

Handwriting analysis: A psychopathic viewpoint

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ABSTRACT

Mutuality between handwriting and individual's inclination toward crime is an area of profound fascination. It is challenging to enter the most hidden corners of an abnormal mind in order to discover, understand and explain its resorts, and also to provide clues regarding the way of approaching, treating and planning rehabilitation. In India and other common law countries, insanity is exempted from punishment even if insanity leads to the person committing heinous crimes; because they are considered incapable of deciding the rightness or wrongness of an act. Therefore, it is crucial and imperative to understand the reason behind the anti-social crime and associated factors influencing personality of the offenders especially psychopaths. Forensic graphology and psychiatry are the two major disciplines involved in assessment of psychopathic tendencies and criminality. Both the approaches follow projective nature to analyse and get into deepest of the personality of an individual. Forensic is a punitive science concerned with the passing judgement on human conduct while psychiatry is a therapeutic and reformative science followed for the benefit of society, human rights and psychopaths. Though the two approaches assess personality from different perspectives, when applied together can give a more effective and holistic explanation of criminal behaviour. The present paper describes some important techniques of handwriting analysis and highlights common handwriting patterns of psychopaths.

Keywords: *Psychopathy, Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD), Handwriting Analysis, Graphonomy, Psychiatry, Forensic Psychology, Criminal/Antisocial Behaviour*

Psychopathy is characterized by a set of personality traits such as shallow emotional responses, lack of empathy, and impulsivity marked by poor behavioural controls, resulting in persistent antisocial and criminal behaviour (Cleckley, 1941; Hare, 1996). Psychopaths are responsible for an undue proportion of crime committed (Kiehl & Hoffman, 2011). In addition to immoral and antisocial behaviour, an individual with psychopathy manifests lack of ability to love and establish meaningful personal relationships, shows extreme egocentricity, and fails to learn from experiences. The conning and manipulative interpersonal style of psychopaths generally creates a huge, destructive impact on their life, work, and social functioning. Psychopathy is found in approximately 1% of the general population, and is much more prevalent in men than women. When compared to offenders, psychopathy constitutes approximately 15–25% of the prison population.

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The unique features of psychopathy, as well as the impact of the disorder on society as a whole, continue to spark interest and fear in society. Researchers and clinicians have advanced our understanding of the symptoms beyond what was originally proposed by Cleckley (1941). Koch (1891) was first in his works to group 'Psychopathic Inferiorities' into behavioural states. Schneider (1923) established psychopath as a subclass of abnormal personality. The work of Henderson (1939), Cleckley (1964), McCord & McCord (1964) have established core criteria for the disorder revolving around anti-social behaviours and classified psychopath personality as a distinct clinical entity.

Robert Hare (2003), a famous psychiatrist described psychopaths as, "*Intra-species predators who use 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 away what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret.*"

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5), provides mental health care professionals a set of common criteria used for diagnosing mental health disorders. The DSM- 5 has gone through a few changes and one of those changes is the diagnostic title for sociopath. Sociopath and psychopath are now blanketed under the title *Antisocial Personality disorder* or APD for short. The essential features of any personality disorder are impairment in personality (self and interpersonal) functioning and the presence of pathological personality traits.

Assessment of Psychopathy

There are various ways to assess psychopathy and especially APD. The self-report scales such as Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale correlate moderately to highly with observer measures of psychopathy but untruthfulness and absence of insight are hall marks of APD, so self-report scales are of limited utility for detecting APD in clinical or forensic settings. Thus, self-reports should be supplemented by other corroborative tool such as hand writing analysis and negative personality traits such as aggression, dishonesty, insincerity, unreliability, violence, emotional instability to assess the disorder. *Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)* developed by Hare (1991) is one instrument considered as the gold standard for assessing and diagnosing psychopathy in forensic samples. PCL-R is organised as a two-factor model (Emotional and Interpersonal traits). Similar to PCL-R, the *Psychopathic Checklist Screening Version (PCL:SV)* is four factor model comprising interpersonal, affective, lifestyle and antisocial components (Neumann, et al., 2006). Hence, *the Psychopathic Viewpoint* stands that psychopaths commit crime due to affective and interpersonal deficits and not due to any other motive. This paper suggests the need for a precautionary approach to get insight and beware others about antisocial personality disorder ahead of time through handwriting analysis to avoid possible threat that may be caused by them.

A general rule for the specialists, investigators, graphologists and psychologists is that, "*there is no such thing as a psychopath's handwriting*", because there is no completely honest person (normal), or a completely dishonest one (psychopath), everyone has a negative potential, no matter if one choose to let it run his/her actions (conscious level of mind) or if one keep it under control (unconscious level of mind). There is no defined sign that is the equivalent of dishonesty, hypocrisy or psychopathic tendencies. Hence, one has to build hypotheses for graphological analysis of the handwriting of a psychopath, which is

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very subtle experience and need to correlate sign between absolutely negative feature and a writing particularity.

Graphonomy

Graphonomy is the study of handwriting especially for the purpose of character or personality analysis. Handwriting analysis is a skilful art of personality assessment. Following in the footsteps of criminologists Jules Crépieux-Jamin (1925), Saudek (1928), Pulver & Muhl (1949), Etienne de Greeff (1950) and Siegel (2013) lists eight signs most often found in dishonest writers which are as : left tending half ovals, small tight loops, covering strokes, abrupt stops above the line, breaks and mends, smeariness, slowness, and looped arcades. Extremes in tension, for example either very tense or very slack writing, are also associated with the antisocial personality. Handwriting is not done by hand or feet but by a brain, printing brain on the paper. Hence, handwriting reflects how one feels, think and act in a particular situation. It is learned consciously which becomes automatic and unconsciously expressive.

Assessment of Psychopathy through Graphonomy

The writing characteristics of psychopaths (or APD) are discussed under following pictographs:

1. Level of Organization: From a graphologist's point of view, the writing of a psychopath can generally be described as relatively conformist, rather banal, with little rhythm, stiff, monotonous and abounding in abnormalities.

2. Zones: There are three zones in handwriting namely, lower, middle and upper which represent Freudian conceptual instincts as Id, Ego and Superego respectively. Zone imbalance indicates lack of harmony in three basic areas of psychoanalytic development of personality described by the Freud. An inflated or shrunken zone is a danger sign of psychopaths.

- **Inflated lower zone:** indicates insecurity, instinctual drives out of control.
- **Inflated middle zone:** indicates lack of maturity.
- **Inflated upper zone:** indicates delusional thinking, absence of reality or logical check, an individual dominated by fantasy and illusion.
- **Shrunken lower zone:** indicates sexual immaturity, fear and trauma.
- **Shrunken middle zone:** indicates inability to cope with daily life and remain unhappy, sad and depressive.
- **Shrunken upper zone:** indicates lacking inspiration and no faith in oneself intellectual abilities.

3. Baseline: It refers to the imaginary line upon one write on a blank piece of paper. Erratic, rigid, rising and falling baselines are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Highly erratic baselines:** indicate lack of moral adjustment, inconsistent attitudes.
- **Very rigid baselines:** indicate narrow mindedness, tension, inhibition and fears.
- **Extreme rising of baselines:** indicate flightiness, restlessness, and lack of firm control on reality.
- **Falling baselines:** indicate depression, low buoyancy and low liveliness.

4. Writing Slant: It describes in which way a handwriting lean. A handwriting can lean in four ways broadly- backhand / reclined, straight up & down, forward / inclined and go in all

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different directions. Erratic, extreme reclined and inclined slants are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Erratic slant:** indicates nervousness, unsettled and erratic mode of expression.
- **Extremely inclined slant** (more than 45° over from the vertical): indicates reactive, hysterical, impulsive, fanatical and obsessive.
- **Extremely reclined slant** (more than 35° back from the vertical): indicates withdrawn, evasive, blocked emotional development.

5. Pressure: It is the amount of force one exerts while writing. It reveals the amount of mental energy the writer is currently using in his life. It also reveals the strength and intensity of the writer's appetites and desires, and the degree to which one can respond to them. And it can indicate for which particular words and/or phrases the writer lacks intensity or feels an increase of it. Pressure is an 'infix' graphological trait, that means one don't always write with the same pressure. To take an account of pressure graphologist assess one's writings over a period of time. Extremely light & heavy, sudden burst and irregular pressure in one's handwriting is danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Extremely heavy pressure:** indicates that one is covertly inhibited and potentially violent.
- **Sudden burst of pressure** (with a heavy pressure): indicates paranoid personality.
- **Extremely light pressure:** indicates sensual feeling response.
- **Highly irregular pressure:** indicates evasive behaviour and lack of involvement.
- **Partially Connectedness** (Pressure misplaced into horizontal dimension): indicates anxiety, hysteria, and possible schizoid personality disorder.
- **Disconnectedness** (Pressure so light that it breaks in places): indicates anxiety, nervousness, doubts over own ability to face difficulty.
- **Extreme Pastiosity** (sharpness of the inking pattern): highly sensual nature, possible violence, sexual perversion, alcohol or drug abuse, criminality, mental or physical illness.

6. Writing Size: It is categorized as large, overly large, medium, small or overly small (microscopic). It reveals writer's nature of personality as extrovert or introvert and how an individual relates to his or her environment. It also tells about capacity for concentration of an individual. Crowded/ tangled, uneven margins, gigantic, microscopic writing sizes are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Crowded or Tangled writing:** indicates confusion, lack of inner harmony and balance.
- **Uneven margins:** indicates antisocial personality (APD), and rebelliousness.
- **No margins:** indicates fear especially of death and overly talkative.
- **Gigantic writing:** indicates mania, lack of awareness of boundaries between self and the environment and exhibitionism.
- **Microscopic writing:** indicates introversion, fear, inhibition, creation of private world, lack of ability to relate realistically to others.
- **Extreme variation in letter size:** indicates inconsistent in response to environment, over sensitive, indecisive, childish and mood swings.

7. Spacing: It refers to the distances between letters, words, and lines of writing. It tells how the writer feels toward other people, about one's social behaviour, and whether or not one thinks fluidly- intelligence. Each word one write represents one's ego. Where one chooses to put the next word represents where one subconsciously chooses to put other people in

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relation to oneself. Overly wide or narrow spaces between letters, cramped letters and cramped spacing between words, tangling lines and uneven spacing are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Overly spacing:** indicates fear of enclosure, isolation, withdrawal and suspicion.
- **Narrow spacing:** indicates fear of losing control on self or surroundings.
- **Cramped, tangling or uneven spacing:** indicates lack of inner organization and inner conflicts.

8. Speed: It tells about an individual's intellectual level, how quickly one can think and act, the degree of spontaneity and honesty. Slow speed indicates discernment of falsehoods and calculative in responding or acting.

9. Rhythm: It has been described as a balance between the contracting and releasing quality of the writing. The extreme release or contraction is a danger sign of psychopaths.

- **Extreme Release:** indicates absence of control and strong feeling of anxiety which can lead to irrational behaviour.
- **Extreme Contraction:** indicates absence of spontaneity, strong psychological stress and inner unrest which can lead to hostility.
- **Splinting of letters:** indicates fractured mental process.
- **Retouching:** indicates uncertainty, lack of confidence and nervousness.

10. Connecting Strokes: There are four basic types of connecting strokes namely – garlands (roundness), arcades (overhandedness), angles (angularity), and threads (squiggling). Illegible writing, overly round, drooping garlands and prominent arcades are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Illegible writing:** indicates that an individual is out of touch with reality, inability to communicate needs and ideas.
- **Overly round writing:** indicates immaturity, dependency, lack of intellectual development, and compulsive tendencies.
- **Drooping garlands:** indicates feeling of guilt and showing that anybody can take advantage of oneself.
- **Prominent arcades:** indicates exhibitionism, avoidance of dealing with emotional problems and hides behind a facade.
- **Extreme threading:** indicates lack of direction or purpose and lack of hold on reality.
- **Inconsistent threading:** indicates anxiety and hysteria.

11. Lead in and Ending Strokes:

- **Long lead-in strokes:** indicates strong dependency ties and exhibitionism.
- **Lead-in strokes from below baseline:** indicates repressed aggression with tension and anxiety.
- **No ending strokes:** indicates inability to dedicate to others (unfaithful).
- **Exaggerated endings:** indicates cautious, defensive behaviour and fear of being hurt.
- **Weak endings:** indicates passivity and depression.
- **Angular ending:** indicates aggression and hostility directed to environment.
- **Extreme squaring of letters and connecting strokes:** indicates possibly psychosis.
- **Frequent X-ing:** indicates self-destructive tendencies and feeling of martyrdom.

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12. Loops: loops in the zones indicate ideas, dreams, imaginations and emotions. They are different meaning depending on the zone the loops are found in and what shape they are. Lower cursive letters b, e, f, g, h, k, l, p and y are loop letters. Exaggerated, stunted, retraced, distorted, reversed and broken loops are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Exaggerated loops in g & y:** indicates emotional or sexual needs not being satisfied.
- **Stunted loops:** indicates an ability to express emotion is impaired.
- **Retraced loops:** indicates inhibition, fears emotional involvement.
- **Distorted loops:** indicates warped emotional response and neurosis.
- **Reversed loops:** indicates rebelliousness, antisocial tendencies.
- **Broken loops:** indicates anxiety over a future course of action.

13. Ovals: It occupies the middle zone of writing and considered as the centre of the graphical world. Letter 'a' lowercase and 'o' are among the so-called ovals and express as the "synthesis of personality" because it expresses the most intimate feelings, consolidated and desired interests of an individual. It symbolizes the Freudian 'EGO' of the personality which is also an executive of the personality of an individual. It represents the continuum of honesty and integrity of an individual. Double or triple (knotted) loops, stabs in the ovals, wedging, felon's claw loops, omitted letters, continuous mistakes, retouching, ovals made upside down, segmented and retracing are especially are danger signs of dishonesty, lack of integrity and psychopaths.

- **Knotted ovals:** indicates defensiveness, inhibition and getting into the area of deceit,
- **Small ink filled ovals:** indicates explosive temperament.
- **Stabs or forked tongue oval:** indicates a trait of liar.
- **Wedging:** indicates dangerously dishonest, criminalistic, crooked and potentially dangerous person.
- **The felon's claw oval:** indicates most frightening trait of personality, which is stabbing from behind, bitterness, subconscious guilt and bad instincts.
- **Omitted letters or Pieces of letters:** indicates deceptive nature and deviousness.
- **Slip of Pen or Continuous mistakes:** indicate lying and extreme anxiety.
- **Ovals made upside down:** indicates embezzlers and thief.

14. Signature: It represents one's public self-image and social persona, which means how one behaves in public and what one think of oneself in public around the people. Long strokes and unusual signatures are danger signs of psychopaths.

- **Long strokes through the signature:** indicates unhappiness with self-image and self-destructive tendencies.
- **Signature which is very different from script:** indicates unrealistic self-image.

CONCLUSION

Along with the overt and covert traits exhibited by psychopaths, they show a unique penmanship. The psychiatric diagnosis combined with the information provided by profilers and graphologists do nothing more than to offer the investigators more details he can use in order to discover the wrong doer. The nature of the crime committed by psychopaths are usually heinous in nature which urges severe punishment at first glance but understanding the reason behind the crime and personality assessment by psychologists and graphologists, it becomes evident that the crime committed by psychopaths is not due to any *mens rea* but only under the influence of antisocial personality disorder. Finally, to conclude specific graphic traits clusters that graphologists have traditionally associated with psychopath or criminal mind reflects in varying degree are tendencies of covering up, evasiveness,

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inhibition, defensiveness, lack of clarity, self-consciousness, deliberate calculations, impulsiveness, deceitfulness, dependency, vanity and ostentation which can be identified in the handwriting of the person as described under the head graphonomy. In United Kingdom and United States of America separate standing have been made for psychopaths, there is still an urgent need in India Judicial system to identify and classify such mental disorder. Since India is a multi-lingual and multi-script county, therefore a great amount of research scope is present in identifying psychopath or antisocial personality traits through Automatic Handwriting Analysis (AHR), and Online Handwriting Recognition (OHR) on popular Indian scripts.

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Conflict of Interest

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