guilt or innocence. The trial court correctly determined the police had violated Christopher's Miranda Rights in that the police continued to question him about the homicide when he invoked his right to counsel, thus his statement could not be used as evidence against him nor could the prosecution comment on those intangible qualities, such as his demeanor, that speak volumes to a jury.

## CONCLUSION

Many in law enforcement believe that in order to consider the interview a success, it is imperative to get a confession. The fact that a detective does not get a confession does not mean that the interview was not a success. The definition of what constitutes a successful interview may have to be altered for psychopathic suspects nor is shifting strategies an indication that the interview will be less fruitful; in fact, it increases the probability of obtaining relevant information and exposing those intangible aspects of an interview such as how the person reacts when they received news of the homicide. In fact, the inconsistent and implausible responses the detective elicits from criminals are devastating when disclosed in court. Imagine the jury in the Porco case viewing 6 hours of egocentric, emotionless, manipulative statements from the defendant.

Furthermore, if a defendant decides to testify on his or her own behalf, those statements can be used to further impeach his or her credibility in the event he or she gives further inconsistent testimony during a trial. In court, these defendants are not in a position to avoid those they can not manipulate. Consider also the fact that defence attorneys attempt to project an image to the jury that their client was tricked, intimidated, and eventually coerced into giving a confession to interrogators. This defence strategy is virtually non-existent as the jury views a videotaped conversation of the defendant speaking freely, voluntarily, and without coercion or force. Instead, the jury views an investigator simply collecting facts and giving the suspect the opportunity to tell his or her side of the events coupled with the fact there was no coerced confession.

Not taking the time to assess a suspect's personality traits can lead to a flawed interview strategy that yields neither a confession nor valuable information. The Christopher Porco case is an excellent example of how not to conduct an interview, but it does serve as an excellent training tool for law enforcement to learn from. In addition, given that law enforcement is more apt to come into contact with psychopaths than other professionals, it behoves law enforcement training centres to begin the process of training professionals on traits particular to psychopaths and how to use their traits to their advantage when conducting an interview.

### **Strategies to consider when interviewing a psychopathy**

- Do not necessarily rely on past strategies that were successful in obtaining confessions to determine future strategies. Interviews that do not produce a confession are not necessarily unsuccessful if they produce implausible and inconsistent statements that impact the credibility of a suspect.
- The interview of the suspect can not be based on appeals for sympathy, remorse, regret, or social obligations (Quayle, 2008). The interview has to be based on a non-emotional format and the dialogue must revolve around facts and specific evidence (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008). We observed this failed strategy on Porco.
- The interviewer should avoid projecting their own emotions when considering an interview strategy. We can observe how the detectives in the Porco case projected how Christopher should feel because they assumed that that is how a person should react to a horrific crime (Quayle, 2008).
- Avoid confronting the suspect with a belittling style observed in the Porco case. (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2008). Instead, interviews with suspects should be planned and evidence against the suspect must be collected to confront the suspect when he or she denies the

- facts. In the Porco case, the detectives rushed to interview Christopher within hours of the murder with no evidence to confront him with when he denied his involvement.
- Consider for interview strategy purposes incorporating post-offence behaviours displayed by a suspect as a possible indicator of psychopathic traits. Psychopaths are more likely to not display post-offence traumatic behaviours because murder is more often instrumental and committed without intense emotion. They are less distraught and immobilised with fear or confusion (Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009).
  - Much of the focus revolves around the interviewee; however, it is important that the interviewer understands his or her own personality strengths and weaknesses. *Know thyself*: is the interviewer an individual that has to be in control of an interview and the interviewee when in fact it may be necessary for the suspect to believe he or she is in control?
  - Avoid being overly confident in believing that the interviewer is capable of detecting deception. To date, practitioners in the criminal justice system are no better at detecting deception than the average person, although they are confident in their ability to tell whether someone is lying (Ekman, O'Sullivan, & Frank, 1991, 1999; Ekman, O'Sullivan & Frank, 1991; Hakkanen-Nyholm & Hare, 2009).
  - If it is evident that the suspect being interviewed is likely the culprit, the interviewer's goal is to collect as many inconsistent and implausible facts as possible. Presenting incriminating evidence to the suspect does not increase the probability of a confession (Rabon, 2006). When dealing with the pathological interviewee, give him or her the facts and details that will refute his or her assertions, but do not expect him or her to necessarily acquiesce or recant previous statements.
  - If the suspect does show emotions, the interviewer must be aware that they are emotions learned from observing how others behave in a given situation (Hare, 1993; Perri, Lichtenwald, & MacKenzie, 2008). The psychopath may be using this strategy for any number of reasons (i.e. to test the interviewer's strategy, evaluate how clever the interviewer is, probe the interviewer for personal weakness).
  - Understand the nature of the crime and its victimology. In this case, it was a parricide. Does the interviewer understand the offender profile of adult children who kill parents, possible motives, and crime scene traits? For example, some adult children who kill their parents do so to avoid having the parents detect crimes perpetrated against them and potentially disclose them to law enforcement (Heide, 1995). In addition, some of these adult children are psychopathic (Perri *et al.*, 2008; Weisman & Sharma, 1997).

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