

DISPARITY IN FLEDGLING BOY AND GIRL PSYCHOPATHS

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In this paper, the similarities and differences between male and female adolescents with callous-unemotional (CU) traits will be discussed, with a specific focus on female juveniles in the system. This will be accomplished by first gauging the risk factors between the two sexes. There will be a discussion over how juveniles are treated, and what that does to them as mentally ill inhabitants. There is an obvious need for reformation of these violent and antisocial tendencies that push these youths towards psychopathic characteristics. Bringing more information of CU females is necessary for the reformation of these individuals.

Psychopaths are not all the blood thirsty killers that are on TV or in comic books. They come in all shapes and sizes, in the dark and in plain sight. A definition of a psychopath is “an individual who demonstrates a discernible cluster of maladaptive features hindering psychological and interpersonal development that clearly distinguishes them from the population norm” (Feifer, 2009). Another definition is that psychopathy “is characterized by a distinct constellation of personality and behavioral abnormalities” (Rogstad & Rogers, 2008). While there are many definitions of what a psychopath is, something crucial to see is that they lack empathy for others.

An important factor to consider when dealing with psychopathy is that most of the information available is about adult male psychopaths. This means that much less is known about adult females and adolescents.

This essay will put more focus on the adolescents. There is plasticity in a child’s brain, allowing for the brain to be changed and reformed. Psychopathic tendencies can be reverted. Because of this plasticity, adolescents are not referred to as psychopathic. Adolescents exhibiting psychopathic traits at a young age are more likely to keep those traits when they are older (Lynam, 1998).

There are different risk factors that account for these traits, as well as biological factors that can come into play. When adolescents display psychopathic traits, it often goes unnoticed as a result of them tending to look innocent and perceived to be incapable of inflicting pain. Beth Thomas is an example of a child that looks harmless and innocent, yet still shows many psychopathic traits. could regularly be found injuring her brother without remorse. Based on interviews conducted by an examiner, one can

tell that Beth is not a neurotypical girl. She is a good example to bring up for two reasons. The first is that Beth has changed and now lives a life dedicated to helping adolescents that were in a similar position to her. This is because of a newer treatment option that became available to her. The other reason that Beth is a good example is that she is a female with callous-unemotional (CU) traits (Peerce, 1992). Young females are brought up the least in studies dealing with psychopathy, even less so when referring to the female adolescents within the juvenile system (Dixon, Howie, Starling, 2004). The lack of research and understanding towards females with CU traits is limiting what people know about psychopathy in general and needs to be worked on with eyes towards the future.

Psychopathy is not a straightforward concept, and there is a lack of information in some areas of the disorder. This essay will focus on the lack of information presented on psychopaths. This can be seen from the absence of studies and information on adolescents, particularly young females.

Risk Factors of Psychopaths

Psychopathy is diagnosed by a combination of factors, including biological and environmental factors. Biological factors come from deficits in the brain. This can include damage to the amygdala, one of the most important structures within the brain pertaining to psychopathy. This is the fear center of the brain. When problems are caused within it, signals are sent incorrectly to the prefrontal cortex, causing complications. Environmental factors are common when someone is diagnosed with psychopathy. This can include difficult temperament, childhood maltreatment, and family conflict. These factors can be mimicked

in a way to make it look as though psychopathy is there. This could be seen with Phineas Gage, who had a traumatic brain injury to his orbitofrontal cortex. He appeared to have developed psychopathic traits, but he lacked other risk factors that would have caused him to have the mental illness (Kiehl & Buckholtz, 2010). This can be used to prove the importance of risk factors with relation to psychopathy. Different groups of people are affected by varying risk factors.

Female risk factors vary from male factors slightly. This variation stems in part from the type of aggression that females with CU traits typically show. This is classified as relational aggression. Female aggression can be seen as the peer pressure aggression, meaning the female will mimic antisocial or delinquent behavior they see, especially when incarcerated. This comes down to the mirror neurons within the brain that will see examples of bullying and will want to copy it. It can also consist of copying drug abuse and truancy problems (Deskalo, 2015). This means that the type of aggression has a big part to play on the type of risk factors females will have. Early teenage years cause most of their problems. Females are less susceptible for certain risk factors because of how they are raised compared to adolescent males. Parents of females will try to push socialization of their daughters, which can change some of the deficits in the female's processing specifically due to the mother's influence (Farrington, 2005). This shows that the tendencies of adolescent females have more characteristics that can counter their CU traits, reinforcing the statement that there are more male psychopaths than female psychopaths.

Adolescent males tend to have

risk factors closely related to those of traditional psychopaths because psychopathic data is more regularly studied in males rather than females. Risk factors can include biological deficits from within the brain, a neglected childhood, delinquency, being put in a home or orphanage, and bullying. Brain deficits are most prevalent in psychopaths but are not required to reach the level of a psychopath. Neglect in childhood can mean a number of things, but adolescents with this risk factor most likely came from homes that were unloving and that were unsupportive. This can go along with being in an orphanage because of its lack of a parental figure in life. If the child is in an environment without the proper tools, they are more likely to develop an antisocial disorder. Delinquency and bullying are closely related, especially in adolescent males. Violence is seen more in adolescent males when compared to females, as females are more likely to be manipulative (Deskalo, 2015). When talking about risk factors, many of them can be prevented. Almost every risk factor that is environmental can be stopped early on in life to help prevent the creation of a psychopath.

Juveniles and Psychopathy

An important part of psychopathy is the correctional facilities when dealing with adolescents. Many of the CU adolescents are put in these places as a result of the violent, empathy-deficient behaviors they have. How these adolescents are being treated within the system is pushing them more towards their CU ways. Females in the juvenile setting tend to have it worse than their male counterparts. Adolescent females tend to be put under tougher regimens and have more severe

punishments, even though females tend to be charged with less serious crimes (Schlossman & Wallach 1978). This is currently being cut down as facilities are putting focus on fairer treatment and better living environments for adolescent females. This is important as females are more prone to need treatment for mental health problems when incarcerated. Facilities are now putting in the means to house people with these conditions with counselors that can help work through problems (Timmons-Mitchell, Brown, Schulz, Webster, Underwood, Semple, 1997). However, it is still too difficult to make the correctional facilities perfect. There will always be some kind of violence in these systems, which can lead to the extension of CU traits and a more antisocial lifestyle, pushing these adolescents towards psychopathic ways. Female facilities still have problems with offenses towards the involved, and until that is fixed, it is hard to see these facilities doing their jobs in reforming these adolescent females.

Male facilities do their jobs much more efficiently than female facilities. This may be because of a couple of different reasons. One example of this is that there is more separation when dealing with adolescent males, depending on their crime. In Indiana, there is only one female center and three male centers. These centers are broken down by the severity of the crime. Another reason why male juvenile facilities tend to be better is because most centers are catered towards males. The facilities that house both males and females tend to be more fit towards the young men. This is because more males on average come through the system (Timmons-Mitchell, Brown, Schulz, Webster, Underwood, Semple, 1997).

There are two types of correctional

facilities: detention and therapeutic centers. The detention centers have the job to hold inmates until their sentence is over. The therapeutic facility does an important job in helping connect these adolescents with counselors and psychiatrists to help evaluate their mental state (Desai, Goulet, Robbins, Chapman, Migdole & Hog, 2005). There is an extreme lack of these kinds of facilities around the United States. With more of these programs, detention centers can focus on reforming adolescents.

These two different types of facilities are similar in many ways. They try to care for the adolescents but can do so in the wrong way by punishment rather than rehabilitation. Punishment is the first thing that many people think of when they think about juvenile centers. This problem is finally starting to be addressed in juvenile centers around the United States. There is a focus on rehabilitation through therapeutic remedies to give the adolescents the desire to be a better person. However, this will not change that there are still problems with the juvenile prison system. This can partially be explained by the lack of attention given towards the female facilities or the need for more specific mental units in juvenile centers. There is also the combined problem of violence within male and female centers. There is a need for these facilities to be corrected.

Violent Tendencies in CU Adolescents

Violence is commonly perceived as a tendency when thinking of psychopathy. This is because of the associations to individuals like Hannibal Lector or Buffalo Bill. These assumptions can cause damage in different forms depending on the adolescent. There are typical norms

on the type of violence or misconduct that either males or females tend to carry out. Females tend to use less direct means of violence, using a covert type of aggression. This can be seen by the way some females tend to use manipulative language in order to attack someone or even carry out unlawful deeds. This is different than in males as they typically use overt violence. This type of violence is because of the aggression that many males tend to have with CU traits (Björkqvist, 1994) (Feifer, 2009). Adolescents with these psychopathic tendencies are less distressed about the way they behave when compared to those with other mental deficits. This shows that CU traits may actually lessen the distress on a person, which could lead to the other antisocial behaviors these adolescents may express (Viding, Blair, Moffitt, Plomin, 2005). These adolescents being desensitized to violent behavior can have a significant impact on the way they go about other parts of their lives. Their tendencies are more likely to change compared to a neurotypical person. This idea shines as to why these adolescents act the way they do.

A Call for Help

There is currently an emphasis on things like school and health, but there seems to be a lack of focus when that health refers to someone with a mental illness. Therefore, there is still work that needs to be done for treatment and interventions towards helping adolescents cope and reform their callous traits. Indiana's Pendleton Correctional Facility is an example a facility that focuses on their inhabitants with mental illnesses. The Pendleton Facility separates their adolescents based on the type of crime and state of mind. All the adolescents who are diagnosed with a mental illness go into

one area of the facility. When referring to CU adolescents, this facility has psychiatrists and counselors help the child work through their psychopathic behavior. This kind of work is also accomplished outside of correctional facilities, which could be seen with Beth Thomas. By receiving the treatment by therapy, she was able to revert her CU traits. As mentioned earlier, she now works with youth that are in a similar place to where she was as a kid (Peerce, 1992). These two examples show the current work being done in order to help adolescents to revert their CU traits later in their lives.

Conclusion

There are many fundamental differences between female and male adolescents in today's world. One of these differences includes the risk factors that can cause the adolescent to have CU traits. It is imperative to alleviate the environmental risk factors in adolescents because this can lead to fewer adolescents with CU traits. Along with risk factors for CU adolescents in general, there are also risk factors associated with delinquency. Within delinquency, it is important to note the mistreatment for females in the juvenile delinquent system. This mistreatment extends to scientific research. There is a lack of studies and research about the females compared to the males. Along with specific risk factors, CU adolescents also display certain tendencies. These tendencies can lead to an easier time identifying the adolescents impacted by these traits. In order to stop these tendencies, there is work being done to try to prohibit CU traits in adolescents. These traits can be stopped in adolescents before they are solidified in the brain. There is a need for more focus on helping the adolescents, whether that be with

the implementation of new treatments or a focus on improving what is currently being done. Therefore, there needs to be more research done on the most underprivileged demographic in psychopathy: female adolescents.

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