IS ANYONE REALLY EVIL?

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WE ALL OCCASIONALLY DO THINGS THAT WE KNOW ARE WRONG. BUT CERTAIN PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO COMMIT CRIMES THAN OTHERS. SOME ARE HABITUAL PETTY CRIMINALS, AND OTHERS REGULARLY COMMIT CRUEL AND VIOLENT ACTS. THESE ACTIONS ARE OFTEN DESCRIBED AS "EVIL" AND THE OFFENDERS ARE LABELED AS EVIL PEOPLE OR PSYCHOPATHS.

A guilty conscience makes us want to get physically clean- this is known as the Lady Macbeth effect

CRIMINAL PROFILING:

A new branch of psychology, investigative psychology, now provides information that can be used by the police. An important part of investigative psychology is criminal profiling, using evidence from a crime scene to get an idea of the criminal's personality and motivation, in order to narrow down the range of potential suspects.

DARK SIDE- Some psychologists believe that people who commit evil acts have a built-in personality disorder, called psychopathy. Psychopaths have a lack of empathy, and thus don't mind hurting others.

PSYCHOPATHS SHOW A STUNNING LACK OF CONCERN FOR THE EFFECTS THEIR ACTIONS HAVE ON OTHERS, NO MATTER HOW DEVASTATING THESE MIGHT BE- ***ROBERT D. HARE***

Evil actions

What actions make a person evil? Society decides what it considers bad behavior and calls these actions crimes, but these include minor crimes such as shoplifting, which we don't normally consider to be evil. What we think of as evil acts are generally the most serious crimes, including murder, assault and rape. But is it right to label such offenders as evil? Good people may cause harm in extreme circumstances- killing in self-defense, for example. But some people regularly commit cruel and violent crimes. Rather than simply labeling them as evil, however, some psychologists have asked whether these individuals choose to do evil things, or whether they have an innate personality type, or an abnormality or illness which causes them to engage in criminal behavior.

Personality disorder

By analyzing crime statistics, such as the age, gender, intelligence and social background of offenders, psychologists have tried to determine what factors are involved in habitual criminal behavior, especially in serious crimes. Although social background plays a part, many believe that personality is more important. Robert D. Hare suggests that violent criminal behavior results from a personality disorder, sometimes known as psychopathy, but which he calls antisocial personality disorder (APD). He found a number of personality traits that are characteristic of APD, and devised his Psychopathy Checklist for identifying the disorder. The checklist is divided into two main categories. The first identifies traits such as selfishness, deceit and a callous lack of remorse or guilt, while the second identifies elements of an unstable, antisocial lifestyle, including an exploitative dependence on others. Recent research has shown some correlation between APD and certain types of brain abnormalities but the link has not been proven and environmental factors are also associated with the development of the disorder.

Treatment and punishment

Society largely deals with criminals by punishing them, usually by putting them in prison. Offenders may also receive psychological treatment to deter them from committing future crimes. While these methods can be successful with some people, those with APD are largely undeterred by prison or techniques such as psychotherapy. Treatment of APD is controversial, and some psychologists believe that identifying somebody as a psychopath is not helpful. Hare's checklist has also been criticized because some individuals scoring highly may be merely irresponsible, impulsive, or emotionally detached, but are not necessarily serious criminals. And others who have a form of APD do not commit crimes, but exhibit the disorder by becoming bullying bosses, or even tyrannical dictators or military leaders.