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**Youth Psychopathy
and Violence:
Myths and Realities**



Adelle Forth
Violence & Aggression Conference
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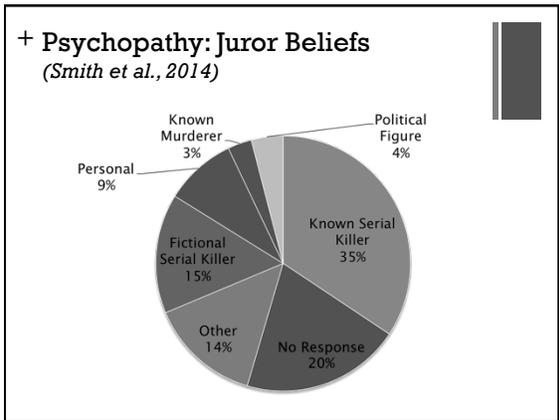
+ **Overview**

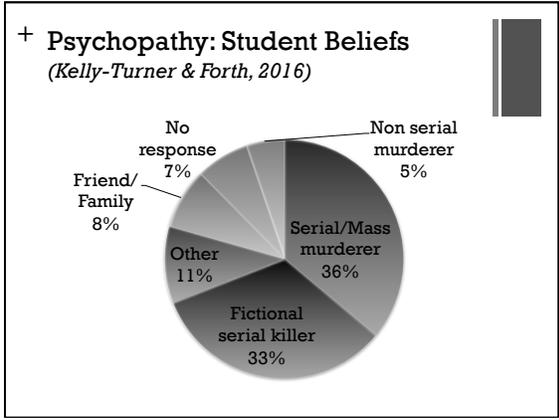


- How stable are psychopathic traits?
- Do male and female youth differ on measures of psychopathic traits?
- Does gender moderate the relationship between psychopathic traits and negative outcomes?
- What are the motives underlying violence in youth and adults with psychopathic traits?
- Do psychopathic traits distinguish violent persisters from desisters?
- What is the impact of the diagnostic label?

+ **Who comes to mind when you think of a psychopath?**







+ What concerns do you have about the use of psychopathy measures in youth?

+ **Concerns**

1. Scores may be inflated by general characteristics of adolescence
2. "Damning label"
3. "Sticky label"

+ **The False Positive Problem**

"Sometimes, however, the child or adolescent will for a while behave in a way that would seem scarcely possible to anyone but the true psychopath and later change, becoming a normal and useful member of society."

Cleckley (1976, p. 270)

+ **"Damning" Label: Potential Stigma**

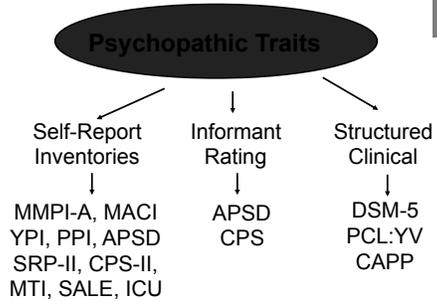
"Juvenciles who are branded as psychopaths are more likely to be viewed as incorrigible, less likely to receive rehabilitative dispositions, and more likely to be transferred to the criminal justice system to be tried as adults and face the possibility of adult sanctions."

Steinberg (2002, p. 36)

+ What to look for in a youth psychopathy measure

- Scores reflect level of traits that are non normative
- Age-appropriate manifestations
- Scores reflect stable dispositions and not transitory problems
- Range of features included
- Scores based on multiple sources

+ Psychopathy: Assessment Issues



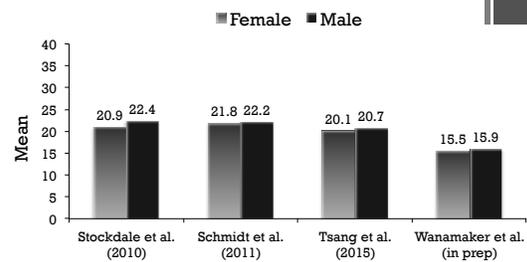
+ Longitudinal Study: Community at Risk Sample *(Bergstrom et al., in press)*

Time period	1	2	3
1. APSD Time 1 (8 – 10)			
2. APSD Time 2 (12 – 14)	.61**		
3. APSD Time 3 (16 - 18)	.58**	.64**	
4. PCL:SV Time 4 (48 yrs)	.40**	.52**	.66**

- Moderate stability across developmental periods
- Most change during adolescence
- Most likely direction of change is decreasing

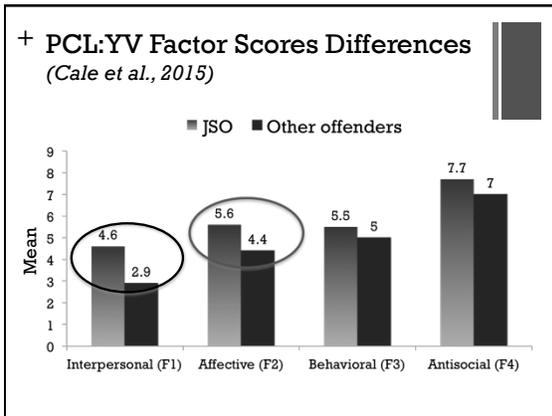
+ Do psychopathy scores vary across gender or violent offender types?

+ PCL:YV Scores: Males vs Females



+ Prevalence of Psychopathic Traits
(Cale et al., 2015)

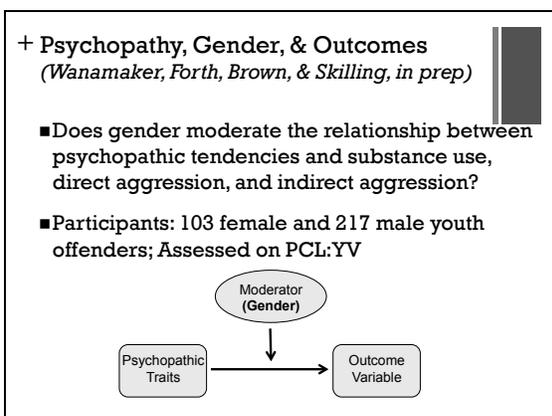
- Incarcerated juvenile sex offenders (n = 40)
 - PCL:YV: 26.0 (32% scored 30+)
 - 7+ convictions: 73%
- Incarcerated non sexual serious offenders (n = 223)
 - PCL:YV: 20.8 (9% scored 30+)
 - 7+ convictions: 68%



+ Potential Implications

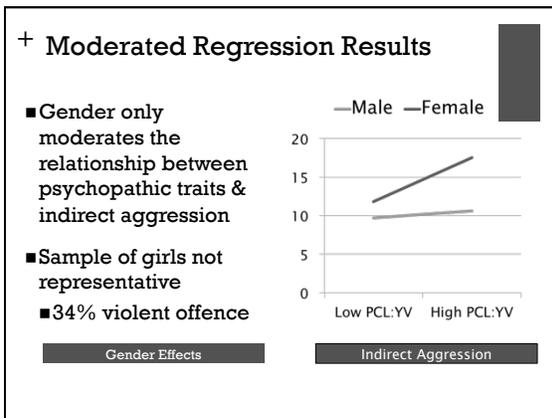
■ *“It is possible that specific dimensions of psychopathy, such as affective deficits, can provide important information about the specific characteristics of sex crime events. On the other hand, interpersonal styles provide information about the methods or processes by which JSO commit sex offenses.”*

Cale et al., 2015, p. 343



Does Gender Matter: Findings

Predictor	Outcome	Main Effects	Moderated Effects
Psychopathic traits	Alcohol use problems	Yes	No
Psychopathic traits	Drug use problems	Yes	No
Psychopathic traits	Physical aggression	Yes	No
Psychopathic traits	Verbal aggression	Yes	No
Psychopathic traits	Indirect aggression	Yes	Yes



+ Two Types of Violence

- Reactive (Hostile) violence
 - Impulsive, heightened angry arousal, reaction to perceived provocation
- Instrumental (Proactive) violence
 - Planned, unemotional, goal-directed

+ Meta-Analysis: Psychopathy and Types of Violence (Blais, Solodukhin, & Forth, 2014)

- 53 studies; N = 8,753
- Examined instrumental and reactive violence
- Compared types of psychopathy measures
- Moderators: gender, age, ethnicity, country, outcome measure

Meta-Analysis (Blais et al., 2014)

Measure	k	n	r	95% CI	
Instrumental					
Clinical	21	1,504	.30	.23	.34
Informant	11	3,321	.44	.42	.46
Self-report	26	5,075	.37	.35	.39
Reactive					
Clinical	11	695	.30	.17	.42
Informant	10	3,283	.43	.28	.56
Self-report	22	4,698	.34	.28	.40

+ Meta-Analysis: Findings

- Psychopathy was *equally* related to both instrumental and reactive violence in youth and adults
- Interpersonal facet most strongly related to instrumental violence
- Lifestyle/antisocial factor most strongly related to reactive violence
- Informant ratings most strongly related to both types of violence

+ Persistence and Desistance of Offending Study *(Forth & Richard, 2012)*

- Do youth who persist in violent offending differ youth who desist?
- 238 male young offenders
 - 38% desisted and 62% persisted
- Follow-up ranged 5 to 14 years (Avg follow-up = 14 yrs)

Differences in “persisters” vs “desisters”

Variable	Persisters	Desisters
PCL:YV	26.0	22.7**
SAVRY - Risk	26.0	21.5***
CD symptoms	8.6	7.1***
Age at first offence	11.7	13.1**
Substance abuse	90%	74%**
Parental criminality	45%	30%*
SAVRY - Protective	1.0	1.8***
Positive attitude authority/ intervention	9%	22%**
Strong commit. to school	10%	29%***

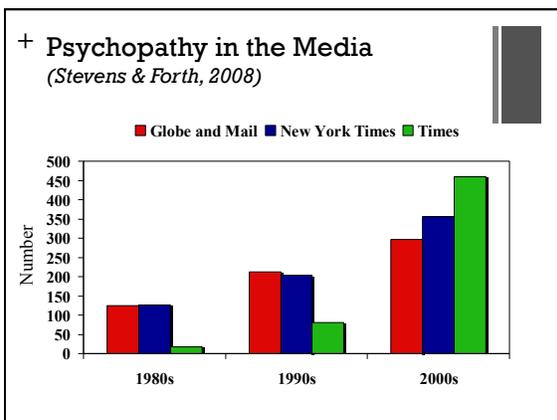
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

No differences between “persisters” vs “desisters”

Variable	Persisters	Desisters
CD diagnosis	98%	94%
ADHD diagnosis	53%	43%
Childhood neglect	60%	57%
Childhood physical abuse	43%	38%
Foster care	63%	58%
Ever expelled	58%	53%
Criminal peers	97%	93%
Prior NV offences	5.4	5.1
Prior V offences	.62	.82

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Diagnostic Label & Potential Impact



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Cody Posey

- 2006: Cody Posey considered for transfer to adult court for killing his father, step-mother, and step-sister at age 14 in 2004
- Potential sentences
 - Adult court: life (parole eligibility after 30 years)
 - Youth court: max of 5 years (released at age 21 years)

+ **Cody Posey**

■ **Prosecution:**

- **Attorney:** Cold-blooded psychopathic killer
- **Psychiatrist:** stated scored “unusually high on a test for psychopathy”; PCL:YV score of 19; usually score of youth is 3.2; not a good candidate for treatment

■ **Defense:**

- **Attorney:** not a psychopath but teen traumatized by years of physical and psychological abuse
- **Psychologist:** PCL:YV score of 11; very low score compared to other incarcerated youth

Study	Sample	Manipulation	Higher risk	Harsher sanction	Less Amenable
Edens et al. (2003)	Students	P traits vs positive traits	---	Yes	Yes
Stevens & Forth (2005)	Students	P vs CD diagnosis	No	No	No
Murrie et al. (2005)	JPO	P vs CD vs no disorder	Yes	No	No
Murrie et al. (2007)	Judges	P vs CD vs no disorder	No	No	No
Rockett et al. (2007)	Clinicians	P vs CD vs no disorder	Yes	---	No
Chauhan et al. (2007)	Mixed	Is a psychopath vs no disorder	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vidal & Skeem (2007)	JPO	Is a psychopath vs no disorder	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jones & Cauffman (2008)	Judges	Is a psychopath vs no disorder	Yes	Yes	Yes
Boccaccini et al. (2008)	Jurors	Is a psychopath vs P vs CD vs no disorder	Yes	Yes	No

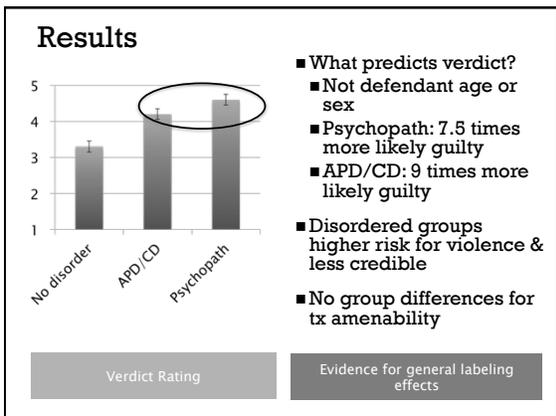
+ **Diagnostic Labeling Study**

(Blais & Forth, 2014)

■ **What are the potential biasing effects of the psychopathy label in an aggravated assault case?**

■ **3 (Diagnosis: psychopathy vs APD/CD vs no diagnosis) x 2 (Age: 15 vs 30) x 2 (Sex: male vs female)**

■ **Dependent variables: verdict, credibility, violence risk, treatment amenability**



+ Summary

- How stable are psychopathic traits?
 - Moderate stability but meaningful change occurs
- Are there gender differences in psychopathic traits?
 - Similar scores for justice involved youth
 - Some item level differences
- Does gender moderate correlates of psychopathic traits in youth?
 - More similarities than expected

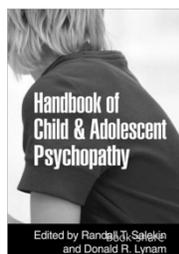
+ Summary

- What are the motives underlying psychopathic youth and adults' violence
 - Engage in reactive *and* instrumental violence
- Do psychopathic traits distinguish between persisters and desisters?
 - Yes, but there are other factors as well
- What is the impact of the diagnostic label?
 - Higher risk for reoffending and guilty verdict, but no more than conduct disordered diagnosis

+ The path ahead....

- Do psychopathic traits show the same stability in boys and girls?
- Are psychopathic traits in youth related to any positive life outcomes?
- Which psychopathic traits are more amenable to change with intervention?
- Are psychopathic youth better at detecting victim vulnerability?

To find out more (www.hare.org)



+ Cautions

"...clinicians and researchers have a responsibility to use the information they gain about this syndrome in constructive, meaningful, and most importantly, helpful ways."

Salekin et al. (2004)

+ Final Words

“Humanity needs to know what psychopathy is, how it behaves and the harm it can do if left uncensored and undetected.”

Survivor of a Psychopath
Dec. 30, 2008

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+ Thank you

- Thank you also to my honour students, graduate students, and colleagues
- Elizabeth Solodukhin
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- Julie Blais
- Shelley Brown
- Tracey Skilling

+ Contact Information

Adelle Forth, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada, K1S 5B6



Tel: 613-520-2600, ext. 1267
Email: adelle.forth@carleton.ca
