The Neuropsychological Bases of Psychopathy in a Community

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Abstract of Thesis:

The project will examine neuropsychological functioning in a large sample of community member participants who will be identified, through Lilienfeld and Widows (2006) Psychopathic Personality Inventory Revised as having various degrees of psychopathic features. The relationship between passive avoidance learning scores, as defined by performance on a number sequence learning task (modified from Lykken,1955) and a go/no go discrimination task and scores on Behavioural Activation and Behavioural Inhibition Scales (Carver and White, 1994) that are purported to measure emotion related behavioural activation and behavioural inhibition systems as identified by Gray (e.g. 1994) as existing in the prefrontal cortex will be compared to levels of psychopathic features in participants. The initial prediction is that participants high in psychopathy will demonstrate poor passive avoidance learning and will be high in behavioural activation and low in behavioural inhibition reflecting impulsive behaviour. A further and quite major examination will involve identifying differences between psychopathic and non-psychopathic groups on a battery of measures identified in terms of a motivational and cognitive neuropsychological accounts of psychopathy and to determine whether any differences can be characterised in terms of two dimensions, cognitive and behavioural impulsivity. The results obtained will be interpreted within the single theory of brain function in emotion advanced by Gray (e.g. 1994) and with regard to a motivational or cognitive neuropsychological account of behaviour. Statistical analysis is expected to reveal a model that will reflect a strong motivational influence with lesser support being found for a cognitive neuropsychological explanation of psychopathic behaviour.