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## Who Is The Violent Offender and What is the Target Selection Process?

1. The Violent Offender
2. Personality Traits
3. Opportunity Theory of Crime
4. Target Selection Process
5. Root Causes of Interpersonal Violence

### Introduction

Theory of Mind (ToM) in self-defense refers to the capacity to understand and attribute mental states to yourself and to others with the purpose of predicting violent behavior and defending against it (1, 2). In today's article I will develop a theory of criminal mind and answer the question, "who is the bad guy?"

In section one I will develop a profile on the violent offender exploring values, beliefs, motivations, and meaning of the act. In section two I will introduce some of the personality traits common to violent offenders. In section three I will introduce the ecological elements of a crime and predatory violations. In section four I will introduce the considerations and criteria that go into the target selection process, and lastly, in section five I will introduce the root causes of interpersonal violence using the Ecological Model to explore a continuum of risk factors.

To be clear, understanding all of this will not help you in the heat of the moment if you are under attack. All you will have to rely on in the moment is your wits and martial training. However, it will help you to better understand and predict future behavioral patterns of violent offenders enabling you to formulate more effective prevention and mitigation strategies that you can integrate into your defensive persona, martial training and daily life.

王阳明-心学家



Master Luo Guang Yu  
罗光玉 1888-1944

## 1. Who is the Violent Offender?

### 1.1 Categories of Non-Normalcy

In discussing 'who' in self-defense the first thing that comes to mind is, "who is the bad guy?" It is instinctual to focus on the source of the threat but this reflects a narrow view as perpetrators of violence represent a minority subset of the greater population. Simply put, there are many more people in the world than there are 'bad guys,' and so it becomes increasingly important to contextualize the different groups of people that you come in to contact with on a daily basis. We can categorize a select number of sub-groups onto a continuum (Chart 1) to help better contextualize degrees of normalcy (and non-normalcy) which can later be applied to threat assessment and benchmarking risk. These five sub-groups include: the Artefact, the Nuisance, the Opportunist, the Distressed, and the Violent Offender (VO).

**The Artefact (A).** Artefacts are the seemingly random people that you encounter in your everyday life. It can include for example the local shop owner where you buy your morning coffee, the teenager waiting at the bus stop, the person reading the newspaper in the park over lunch break, the bike courier who crosses your path at an intersection, or the front desk security guard at your place of work. The main point here is that they all occur in a context of normalcy and do not raise concern.

**The Nuisance (N).** The Nuisance as the name implies is a person who causes you minor inconvenience outside of the normal context of what you are doing. It might be a person asking you for the time in the mall, a panhandler asking you for some spare change, or even a misogynistic construction worker whistling at you on the street as you walk by. Because it is slightly outside the scope of normalcy (or not depending on where you live) you will take notice and stay guarded.

**The Opportunist (O).** Next on the scale is the Opportunist which is someone who will not break contact with you. This might be a persistent panhandler, an aggressive door-to-door salesperson, or someone asking for directions who displays an unusual intensity and duration of contact. This is beyond the Nuisance and is increasingly abnormal. You will take notice and maintain an increased state of awareness.

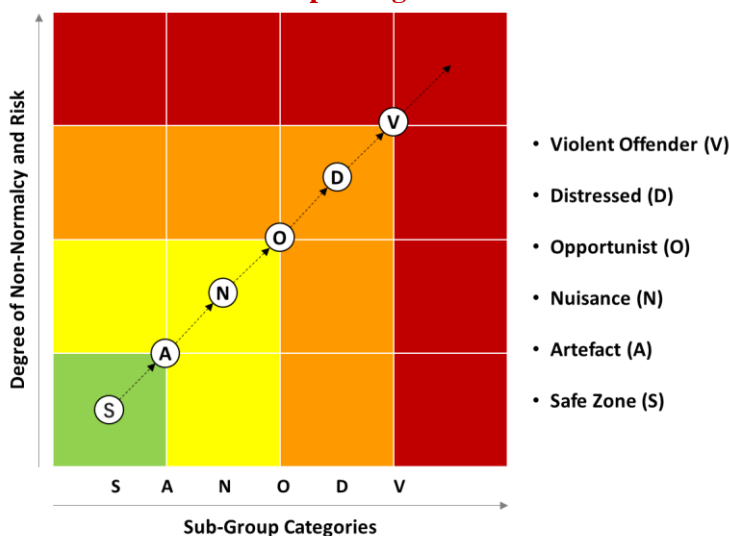
**The Distressed (D).** The Distressed is someone who is physically, cognitively and/or emotionally dysregulated with some degree of secondary fixation on you. A few examples of observable distressed states could be a couple arguing heatedly in the park, someone walking down the street intoxicated, someone experiencing road rage in heavy traffic, or someone in a super market lineup making aggressive uncontrolled gestures. On a sliding scale this is increasingly further outside the scope of normalcy and should put in into elevated state of awareness. If circumstances further develop to a point where that person turns to your direction, makes eye contact, begins speaking to you, or starts walking in your direction, this should put you into a high level of alert and ready to defend. This is reflected in an increasing intensity and duration of contact with diminishing proximity.

It is important to contextualize the different groups of people that you come in to contact with on a daily basis in order to properly assess threats and benchmark risk.

The Violent Offender (V) is someone who directly confronts you face-to-face with intentions to physically harm you. This situation is potentially life threatening and you will be on the highest possible level of alert ready to defend.



**Chart 1: Sub-Group Categories**



Source: Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu Analysis

**The Violent Offender (VO).** Lastly, the Violent Offender is someone who directly confronts you with intentions to physically intimidate you, coerce you, hurt you, rob you, sexually abuse you, or commit some other form of violence on you. You may have limited time to react or you may be taken entirely by surprise. This situation is potentially life threatening and you will be on the highest possible level of alert ready to defend.

**Safe Zone (S).** The Safe Zone can be in solitude or together with someone you completely trust like family or close friends. It represents a zone of complete safety and normalcy. It is not necessarily fixed to any one particular location or time, but more often than not is in a secure location like the privacy of your own home or a friend's. The context is normal and you are in a state of complete ease.

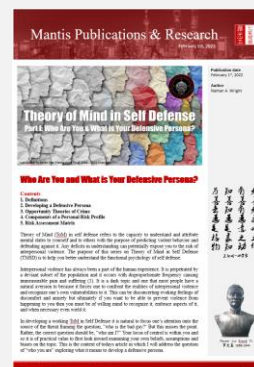
## 1.2 Not all violent offenders are strangers

It is common to assume that all violent offenders are strangers in your life. After all, if you are one of the good people then how could you possibly be associated with one of the bad ones? At best you already have a low personal risk profile (PRP) and a good group of peers surrounding you. Alternatively you might have a medium PRP but possess an uninformed naivety of your friends. At worst, you might have a high PRP but intentionally resist to acknowledge your risky peer group. Statistically speaking, more often than not violent acts are perpetrated by a person you know.

For example, if you are associating with insidious peer groups that engage in high-risk behaviors, this will increase the likelihood of a known attacker. In other cases of sexual violence, offenders are often ones close to the victim including an intimate partner, a family member, a friend, a guardian, or even a care giver. This aspect of familiarity is critically important to keep in mind when you are formulating preventative strategies and engaging in situational training scenarios. The anonymous attacker who jumps out from behind the white van in the dark parking lot may not be the most likely scenario.

The green quadrant in Chart 1 represents a zone of complete safety and normalcy. It is not fixed to any one particular location or time, but often can be at home where you are in solitude or together with your most trusted family or friends and in a state of complete ease.

Violent acts can be perpetrated by a person that the victim knows, not just strangers. This relates back to an awareness of your personal risk profile and is important to keep in mind when developing preventative strategies.



**Theory of Mind in Self Defense: Part I - Who Are You and What is Your Defensive Persona?**

### 1.3 The Violent Offender's World View

The worldview of a VO is drastically different from that of everyday law-abiding citizens. Rather than being guided by normative pro-social values based on peace, trust, cooperation, love, and sustainability, theirs can be characterized on a sliding scale of anti-social values based on conflict, distrust, deceit, resentment, callousness, zero-sum gain and violence. More often than not, set against the backdrop of impoverished economic conditions, tragic family backgrounds, community instability, and a history of exposure to interpersonal and collective violence, VO's have chosen an altogether different pathway in life.

As a reflection of their individual biology, personality, experiences, values, and attitudes, the VO has made the self-definitive self-affirming decision that they will not be a victim of violence, and instead, become a producer of it. It is a hyperpolarized view where violence becomes fully operationalized as a rational and justified means to an end. The VO will not hesitate to perpetrate violence with the utmost virulency and finality in efforts to intimidate, control, dominate, hurt, maim or even kill in the name of perceived gain, or removal of a perceived stimulus.

### 1.4 Motivations and Meaning

Depending on the type of violence perpetrated, different VO's will have different motivations that in turn infer different meaning. In proactive violence (instrumental, predatory, premeditated, cold-blooded) offenders are purposeful with clear goals in mind including material gain (money, property, other assets) or subjective gain (power, sense of control, sexual gratification, symbolic) (4, 6, 7).

Reactive violence (affective, impulsive, reactive, hot-blooded) on the other hand typically involves hostility and retaliation, often occurring without forethought in response to a perceived threat, provocation, or insult. It is highly emotional with enhanced physiological arousal that can be completely uncontrolled (5, 7).

Predatory offenders tend to commit more severe physical violence including acts of aggravated assault and homicide displaying more antisocial-narcissistic-aggressive personality traits, which is likely related to increased rates of psychopathic traits. Affective offenders, the more common type, can include assault (physical and sexual), and tends to have a wider range of psychopathologies in addition to passive-aggressive, borderline, and narcissistic personality traits. Described as suffering from emotional dysregulation they usually have higher chronic anger, more fearful attachment, and are more likely to have had a close connection to their victims as in IPV and sexual violence (4, 6).

## 2. Personality Traits of the Violent Offender

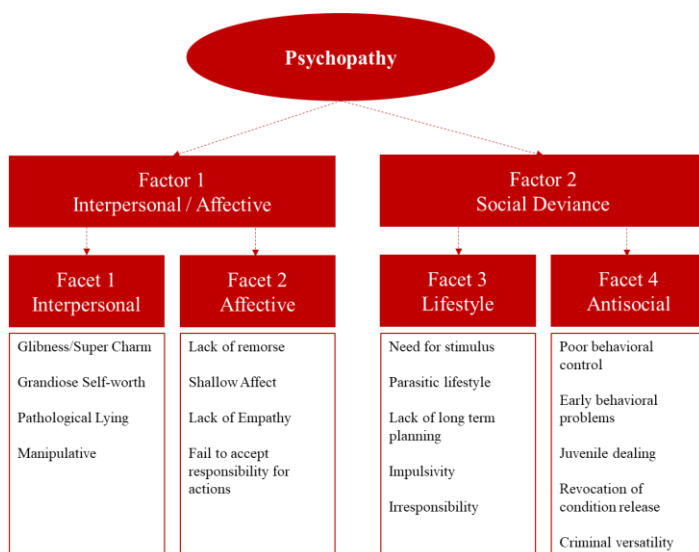
### 2.1 Anti-Social Personality Disorder

VO's often display personality trait symptoms that can be characterized as being on the spectrum of psychopathy. The American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 Handbook (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) for practicing clinical psychiatrists refers to the official diagnosis of Factor II Social-Deviance as Anti-Social Personality Disorder (APD), sometimes colloquially described as sociopathy (8, 9, 10).

The VO has made the self-definitive self-affirming decision that they will become a producer of violence, operationalizing it as a rational and justified means to an end.

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## Chat 2: Typology of Psychopathy



Psychopathy Check-List Revised (PCL-R)

VO's with APD are typically characterized by the following personality symptoms including: disregard for right or wrong, persistent lying to exploit others, callousness, the use of charm or wit to manipulate for personal gain, a sense of superiority, impulsivity, an inability to emotionally regulate, unnecessary risk-taking or dangerous behavior with no regard for the safety of others, repeatedly violating the rights of others through dishonesty and violence, consistently irresponsible and repeatedly failing to meet working or financial obligations, reoccurring problems with the law including criminal history, and poor or abusive relationships (8, 9).

Most criminal cases involving violent crimes involve perpetrators who demonstrate many of these personality traits and symptoms. Conservatively speaking over 85% of incarcerated prisoners sentenced for violent acts are diagnosed with APD and over half of those additionally suffer from alcohol and drug abuse disorders (8, 9). Adults with APD typically show symptoms of conduct disorder before the age of 15 if diagnosed in the system (8, 9).

### 2.2 Factor I Psychopathy

Primary psychopathy (Factor I, Interpersonal-Affective psychopathy) is a rare but more devious and virulent personality type more commonly associated with instrumental violence. According to Hare's Psychopathic Checklist - Revised (PCL-R) (Hare, 1999;2003) symptoms include above average intelligence, superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, pathological lying, cunning and manipulative, a lack of guilt / remorse, shallow affect, callousness and a lack of empathy, failure to accept responsibility, and proclivity to engage in extreme forms of violence – physical, sexual and psychological. Approximately 1% of a population suffers from some form of psychopathy which falls on a broad spectrum from mild and manageable to strong and out of control (10). Approximately 25% of incarcerated inmates qualify as suffering from Factor I psychopathy (10).

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## 3. Opportunity Theory of Crime

### 3.1 Elements of predatory violations

Before exploring the process and criteria of target selection it is of practical value to first introduce some background on the basic ecological elements of predatory violations and the opportunity theory of crime. The Routines Action Theory model developed by Cohen and Felson in 1979 posits that the probability of a crime occurring increases when there is a meeting in time and space of three elements: 1) the motivated offender, 2) the suitable target, and 3) the absence of a capable guardian.

Motivated offenders are defined as having both criminal intent and an ability to carry out those intentions if they meet in space and time. Target suitability is often determined by factors that increase the attractiveness of a target as determined by the offender, and influences the occurrence of direct contact with potential offenders. Guardianship can include formal guardians such as the police, but ordinary citizens also act as guardians as they go about their own routine activities. It can also include physical measures, such as target hardening (e.g., locks, carrying weapons) (11).

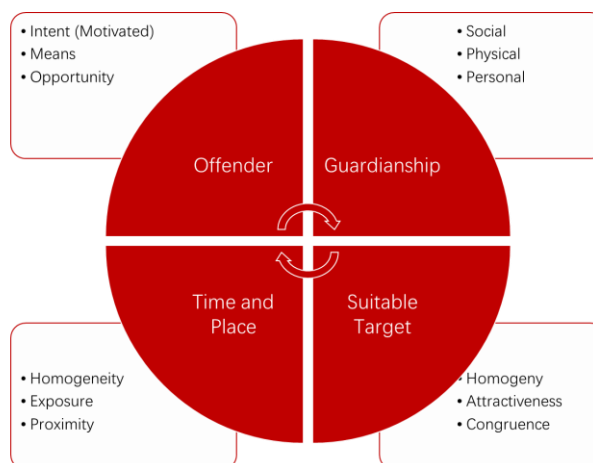
### 3.2 Motive, Intent, Means, and Opportunity

Motive, intent, means, and opportunity is a popular summation of four aspects of a crime. In the context of understanding violence and target selection they are useful principles worth reviewing. **Motive** determines the reason for engaging in the act which can include monetary motivation, power dominance motivations, and/or reactionary emotional motivations. **Intent** determines the purpose of the act itself and is relevant in the court of law. **Means** describes the ability (or lack of) to physically and successfully engage in the act. Someone who is physically stronger, wielding a weapon, and/or who makes the use of the element of surprise may be at an advantage is therefore said to possess 'means.' **Opportunity** describes whether or not the VCA has the chance in time and place to commit the act as premised by the model above.

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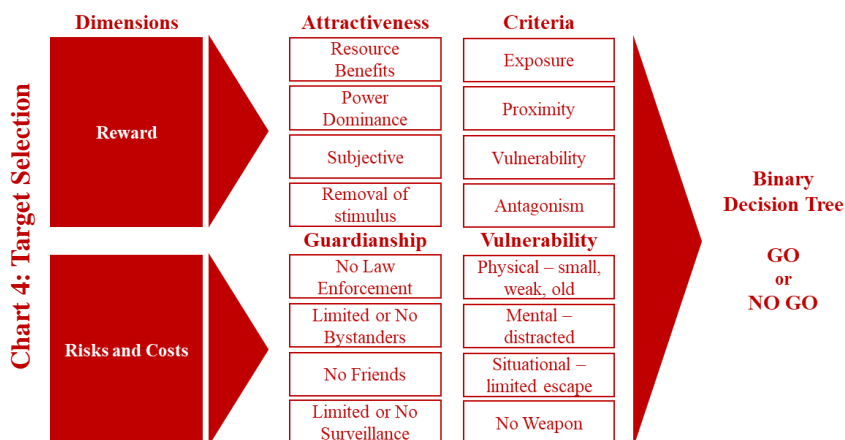
The Routines Action Theory model posits that the probability of a crime occurring increases when there is a meeting in time and space of three elements: 1) the motivated offender, 2) the suitable target, and 3) the absence of a capable guardian.

Chart 3: Routine Activities Theory



Source: Cohen and Felson

## 4. How is a Target Selected?



Source: Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu Analysis

Target Selection is the process of how a VO chooses a potential target for predation. It is not a process that happens within you, but rather, is an internal process that occurs inside the mind of the offender.

### 4.1 Target Selection

Target Selection is the process of how a VO chooses a potential target for predation. It is not a process that happens within you, but rather, is an internal process that occurs inside the mind of the offender. The target could be anyone as dictated by the VO and it is a process that occurs unknowingly to you without anything actually happening. In fact, you may enter the radar of a VO becoming a potential target without actually ever even knowing it or being victimized. If you have a low personal risk-profile, the act of being targeted may only occur a few times within a given year and without occurrence of any negative events transpiring. If you have a high risk personal profile, target selection may occur multiple times with the span of a given month, week, or even a single day, and the risk of something bad happening increases substantially.

### 4.2 Dimensions of Achievement

Target Selection is a dynamic process that occurs across two dimensions of criminal achievement: productivity (reward) and cost avoidance (risk) (Chart 3, 4). Productivity is a measure of yield, or what can be achieved (gained) in terms of resource benefits (money, property, sex), power dominance control (school bullying, gangs jockeying for territory, bar fight, rape), or the removal of a perceived negative stimulus common in reactionary affective violence (road rage, argument over a parking spot, argument between partners). Cost avoidance (risk) is a measure of the chances of the VO being caught and incarcerated by law enforcement, or alternatively, incurring physical injury. The VO will seek to maximize yield and minimize risk.

Target Selection is a dynamic process that occurs across two dimensions of criminal achievement: productivity (reward) and cost avoidance (risk).

### 4.3 Exposure, Proximity, and Absence of Guardianship

Part of the targeting process is premised on factors of exposure, proximity, and the absence of guardianship (Chart 3, 4). These are closely related to means and opportunity. **Exposure** is situational and is the physical visibility and accessibility of a person or object to the potential offender. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time may put you in the direct line of sight of a potential VO allowing them to identify you as a potential target. **Proximity** is the spatial distance between the potential target and the VO. As proximity decreases target attractiveness increases and the viability of

The **Target Congruence Model** posits that target attractiveness is a measure of gratifiability, vulnerability, and antagonism.

**Target vulnerability** assesses whether there is something about a target that limits their ability to perceive an attack or to resist an attack thereby making it easier for the VO to achieve their goal.

**Target antagonism** is about a specific quality, possession, skill or attribute that brings about anger, jealousy or destructive impulses from the offender.

engagement increases. It brings the bad guy one step closer to making the go / no-go decision. **Guardianship** can be friends, family, security guards, law enforcement, other people in the area, or security systems that may deter an attacker. The absence of guardianship potentially increases the chances of something bad happening because it reduces the VO's risk of getting caught or being injured - but this is not absolute.

#### 4.4 Target Congruence

Outside of exposure, proximity, and guardianship, target attractiveness is further evaluated based on perceived yield and vulnerability (Chart 3, 4). The Target Congruence Model posits that target attractiveness is a measure of gratifiability, vulnerability, and antagonism.

**Target Gratifiability** is about payoff and the perceived characteristics of quality, possession, skill or attribute that the VO wants to obtain, use, have access to, or manipulate (12). In the case of sexual assault, being a female would put you at greater risk for victimization, although being male does preclude you from it. Making a stop at an ATM or carrying valuable possessions in the form of handbags or accessories would fall into this category as a risk factor for being selected for theft or robbery.

**Target vulnerability** assesses whether there is something about a target that limits their ability to perceive an attack (lack of awareness or line of sight) or to resist an attack (physically or situationally) thereby making it easier for the VO to achieve their goal (12). This might be the case for those who are very young, smaller in stature, handicapped, elderly and weak, intoxicated, or just because they preoccupied with something else (i.e. looking at your mobile phone). Likewise, being male, appearing larger and more capable, appearing confident and more situationally aware could potentially deter a VCA and trigger de-selection.

**Target antagonism** is about a specific quality, possession, skill or attribute that brings about anger, jealousy or destructive impulses from the offender (12). It can be a passive or an active characteristic. Passive examples could be perceived ethnic characteristics, sexual orientation, obesity, or even just being female which can all potentially lead to discriminatory hate crimes. Active examples would be getting into a heated argument where you provoke a VO to attack which is particularly common amongst young males in situations of elevated emotional distress, intoxication, jealousy and / or power dominance displays.

#### 4.5 Go-No Go Decision Tree

The VO risk assessment process is rudimentary and their decision tree is primarily a binary one - go or no go - based on the perceived risk-reward mix. At the most fundamental level VO's are looking for a payday from an unwitting target in which they can gain both positional and relational dominance. Your goal in developing preventative and mitigative strategies should be to minimize exposure and proximity, maximize presence of guardianship (fortification), appear less attractive, and look less vulnerable (less easier) thereby either circumventing the VO's decision gap altogether, or triggering the process deselection. In order to do so it is wise to put yourself in the shoes of the VO and think about it in terms of what factors signal greater perceived yield and what factors signal greater perceived weakness.

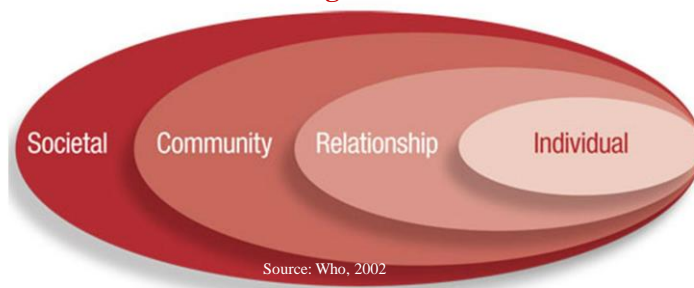


## 5. What are the Root Causes of Violence?

### 5.1 Nature Nurture Continuum

There is no single factor that explains why some individuals behave violently toward others or why violence is more prevalent in some communities than in others. What is clear is that violence is the result of a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors. This is the nature-nurture continuum. The Ecological Model (Chart 5) puts forth a holistic framework outlining a number of risk factors for violent behavior that includes individual factors, family relationship factors, community relationship factors, and socio-economic factors (13, 14). The underlying hypothesis reasons that when individuals with biological vulnerabilities are exposed to chronic environmental stress conditions this can manifest in mind-body dysregulation, adverse personality constructs and/or disorders that can also include the manifestation of violent behavior.

**Chart 5: Ecological Model Violence**



### 5.1 Individual Factors

#### 5.1.1 Biological Factors

Research evidence suggests that dis-regulated social behavior manifesting in violence has its roots in neurophysiological impairment (15). Increasingly as a result of advancements in neuroanatomy and modern neuroimaging techniques, scientists are able to provide a more detailed explanation and associate the development of neural disorders with structural and functional abnormalities in brain physiology.

The pre-frontal cortex (PFC) (Chart 6) is the portion of the brain responsible for executive function (logic, planning, impulse control) and emotional regulation (16). In impulsive behavior disorders and anti-social personality disorders, areas of the cerebral cortex are found to be less active suggesting that aggression, violence and crime has a corollary relationship with less functional efficiency in the PFC (24) (Chart 6).

Offenders of affective violence in addition to reduced PFC function also have higher activity in the limbic system (Chart 6), and specifically the amygdala, resulting in stronger anticipatory emotional responses (fear, terror, anger and rage) (17, 24). Likewise, offenders of instrumental violence (premeditated), and in particular those

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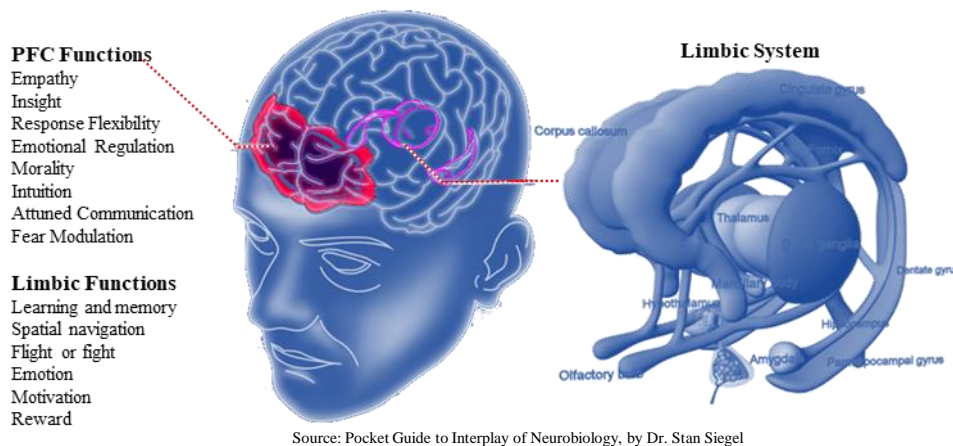


The Secret to Better Performance is Control – Lessons in Mindfulness in Praying Mantis Kung Fu

with Factor I Psychopathy may have medium to low cognitive function but suffer from lower activity in the amygdala, insula, and the anterior cingulate cortex which results in reduced empathetic attitudes towards other people’s pain (4, 5, 6) as well as reduced emotional fear responses (4, 5, 6), often described symptomatically as appearing fearless, cold and callous. You can refer back to my article, “The Secret to Better Performance is Control” in which I provide a high-level introduction into the basics of brain biology as relates to mindfulness and emotional regulation.

Nicotine, alcohol and drug exposure is a high-risk factor during the critical stages of fetal development that can lead to serious birth defects, intellectual disabilities, cognitive deficiencies, and longer-term socio-emotional functions resulting in problems coping with life (18). It has a relational link to increased risks of antisocial behavior, violence, and other at-risk behaviors including future drug use, alcohol abuse and dangerous sexual activity (18). Fetal malnutrition is another risk factor adversely affecting healthy fetal development that can lead to physical, cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities inclusive of antisocial and violent behavior in later years.

### Chart 6: Pre-Frontal Cortex and Limbic System



Source: Pocket Guide to Interplay of Neurobiology, by Dr. Stan Siegel

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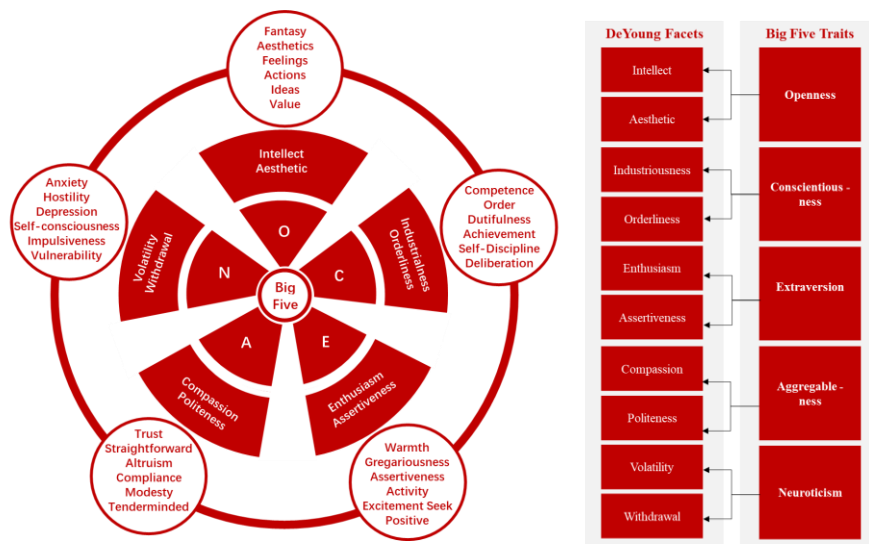
Anti-Social Personality Disorder (Factor II psychopathy, secondary psychopathy) is primarily associated with dimensions high on Neuroticism, and secondarily with low Agreeableness, and low Conscientiousness.

### 5.1.2 Psychological Factors

Section three previously outlined the different factors of psychopathy (Factor I and II) and some of the facet traits according to the DSM-5 Handbook. Separately from the DSM-5 there is also a large stream of academic research investigating the correlation between the Five Factor Model which outlines five dimensions of human personality (Chart 7) and violent behavior.

Research studies show that Anti-Social Personality Disorder (Factor II psychopathy, secondary psychopathy) is primarily associated with dimensions high on Neuroticism, and secondarily with low Agreeableness, and low Conscientiousness (19, 20). These relate to high negative emotionality, low empathy, low self-discipline, and high impulsivity. On the DeYoung sub-facet model APD is primarily associated with high volatility, and secondarily with low compassion / politeness, and low industriousness / orderliness. Primary psychopathy (Factor I) is primarily associated with dimensions of low Agreeableness, and secondarily with low Neuroticism and mid to low

**Chart 7: Five Factor Model, De-Young Facets, NEO Sub-Facets**



Source: Robert McCrae and Paul Costa, FFM, De-Young, NEO, Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu Analysis

Biological equivalents of Five Factor Model: O: Increased breadth of mental associations. C: Increased ability to inhibit impulse (pre-frontal cortex). E: Increased sensitivity to reward (midbrain, dopamine). A: Increased empathy and regard for others (ACS, PFC). N: Increased sensitivity to threat (limbic system, serotonin, glucacorticoid).

Coconsciousness. On the DeYoung sub-facet model this is associated with low compassion and politeness, and secondarily with low volatility and low industriousness / orderliness (19, 20).

## 5.2 Environmental Factors

Chronic toxic environmental conditions can expose vulnerable individuals to increased risk of violent behavior. These external factors can include toxic family relationships, unstable community relationships, and dire socio-economic conditions (13). This is not to say that all people who grow up in extreme conditions go on to become hardened criminals or perpetrators of violence. This is just not true. The fact is the vast majority of any population - including even the most disenfranchised ones - follow normative rules of society leading peaceful and productive lives as best they can, while violent offenders on the other hand represent a fractional minority of the population. Likewise, some people who grow up in privileged conditions go on to commit crimes including acts of extreme violence. However, it has been found that an overwhelming majority of violent criminals have been shown to have endured some forms of adverse experiences in their childhood and teen years, whether suffering from a combination of maltreatment (abuse and neglect), exposure to extreme violence (physical, sexual, psychological) and/or low socioeconomic status (20,21).

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### 5.2.1 Family Relationships

Typically, but not always, VO's may have been exposed to toxic family environments that include poor parenting practices, neglect and abuse (physical, sexual, psychological). Neglect can include failure to provide sufficient supervision, nourishment, or medical care. Neglectful parents tend to be young, low income, perhaps unemployed, and have low education. They may have difficulty planning



Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) in the form of psychological abuse, violent physical abuse and even sexual abuse can have devastating long-term impacts on the healthy physical and mental development of a child.

Children that grow up in unstable family conditions and who forego formative stages of early childhood socialization will be more at risk to social-isolation and/or associating with deviant peer groups.

Without proper supervision and guardianship, at-risk youth may further engage in anti-social behavior where they increasingly become dedicated producers of violence and loose their inhibition to it.

life events like marriage, having kids, or seeking employment. These characteristics can compromise parenting and is associated with disrupted social relationships, difficulty dealing with stress, and difficulty in reaching social support systems.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) in the form of psychological abuse, violent physical abuse and even sexual abuse can have devastating long-term impacts on the healthy physical and mental development of a child. As an example, witnessing violence first-hand in the form of intimate partner violence, or even more tragically having violence perpetrated against oneself directly by a parent, caretaker, or sibling. Parents likely to abuse their children physically tend to have low self-esteem, poor impulse control, possibly substance abuse issues and tend to display antisocial behaviors themselves. Abusive parents show greater irritation and annoyance in response to their children's moods and behaviors, are less supportive, less affectionate, less playful and responsive to their children, and are more controlling and hostile (20, 21).

Children who have been abused and neglected are often removed from their families and placed in foster care which typically occurs early on in the life cycle. In and out of foster care, children often forego the formation of critical maternal bonds – founded on trust and love - that are necessary to supporting the early stages of proper human socialization. In the most extreme cases some teens may even “age out” of foster care meaning they have spent their entirety of their childhood life living in foster care, where they may have further experienced neglect and abuse (13). In 2018 alone, over 18,000 youth aged out of foster care, considered the most vulnerable of the vulnerable (22, 23).

## 5.2.2 Community Relationships

Children growing up in unstable family conditions that forego the formative stages of early childhood socialization will be more at risk to social-isolation and/or associating with deviant peer groups in local communities. With a lack of proper parental guardianship, activities often go unmonitored as they experiment and engage in random acts of mischief including petty vandalism, petty theft, and/or street violence. In hostile school system environments with limited resources and patterns of deep socioeconomic segregation, at-risk children are more prone to low academic achievement leaving them unmotivated, further isolated, and more susceptible to falling through the cracks.

With a lack of guardianship and supervision provided in schools, some at risk youth will increasingly turn to the streets experiencing more toxic forms of socialization, learning about the benefits of violence and the personal power gained from it that could not otherwise be achieved. Further engaging in small-time criminal behavior or running with local neighborhood gangs, they increasingly become dedicated producers and consumers of violence losing their inhibition to it and spurring on more risky behavior.

Often against a personal backdrop of personal psychological trauma inflicted from a history of family neglect and/or abuse, at-risk youth are unable to mentally reconcile life's hardships and injustices, often turning to alcohol and drug use as a means to cope. This can lead to severe substance abuse and addiction problems that further increases vulnerabilities and dysregulation resulting in even more self-destructive

behaviors. Teens and young adults facing limited educational achievement, bleak job prospects in the local community, and limited mobility are more susceptible to becoming radicalized turning to extreme violence and crime as a means to earn money, feed themselves, and pay rent. Through this lifestyle choice they are exposed to more insidious peer groups often involved in organized crime where more extreme forms of violence, including homicide, becomes normalized. In this last stage, the virulence and potency with which the VO acts is at its highest as they have already internally made the self-definitive and self-affirming decision that they will operationalize violence as a means of survival in a cruel 'world' where violence reigns king.

### 5.2.3 Structural Factors

It should be clear by now that structural factors also play an important role in the cycle of violence, often referred to as structural violence. Neglectful and abusive caregivers tend to be young, low income, unemployed, have low educational achievement, and exercise poor family planning.

In single parent homes with multiple dependents and where the primary caregiver often works two jobs, elements of maternal bonding, emotional support, and adequate childcare supervision can be compromised leading to deficits in the socialization process. High poverty levels and a lack of affordable housing can put children at risk of living in food-insecure environments and even homelessness. Malnourishment for pre-natal newborns, and those under the age of six can drastically impair brain development and lead to chronic health conditions.

Limited access to continuous healthcare coverage can put children at risk of experiencing further health complications. This can compound the problem of missing more days of school that can also result in reduced educational outcomes. Schools in low-income neighborhoods that have disproportionate resources and that suffer from patterns of socioeconomic disparities are unable to provide the support that many young learners require which perpetuates learning achievement gaps and limits future job prospects.

Fewer economic opportunities in low-income neighborhoods and a lack of mobility leads to disenfranchisement and increased rates of crime and street violence. Impoverished socioeconomic factors create structural cycles of violence that are difficult to break and can expose individuals with genetic predispositions to levels of chronic stress that manifest in violent behavior.

## Concluding Remarks

In developing a theory of mind in self defense, today's article explored the second half of the equation answering the question, "who is the bad guy?" I specifically addressed who the violent offender is, how a targeted is selected for predation, and what some of the root causes of violence are.

In understanding who the violent offender is, it is important to remember that they are a minority subset of the greater population and that there are many more people in the world than there are "bad guys." In this regards it becomes important to contextualize degrees of normalcy and non-normalcy in order to better identify potential threats.

Teens and young adults facing limited educational achievement, bleak job prospects in the local community, and limited mobility are more susceptible to becoming radicalized.

It should be clear by now that structural factors also play an important role in the cycle of violence, often referred to as structural violence.

High poverty levels and a lack of affordable housing can put children at risk of living in food-insecure environments and even homelessness.

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## Theory of Mind in Self Defense Series



7

The VO statistically speaking is someone the target most likely knows, and is someone who has made the self defining and self affirmative decision that they will operationalize violence in order to achieve their goals.



6

In Proactive Violence, offenders are purposeful with clear goals in mind including material gain or subjective gain. Reactive Violence on the other hand typically involves hostility and retaliation, often occurring without forethought in response to a perceived threat, provocation, or insult, where the VO is highly emotional.



5

VO's may suffer from a range of personality constructs and disorders of which Anti-Social Personality Disorder is the most commonly observed. Typical traits include a disregard for right or wrong, persistent lying to exploit others, callousness, the use of charm or wit to manipulate for personal gain, a sense of superiority, impulsivity, an inability to emotionally regulate, unnecessary risk-taking or dangerous behavior with no regard for the safety of others, repeatedly violating the rights of others through dishonesty and violence, problems with the law including criminal history, and poor or abusive relationships.



4

The Target Selection process is exclusively internal to the mind of the VO and is not something that happens within you. It is a dynamic process that occurs across two dimensions including productivity (reward) and cost avoidance (risk). Productivity is a measure of yield, or what can be achieved (gained) in terms of resource benefits, power dominance control, or the removal of a perceived negative stimulus. Cost avoidance (risk) is a measure of the chances of the VO being caught and incarcerated by law enforcement, or alternatively, incurring physical injury. The VO will seek to maximize yield and minimize risk.



3

There is no single factor that explains why some individuals behave violently toward others or why violence is more prevalent in some communities than in others. What is clear is that violence is the result of a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors. The underlying hypothesis reasons that when individuals with biological vulnerabilities are exposed to chronic environmental stress conditions this can manifest in mind-body dysregulation, adverse personality constructs and other disorders including the manifestation of violent behavior.



2

Overall I hope this article today has been both interesting and informative with the goal of helping you to not only understand the mindset and behavioral patterns of violent offenders, but to also start thinking about how this relates to developing preventative strategies which you can incorporate into your tactical martial training and everyday life. In the next installment of this series I will explore the characteristics of a violent interaction addressing the concepts of when and where in time and place, as well as introducing the stages of a crime.



1

Be safe, be kind, and train hard!

Nathan A. Wright  
Chief Instructor, China  
Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu

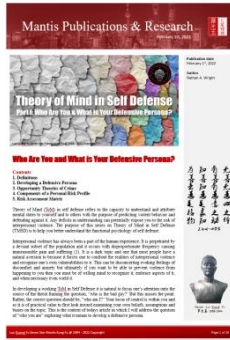


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## Who We Are

We are a diverse group of people dedicated to the transmission and promotion of traditional Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu (Qi Xing Tang Lang Quan). We represent the proud family lineage of Master Luo Guang Yu, who made the style famous in the Shanghai Jingwu Association in 1919. In 2019 we celebrated the 100-year centennial anniversary of Seven Star Mantis in Shanghai.

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