

# Unsexed cruelty: gender and psychopathy

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# Gender and Psychopathy

- What is gender?
- Gender and psychopathy as regulatory practices
- Gender and crimes of violence
- Psychopathy and crimes of violence
- Non violent psychopathy
- What are we looking for?

# Lady Macbeth

Come, you spirits,  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me  
here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe  
topful of direst cruelty!

- *Macbeth Act 1, scene 5, 38–43*

# What is gender?

- The social construction and elaboration of identified sexual differences
- Chromosomal sex usually leads to an assigned sexual identity at birth
- Social relationships are built and constructed around that identity
- 'Gender' refers to concepts of masculinity and femininity
- Not the same as erotic object choice or practice

# Sex

**Biological traits that society associates with being male or female**



# Gender

**Cultural meanings attached to being masculine & feminine, which influence personal identities**

E.g. Man, Woman, Transgender, Intersex, Gender Queer, among others



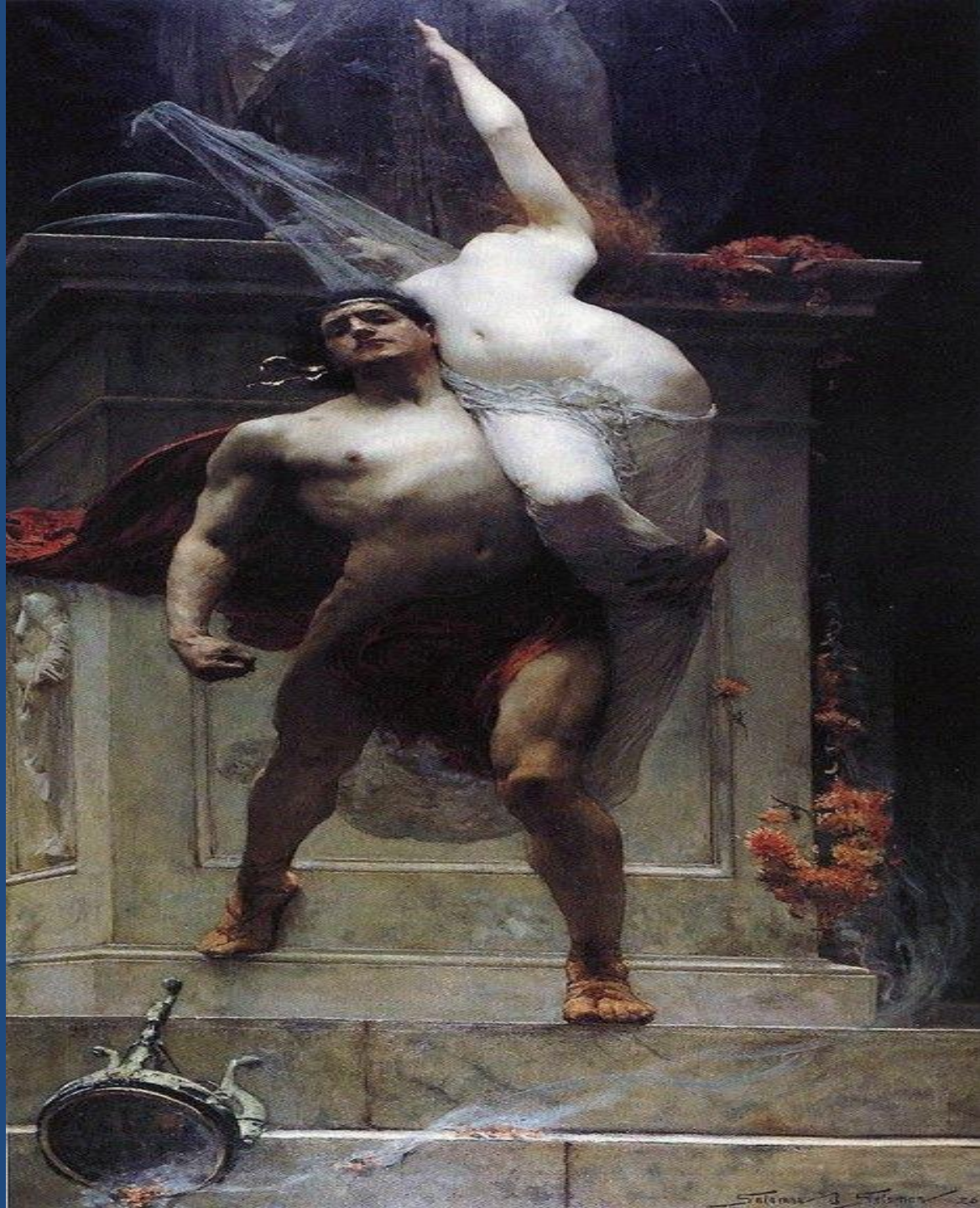
# Sexuality

**Sexual attraction, practices & identity which may or may not align with sex and gender**

E.g. Heterosexual, Homosexual (Gay or Lesbian), Bisexual, Queer, among others







# Gender role expectations

- Are powerful social constructs that regulate power relationships
- We all 'do' gender as part of identity
- Regulates behaviour: what a man or woman 'should' be like
- Categorical and essentialist: often backed up by 'science' that states that gender roles are 'natural'

# Dr Baruch 1915

“ the dear women are obsessed with their fitness for all things masculine which blinds them to the sane view of their biological limitations... these lines are written in no spirit of controversy, simply to point out the irrevocable law of nature....”

Quoted in Fine C (2010) Delusions of Gender



# ***Traditional Gender Stereotypes.***

## ***Feminine.***

***Not aggressive.  
Dependent.  
Easily influenced.  
Submissive.  
Passive.  
Home-oriented.  
Easily hurt emotionally.  
Indecisive.  
Talkative.  
Gentle.  
Sensitive to other's feelings.  
Very desirous of security.  
Cries a lot.  
Emotional.  
Verbal.  
Kind.  
Tactful.  
Nurturing***

## ***Masculine.***

***Aggressive.  
Independent.  
Not easily influenced.  
Dominant.  
Active.  
Worldly.  
Not easily hurt emotionally.  
Decisive.  
Not at all talkative.  
Tough.  
Less sensitive to other's feelings.  
Not very desirous of security.  
Rarely cries.  
Logical.  
Analytical.  
Cruel.  
Blunt.  
Not nurturing***

# Women as evil

- Traditional Judeo-Christian accounts based on the Old Testament
- Fairy tales and fantasies of witches, cruel stepmothers, sorceresses (Warner)
- The other side of idealisation of women's role in society as those who are not cruel to the vulnerable (Welldon)
- Manipulative, seductive, exploit tenderness and vulnerability, untrustworthy, deceptive, sneaky

# Toxic gender roles

## Toxic Masculinity

- Dominance and status seeking
- Invested in strict dominance hierarchies
- Contempt for vulnerability or need or lower status
- Action without reflection
- Idealises strength and conquest
- Protection=control/owns

## Toxic femininity

- Idealises passivity and vulnerability
- Denies agency or responsibility for action
- Denies duty to protect the self
- Denies anger and autonomy
- Externalising distress: bodily self only

# Language is crucial to gender constructions



# 20C challenges to gender constructs

- First wave: No sex is inferior to another and both should have equal rights: whatever differences exist, are not significant politically or legally
- Second wave: gender constructions rigidly restrain everyone: difference is not deviance. Gender roles are on spectrum
- Third wave: gender is only one of a number of discourses of difference/deviance that regulate power and status: race, ethnicity, class, & *theories of individual psychology?*



# Feminist criminology

- Are theories of crime and criminality too male focussed?
- Does research on crime and criminal exclude females?
- And why do women appear to commit less crime?
- From whom is the criminal woman different?
- Are criminal women a type of 'man'?

# Female crime

- Do women have different motives for offending than men?
- Do women's experiences make them more or less likely to offend?
- When women break the rules, is their offending seen through the lens of gender?
- Are their crimes assumed to be sexual, embodied, relational, *feminine*?

HM Govt Justice Committee 2013

Women face very different  
hurdles in their journey  
towards a law abiding life

# The big difference

- Fewer women get convicted for violent crime than men world wide
- Self-reported violence: 8.7% of women ( Coid et al 2005); 10.7% of men (NESARC)
- Confounding issues of official & self-report data: victims may be vulnerable and not able to report; local politics and legislation
- Fewer in number but similar in profile?

# Violence by females

- Violence is seen as unappealing but 'normalised' for male gender role
- But violence is violation of female gender role
- There is no 'normal' account of female anger, nastiness or antisociality
- Which means that cruelty, antisociality and hostility in women is overlooked or dismissed
- Or trauma used as explanation for violence



Hello, 1950s? You left your  
oppressive gender roles in  
our century. Can you  
come pick them up?



# Psychopathy as a regulatory construct

- A discourse about people who don't/won't/can't follow pro-social rules and laws
- Not 'mad' in the ordinary sense: but won't do what's expected of them socially; and don't care what others think of them
- 1930s USA: conservative, emerging from the Great Depression, strict social expectations
- A group who make others feel powerless and afraid: who challenge social expectations

# Cleckley's psychopathy

- Generally middle class group who break rules with apparently little concern for others' responses
- No shame or anxiety; shallow and short lived expressions of distress
- A disorder of social relating: little awareness of interest in how others think or feel
- Deception, substance misuse, fighting, theft, but not violence

# Cleckley's female psychopaths

- Roberta (20)
- *'Unlike most girls of 20, she did not seem to be costing her feminine attraction into the equation that probably occurs in every personal contact between man and woman'*
- Stealing from age 10: continuous theft and deception
- Started having sex with men for money

# Cleckley's female psychopaths (2)

- Anna (40) from Georgia
- *“Fresh, artless, naïve... a British accent”*
- Highly sexually active in her teens
- *“she is not a nice girl ...Outlandish sexual promiscuity”*
- She was married for many years which *“stopped her from repeated divorce”*



# Cleckley's female psychopaths

- Middle class women who committed no major felony or act of violence but had way too much sex without any shame about it
- They were charming, pleasant, deceptive, unreliable, lacking in shame or distress
- Fabricated accounts of events to suit their purpose
- Anna was victim of repeated sexual assault but seemed unconcerned by this
- Who else could Cleckley have considered?

# Bonnie Parker 1910-1934



# Ma Barker 1873-1935



# Magda Goebbels 1901-1945



# Psychopathy and violence

- A complex relationship: how central is it to the concept?
- Hare's visionary approach :to apply Cleckley's concept of social disconnection to offenders
- Socio-Political implications of the non-violent or 'successful' psychopath
- Relevant to debates about female psychopaths and morality more generally



# What's the relevance?

- If gender and psychopathy are regulatory constructs, they may help us understand more about male and female psychopathy
- Male psychopathy may be seen in more positive light than female psychopathy
- Similarities and differences may be evaluated through the lens of gender
- Issues of category and class: non-violent psychopathy should be a particular issue for women

# Is male psychopathy admired?

- A mixture of admiration and fear (Bartlett 2016)
- Fearless dominance, boldness, brave
- Media portrayals: books, movies, TV: the anti-hero
- A person for whom rules do not apply: something special
- Non-violent psychopathy: finance, banking
- Professor Fallon and the 'warrior gene'

# Psychopathy traits in famous political and historical figures

Top 20 Percent		Fearless Dominance ≥ 68 for men, ≥ 62.4 for women			Self-Centered Impulsivity ≥ 69 for men, ≥ 62 for women				Coldheartedness ≥ 18 for men, ≥ 15 for women	
		SI	F	STI	ME	RN	BE	CN	C	TOTAL
	Saddam Hussein	26	27	26	25	17	25	17	26	189
	Henry VIII	28	25	14	25	20	28	16	22	178
	Idi Amin	24	25	27	22	12	19	20	27	176
	Adolf Hitler	26	10	15	27	18	28	18	27	169
	William the Conqueror	27	25	27	22	15	18	12	19	165
	Saint Paul	23	22	27	13	16	25	16	15	157
	Jesus	22	18	27	12	23	28	18	9	157
	Winston Churchill	28	25	20	18	17	22	13	12	155
	Napoleon Bonaparte	20	13	25	22	18	26	9	20	153
	Emperor Nero	21	22	19	15	21	28	8	17	151
	Oliver Cromwell	14	17	14	18	11	21	19	22	136
	Margaret Thatcher	26	10	25	13	11	24	13	14	136
	George Washington	26	22	25	13	8	17	7	14	132
	Elizabeth I	26	14	15	16	12	25	9	13	130
	Abraham Lincoln	26	15	26	9	10	10	10	17	123
	Mahatma Gandhi	22	13	21	9	13	17	11	13	119
2016 CANDIDATES	Donald Trump	27	20	21	26	18	17	20	22	171
	Ted Cruz	24	18	19	26	18	15	15	21	156
	Hillary Clinton	25	15	17	25	18	17	16	19	152
	Bernie Sanders	22	14	18	17	15	14	14	15	129



# Studies of female psychopaths

- Included in early studies using the PCL-R
- Multiple studies across Europe, US and UK
- So far, mixed findings: a tendency to find similarities to males in criminal populations
- But community studies (self –report using under-graduates) tend to report lower rates of psychopathy in women
- Especially fearless dominance
- But more ‘relational aggression’ (Colins et al 2016)

# Early concerns about gender bias

- Zahn Waxler (1993) Problems in the study of antisocial behaviour in men and women
- Grann (2000): On PCL-R, women scored higher than men *only* on sexual promiscuity
- Forouzan & Cooke (2005) Conceptual problems in relation to measurement of psychopathy
- Kennealy et al (2007): females inmates score in similar ways to males on the PCL-R: but F1 may be measure of social dominance and low anxiety
- Beaver et al (2015): Community sample of males and females look similar on psychopathic traits

# Summary: Skeem et al (2011)

- Men tend to score higher on psychopathy measures than women
- But women commit different crimes
- Is psychopathy expressed differently in women? Histrionic PD, somatising, suicidality and internalisation
- Relational aggression and emotional 'backstabbing' may be expression of female psychopathy



# Other problems with studies of psychopathy in women

- Complicated by identification and sampling bias, low base rates of violence, and the effects of law and politics
- Selection of comparison groups; assumptions of difference built into penal policy
- Are violent women highly deviant as *women*? Or as *people*?
- First problem: Not all violence is the same, and different kinds of violence have different outcomes

Homicide related to  
other criminal activities

Interpersonal homicide

Related to  
organized criminal  
groups

Related to other  
criminal acts

Perpetrated by  
Intimate partner/  
family

Related to other  
interpersonal  
homicide

Socio-political homicide

Related to social  
prejudice

Related to other  
socio-political  
agendas

Related to  
political agendas

# What kind of violence is psychopathic?

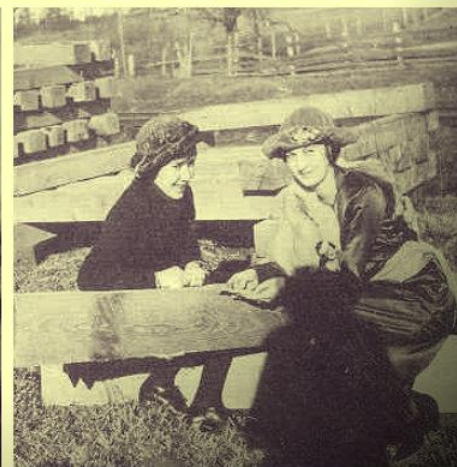
Repeated, persistent, may be pro-active and extensive, polymorphous

- Planned or impulsive? Instrumental or useless?
- Relational or non-relational
- Minority of homicides are committed by psychopaths
- Violence plus antisocial attitudes?



# Relational violence

- Attacks on attachment figures: partners, ex-partners, children, parents
- 41% of homicides world wide
- High levels of affect involved in these offences: 19C accounts of female offenders emphasise the role of 'passion'
- May be pro-social in all other respects
- Rarely score highly on PCL-R





A 16 year old girl convicted of  
murder

Help me. Death is the  
only way. Murder is in  
me.

# Relational psychopathy

- Often in partnership with an attachment figure
- The relationship is part of the violence, and the violence maintains the relationship
- Contempt for vulnerability and entitlement is often present
- Is this a female form of psychopathy?
- Utilising relationships to commit acts of cruelty?



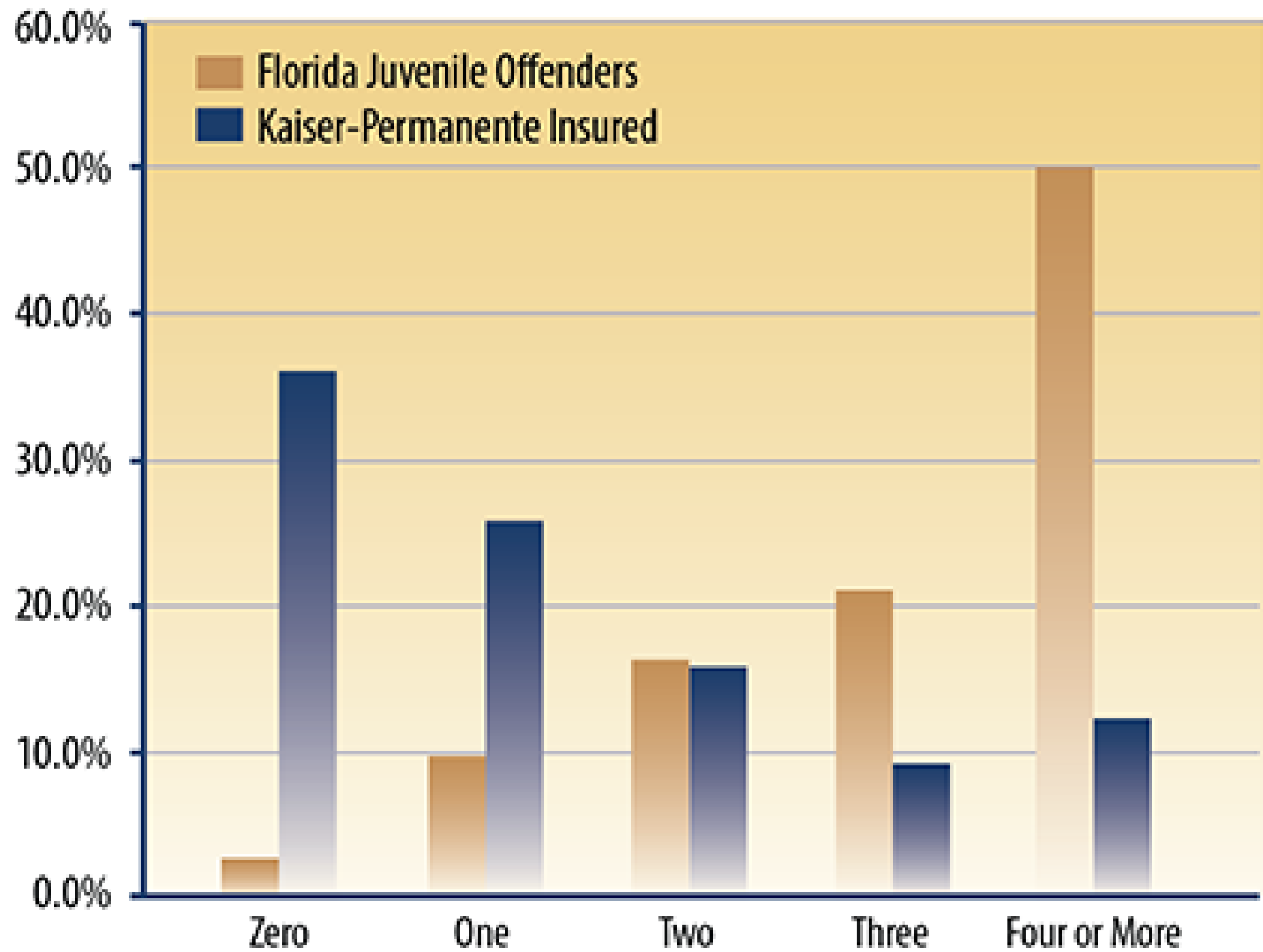
# The Manson girls at trial





# Trauma and later violence

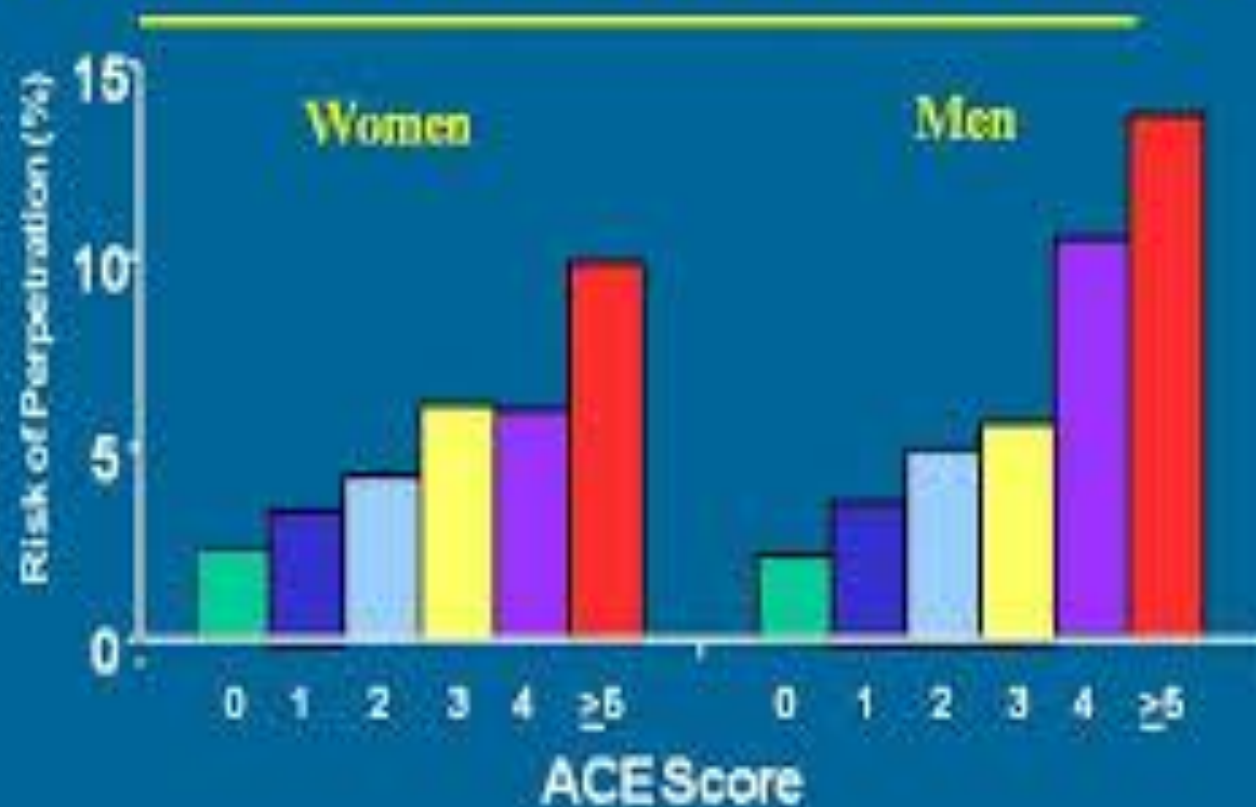
- Does the experience of abuse and trauma explain violence propensity?
- Mixed data; and not confined to females
- May be a risk factor in certain circumstances e.g relational rupture
- Baglivio et al (2014) Fox et al (2015) Increasing ACE increases risk of violence in male juvenile offenders
- **P1: 'They take it out on others later'**

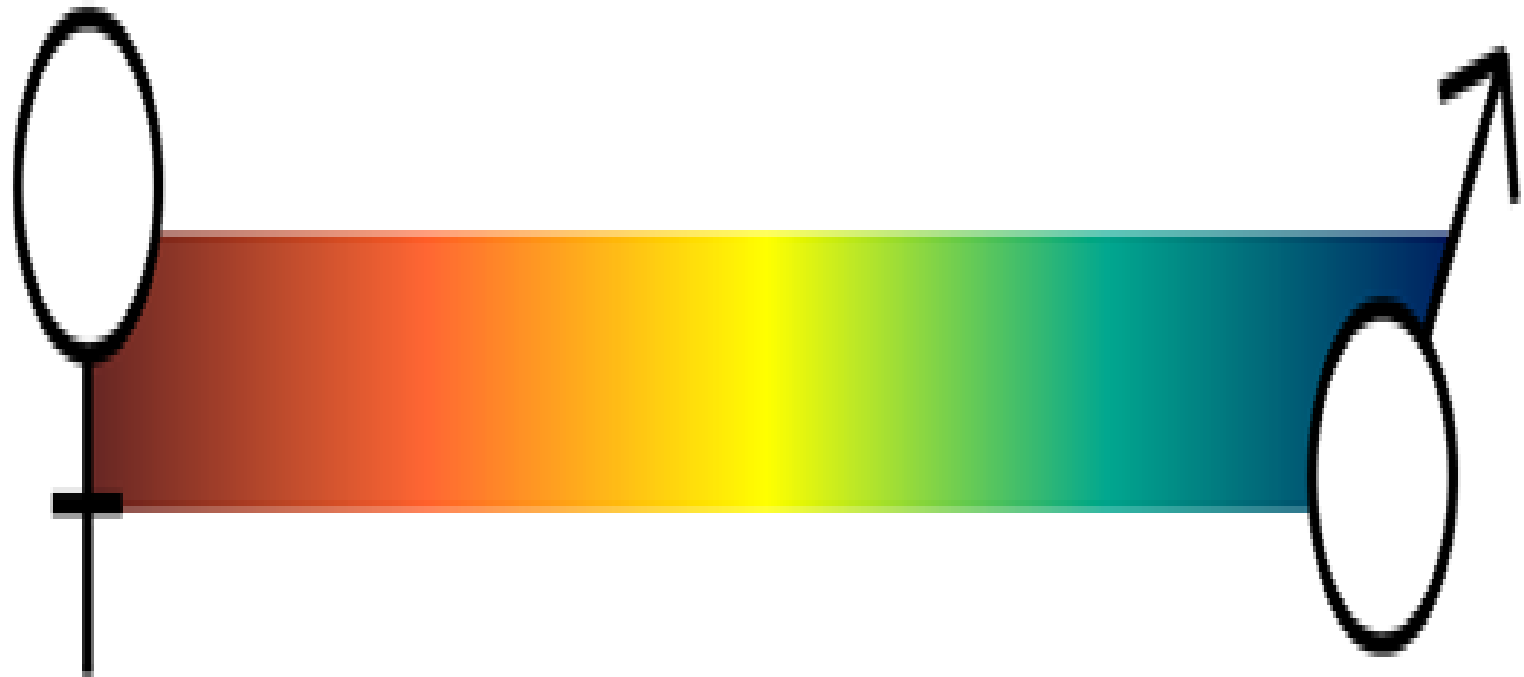


# The role of victimisation

- If the experience of being a victim of violence is a risk factor for later violence, then women should be at high risk of committing acts of violence
- Is this a gender stereotype?
- Victimisation seems to be a risk factor for both men and women
- Especially physical abuse and neglect in childhood

## ACE Score and the Risk of *Perpetrating* Domestic Violence





femininity

masculinity



# Non-violent male psychopaths

- Charismatic, socially dominant and successful, arrogant but charming with it
- Get what they want without considering others' needs: but the others tolerate and even admire; or envy?
- May be especially able to 'read' others' emotions
- Shallow attachments may not preclude long term success in bonding
- Succeed in competitive environments?

# What about non-violent female psychopaths?

- “ coy, coquettish, seductive.. A damsel in distress, dramatic demure, seductive, eliciting pity and sympathy... self-dramatising, portraying self as victim... using sexuality to deceive others... playing the victim.. Shallow attachments..Not grandiose or narcissistic..parasitic behaviour... consumed with approval from others”
- “ A female psychopath will not be expected to present as cocky, but would be more likely to engage the examiner in a passive subdued way”
- Can there be a successful female psychopath?

# Kim aged 22 ( original spelling)

I scored 88% on your test [PPI] and took it only for curiosity because my life is a bit harder than it was when i played my part without conversations with my shrink.

My early year (untill 19) i was not aware of what big deal it was to do bad stuff to other people, i justify it still. But as i grow older people ar harder to get it on.

i like what temporary feelings of 'life' other people give me. Now its shorter and shorter because i think my traits are getting "worse".

or that im not a cute little girl who can get what i want with charming people in an innocent way that i preferred.

yea, im living ok .... but when i dont get it right, prehaps have to catche up a bit... i was smoking alot of cannabis to controll my temper.

not im sober, (without de impulsive things that of course happens when i want. like partying and getting wild beyond measure... its almost funny, everything. i dont feel so much regrets either, its not like i have killed some one haha. i just like to be free and so wild i want to. i have a bit plans, i can lie without remorse.. right now im doing like to boys at once. i like a challenge, life is a challenge. i want to do somthing big like being a chef.. im good at the kitchen... og beautysalonng ... im somewhat shallow so as long people dont get too near im pretty awesome to be around.

but then again. how is it to controll my anger? im selfish, i lived on others and im kinda a pathological liar, but i really dont want my anger to spoil my plans for the future.

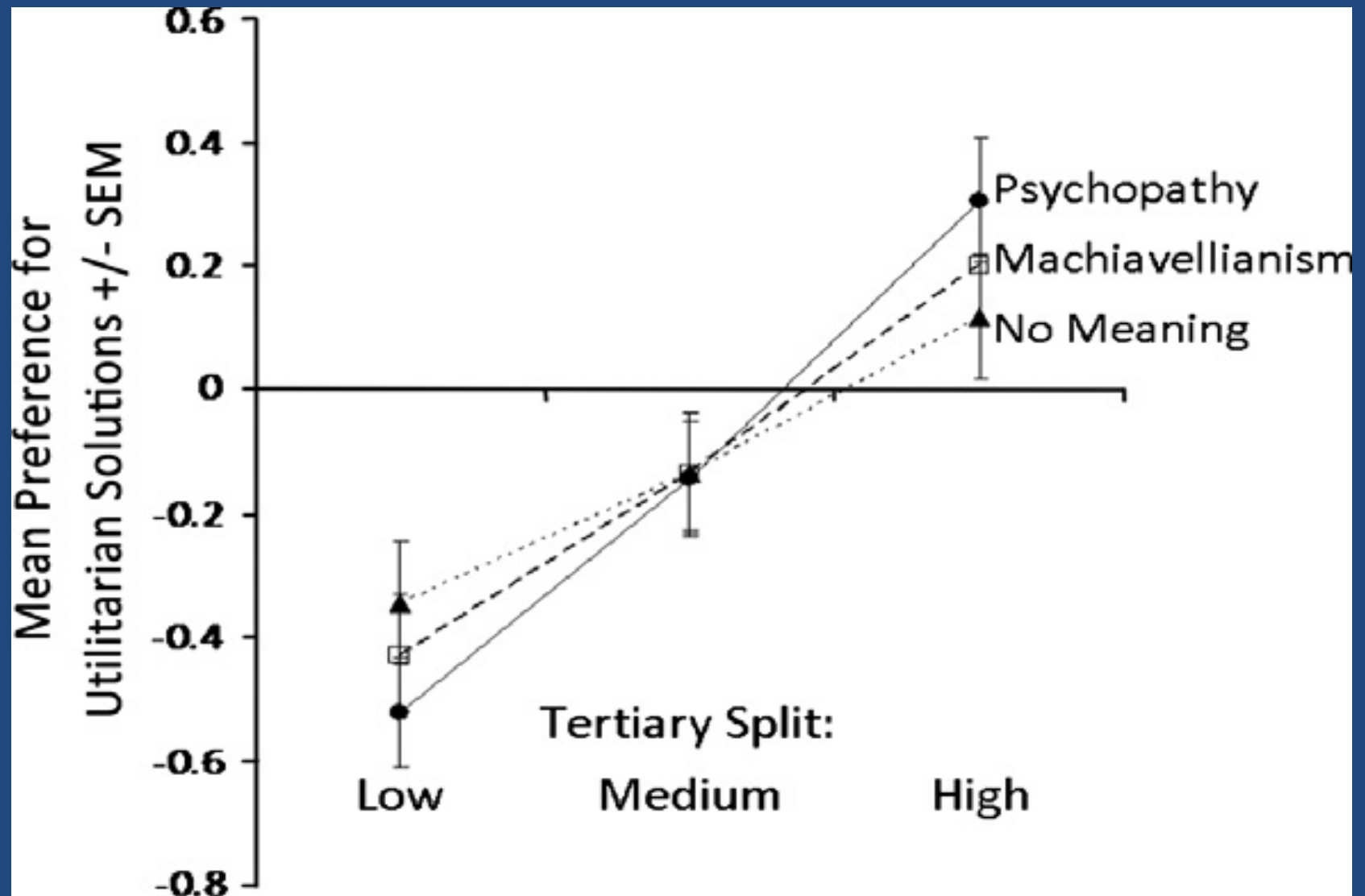
# Concerns re sexist attitudes to female violence

- Reducing their agency by putting them in the role of victim
- Not encouraging them to think about their wish to hurt ( as happens for violent male offenders)
- Not treating them as free agents who make choices
- Failure to offer interventions addressing anger and exploitation of vulnerability

# Psychopathy as a state of mind

- A universal potential; facilitated by risk factors
- Individual and situational risk factors
- Some people might be more at risk than others
- Is the Y chromosome a risk factor?
- Is the political climate a risk factor? E.g. in cultures where vulnerability and need is denigrated and crude accounts of utility underpin social policy

# Bartels & Pizarro 2011





**Gauleiter  
Dr. Meyer**



**Reichsamtsleiter  
Dr. Leibbrandt**



**Staatssekretär  
Dr. Stuckart**



**Staatssekretär  
Neumann**



**Staatssekretär  
Dr. Freisler**



**Staatssekretär  
Dr. Bühler**



**Unterstaatssekretär  
Luther**



**SS-Oberführer  
Klopfer**



**Ministerialdirektor  
Kritzinger**



**SS-Gruppenführer  
Hofmann**



**SS-Gruppenführer  
Müller**



**SS-Obersturmbannführer  
Eichmann**



**SS-Oberführer  
Dr. Schöngarth**



**SS-Sturmbannführer  
Dr. Lange**



**SS-Obergruppenführer  
Heydrich**



# Conclusions?

- Not really! Much depends on future work on concept of psychopathy, and what aspect of social deviance is being assessed
- More alike than different seems a reasonable premise
- Especially for violent criminal populations
- Non criminals: histrionic, seductive, promiscuous, deceptive... we've been here before!
- Why are we looking for differences?



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