THE CRIMINAL PSYCHOPATH MAGNETIZED: IMPLICATIONS OF BRAIN IMAGING FOR PSYCHOLOGY, MEDICINE, LAW AND POLICY

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The construct of psychopathy, or psychopathic personality, is extremely relevant to the criminal justice system. Psychopaths constitute only 15-20% of the prison population, but they account for a massively disproportionate amount of crime, especially violent crime. Because psychopathy is highly predictive of repetitive criminal behavior, the construct has historically been considered an aggravating factor in risk assessment and sentencing decisions. Recent brain imaging data is beginning to illuminate the neural correlates of psychopathy, particularly in the limbic system, considered the "emotional" part of the brain. It could be argued that this research indicates that psychopaths suffer from a brain-based disorder that impairs their affective development and so the condition could perhaps be considered mitigating in sentencing decisions. This seminar will present the latest neuroscience of psychopathy and discuss the (potential) implications of this work on how scientists define the disorder, treat the condition, and how the legal and political systems should deal with psychopaths.

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