working therapeutically with women with psychopathy

what women can tell you about men
OR
what (more) women can tell you about men

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thank you
dr ghitta weizmann-henelius
dr jane martin & dr mette kreis

overview

1. women and psychopathy, violence and risk
2. working therapeutically with psychopathic women
3. recommendations and conclusions

women and psychopathy, violence and risk

gender stereotypes
general

conclusions

1. gender stereotypes dictate our expectations about the behaviour of men and women
2. men and women are more alike than they are different – but they are not the same, the differences are important
3. measures of psychopathy, which reflect the behaviour of men and ignore the social context of violence and aggression, have limited utility with women (and men)
12.10.2010

**gender stereotypes**
aggression and violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>men</th>
<th>women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>held accountable, without question</td>
<td>responsibility 'neutralised' accountability denied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adheved (2011)

**gender stereotypes**
aggression and violence contd/…

male offenders have similar histories as female offenders

*abuse and victimisation, mental disorder, social disadvantage, etc.*

male violence is viewed as consistent with the male stereotype

but female violence is inconsistent with the female stereotype

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therefore, violence in women is neutralised, violence in men is not

*i.e., the use of narrative devices that allow the offender to maintain a social identity as a good person* (Sykes & Matza, 1957)

is women’s violence neutralised because it is intolerable?

or does neutralisation enable those working with women to feel sympathy not antipathy? (Adheved, 2011)

only up to a point though – re. ‘double deviance’ or violent women as ‘doubly damned’ (Chesney-Lind, 1984; Heidensohn, 1991; Lloyd, 1995)

"who is Amanda Knox?"

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**gender stereotypes**
aggression and violence contd/…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>stereotyped</th>
<th>misunderstood</th>
<th>but fascinating</th>
<th>and a problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• madonna vs whore; unstable emotionally; victims</td>
<td>• dangerous sexuality; mysterious emotions</td>
<td>• la femme fatale</td>
<td>• to understand, manage, treat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**conclusions**

1. gender stereotypes dictate our expectations about the behaviour of men and women
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but how can this be so?
same but different
measuring differences between men and women

most empirical studies to date have not captured
gender differences

small numbers of women in research on violence
women are treated in research as just different kinds of
(abnormal) men? (Shewalter, 1987)
the enquiring point of view is usually male – women are
measured against a male template of violence (Adshead, 2011)
violence measured in terms of convictions – undetected
violence will be excluded
feminist studies emphasise victimisation (Adshead, 2011)

same but different
measuring differences between men and women

women’s violence explained (away) in terms of
mental disorder and trauma
using the language of disease to explain social rule-
breaking (Browne, 2001)
yet violence is a relational event, involving multiple factors,
requiring complex explanations addressing the meaning of
the event to main parties involved

same but different
contextual factors relevant to violence

“it appears self-evident that the power one
holds in the domain in which one holds it
will influence the method used to abuse
that power to the detriment of others”

same but different
individual factors relevant to violence

Assessment and Management, Chapter to appear in H. Hakkinen-Nyholm & J.O. Nyholm (Eds),
Psychopathy and Law. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
why is it essential what we give proper consideration to the issue of women’s harm?
there are harmful women out there and we have a duty to protect their victims, and to guide these women towards a less harmful way of living

conclusions
1. gender stereotypes dictate our expectations about the behaviour of men and women
2. men and women are more alike than they are different – but they are not the same nor totally different
3. measures of psychopathy, which reflect the behaviour of men and ignore the social context of violence and aggression, have limited utility with women (and men)

same but different
so what?

psychopathy relevance to women?
we have a problem with women who are harmful but who are not mentally ill for whom there is no easy way to neutralise their harm
who has this problem?
practitioners & the courts

psychopathy empirical research

Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R)
Hare (2003)
20 items, total score = 40
28+ diagnostic - in men no diagnostic cut-offs for women
2, 3 and 4 factor models

psychopathy empirical research using the PCL-R

arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style
deficient affective experience
antisocial lifestyle
impulsive and irresponsible behavioural style

psychopathy empirical research using the PCL-R

prevalence: women (9-23%) < men (15-30%)
severity: women ≤ men
psychopathy measured reliably in women using the PCL-R (and PCL:SV)
construct comparable in women and men:
3 factor PCL-R solution best fit – antisocial poor

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psychopathy
empirical research using the PCL-R

arrogant and deceitful interpersonal style
deficient affective experience
antisocial lifestyle
impulsive and irresponsible behavioural style

psychopathy
empirical research using the PCL-R

does this mean women have more healthy, resilient personalities than men ...?
or or it just down to the poor measurement of personality and the social context in which women are harmful?

psychopathy
empirical research

what is psychopathy then if it's not well captured by the PCL-R?
two things ...

psychopathy
empirical research

Kreis, 2009; Kreis & Cooke, 2011

Kreis, 2009

Kreis, 2009 contd...

Kreis, 2009

low PCL-SV ratings

high PCL-SV ratings
capture the phenomenology of psychopathy in women through formulation

organise
mutual understanding
connections
intervention
communication

risk
structured professional judgement

risk of what?
treatment

relevant factors
FORMULATION
risk management

protective

supervision
monitoring
(victim safety planning)

scenario planning
under what circumstances might she (or he) decide to be violent again?

decision theory
why has this client decided to be violent before? why might she (or he) do so again?
(a) entertained notion of violence and not dismissed
(b) positive consequences were identified
(c) negative consequences acceptable
(d) options for being violent were/are feasible

conclusions
1. gender stereotypes dictate our expectations about the behaviour of men and women
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3. measures of psychopathy, which reflect the behaviour of men and ignore the social context of violence and aggression, have limited utility with women (and men)
conclusions (2)

1. Mainstream interventions for women emphasise vulnerability and neediness, trauma and loss – these interventions are not suitable for women with psychopathic traits.
2. Supplement assessments of psychopathy using the PCL-R with additional evaluations.
4. Use a systemic as well as individual approaches.

Interpersonal measure of psychopathy (IMP)

Kosson et al., 1997; Kosson et al., 2000

capturing “thin slices of behaviour”
Fowler, Lilienfeld & Patrick, 2009
managing harmful women

**top tips - one to one meetings**

**management?**
- know what you are dealing with
- controlling tactics lose power when they are recognised for what they are
- formal assessment of personality
- prepare an interview strategy
  - inc. talk for <50% of the time
- supervision, peer support
- record objective evidence contemporaneously

**top tips – group processes**

- the “scurvey behaviour often practiced by women against each other” (Atwood, 1994)
  - the whole is greater than the sum of the parts
- especially so if there is a ‘leader’ (a Queen Bee)
- relational aggression has a key function in (a) group membership control and (b) maximising returns for the leader
  - ultimately, its function is to glorify its leader

**top tips – group processes cont’d/…?**

- specific strategies:
  - (a) separate leader from group and remove
  - (b) ensure organisational rules and their local enforcement are clear
  - (c) develop wide range of management strategies involving entire staff group
  - covering threats, personal attacks, appeals to management and group action, and rehearsing their use in the group and in supervision

**top tips – the toll on staff**

- “malignant alienation” (Watts & Morgan, 1994; Whittle, 1997)
- staff are at risk of experiencing feelings of professional inadequacy, helplessness, anger, dislike, fear, rejection, sympathy, ambivalence, even hatred due to client’s questioning of competence, trustworthiness and fairness of staff
- re. the narcissistic snares: to heal all, know all, love all
  - (Maltsberger & Buie, 1974; Watts & Morgan, 1994)
  - understand and equate challenging behaviour with client’s inability to act differently & distress
  - step back
  - acknowledge and process negative feelings
  - enhance insight into own vulnerabilities
- identify women who generate these responses
- identify the absence of adequate therapeutic alliances
  - manage those women differently
top tips

formulation

conclusions & recommendations

conclusions (1)

Psychopathy in women

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conclusions (2)

Working with women with psychopathy

1. Mainstream interventions for women emphasise vulnerability and neediness, trauma and loss – these interventions are not suitable for women with psychopathic traits
2. Supplement assessments of psychopathy using the PCL-R with additional evaluations
3. Make interventions formulation-driven
4. Use a systemic rather than an individual approach

recommendations

Recognise hidden harm
Look for underlying pathology
Supplement the PCL-R

Look for differences in approach rather than kind
Expect treatment to be problematic
Utilise risk management strategies based on formulation

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