

## Psychopathy and Law: A Practitioner's Guide

Edited by Helina Hakkanen-Nyholm and Jan-Olof Nyholm.  
Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. 292 pp. \$48.85  
(paperback).

Psychopathy is a central topic in the practice of forensic psychiatry. There are several excellent books on the subject, with more being published each year. Some of these books, however, are quite weighty and comprehensive and seem better suited for academics and researchers than for busy clinicians. *Psychopathy and Law: A Practitioner's Guide* is not one of those books.

Editors Hakkanen-Nyholm and Nyholm make clear that their goal is to try to build a bridge between the academic and professional worlds by providing an integration of topics that have immediate practical application, but are grounded in an empirical and theoretical approach. The target audience is broad, extending beyond mental health professionals to include practitioners from any field that may involve contact with psychopathic individuals. The goal is certainly a laudable one and, on initial inspection of the 13 concise chapters contained in just under 300 pages, the book has great appeal to the busy clinician. The thought that here is a book that can be read cover to cover immediately springs to mind. However, the concise nature of the chapters, which are generally 20 pages or fewer in length, made this an easy book to read in a piecemeal fashion. The book is nicely laid out, with case examples in text boxes sprinkled throughout the chapters. The editors have aimed for breadth of coverage, and the content scope runs from a review of the neurobiology of psychopathy to practical tips for interviewing psychopaths. True to their goal, the editors have limited the biological and neuropsychological empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to only two chapters. The remaining chapters cover topics that are potentially relevant to practitioners dealing with psychopathic individuals.

Given the appeal of the book after my initial perusal, I really wanted to like it. Reading through it, however, I found excellent chapters interspersed with ones that are uneven or that go beyond the available research. As is true of many books with multiple

authors, the writing is uneven. Styles range from a simple summary rendering of the research to much more engaging writing that presents data interspersed with parenthetical comments and opinions that highlight the practical experience of the chapter's author.

The first three chapters on the assessment of psychopathy, psychopathy and brain function, and cognition–emotion interactions in psychopathy provide good summaries, although I suspect that these topics are covered capably in other recent books on psychopathy. The editors aim to differentiate this book from the others, and it is the remainder of the chapters that bear examination to see if this goal is met.

Some of the other chapters are highly informative and provide practical knowledge. Chapters reviewing the specific manifestations of psychopathy in women, psychopathic features in adolescence, and an examination of predatory violence in psychopathy are compact but on point and convey information one could contemplate in the next encounter with a psychopathic patient or examinee. There were other chapters on psychopathy and violent crime, psychopathy and criminal career trajectory, and psychopathy in prisons that convey little practical and useful information and data, which could be more productively obtained from other sources on these topics such as key review articles in the research literature.

There are two chapters that, in my view, seriously overreach the available data. These include a chapter examining the manifestations of psychopathy in economic crime, organized crime, and war crimes and another chapter on psychopathy in families. While supported by interesting case examples, the content reflects the limitations of being overly focused on a single-factor explanation in complex situations. Although I recognize that the editors wanted to provide concise summaries and that these topics are ones that had not been highlighted previously, applying the concept of psychopathy to these situations appears a bit forced. To be fair to the chapters' authors, it is probably unrealistic to expect more than what is in the chapters, given the format of the book, and these topics probably warrant separate books focused on these subjects in their entirety, such as Babiak and Hare's *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths go to Work*.<sup>1</sup>

The most interesting chapter in *Psychopathy and Law: A Practitioner's Guide* is the final one on inter-

personal aspects and interviewing psychopaths, authored by the book's editors. The practical implications of the interpersonal behavior, deception and manipulation, and violence threat of psychopathic individuals is reviewed. The authors provide 11 practical tips for interviewing psychopathic individuals that highlight the need to understand the construct of psychopathy so that one can conduct efficient, effective, and safe interviews with these types of patients or examinees. Although some of their practical tips may seem basic, the editors raise awareness of the need to be reflective and mindful of the particular challenges that should be explicitly considered when interviewing psychopathic individuals.

On balance, the editors achieve their goal of producing a practical, useful book on psychopathy. For a busy clinician who plans to read chapters of interest selectively, this book provides an accessible means of obtaining knowledge of key points and ideas on the different aspects of psychopathy. It is not a reference for psychopathy but instead is a source for quick review of topics, some of which are likely to apply directly to current clinical practice.

#### Reference

1. Babiak P, Hare RD: *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths go to Work*. New York: HarperBusiness, 2007

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## “Let Justice Be Done Though the Heavens May Fall”: The *Zong* in Amma Asante’s *Belle*

Written by Misan Sagay. Directed by Amma Asante. Produced by Damien Jones. A DJ Films, Isle of Man Film, Pinewood Pictures, BFI Production. Released in the United States, May 2, 2014. 104 minutes.

A legal case in which more than 132 slaves were intentionally thrown from a British slaving vessel into the ocean to die may seem an unlikely backdrop for a period romance, but *Belle* attempts just that. The critically acclaimed film takes its name from Dido Elizabeth Belle, a woman born of the union between

a black woman and a white man in 1763. Belle's likeness, next to that of her white half-cousin, was famously captured in a portrait that demonstrates a degree of equality unheard of at the time. The painting has sparked interest in the form of articles, a biography, and now a movie about Belle's life.

Director Amma Asante begins the film with Belle as a young girl meeting her father, Sir John Lindsay, for the first time. He picks her up from a slum in his horse-drawn carriage, amid stares in the street, to take her to the life he says she was “born to.” He goes off to sea in the Royal Navy and leaves her in the care of his uncle, William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, who was the Lord Chief Justice of England. Also in Lord Mansfield's care is Belle's half-cousin, Elizabeth Murray. The film shows a close relationship between the girls as they grow into young women who must find husbands if they are to secure futures for themselves. They are introduced into society at a critical time, during the appeal in the *Zong* case.

Belle first learns of the case of the *Zong* massacre from a local clergyman's son, John Davinier, who has come to study law in an apprenticeship with her uncle. The *Zong* was a slave ship that set sail from Africa in 1781 with 442 slaves on board.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the voyage, many of the slaves became sick and died. The ship owners alleged that the vessel was running dangerously low on water, requiring the crew to jettison 132 slaves into the sea, to save the ship and its crew. Upon the ship's return to England, the company that owned the ship sued the insurance company for the value of the drowned slaves. The case, which came before Lord Mansfield, Belle's uncle, hinged on the necessity of jettisoning the human “cargo,” since natural deaths occurring at sea (such as those from illness) would not be covered by the company's insurance. In the film, Davinier voices his belief that the crew was not in need of water, but had coldly calculated that the slaves were worth more dead than as ruined merchandise. (One must set aside any imagining of a murder trial, as such a trial never occurred; rather the trial was about insurance fraud and “necessity.”)

The case of the *Zong* is a central element in the movie, driving the actions of the main characters. The Lord Chief Justice has weighty responsibilities in the Commonwealth and is described in the movie as “next to the King, the most important man in England.” The case is portrayed as being paramount to the financial future of Britain, because of the