Know your ‘path….

A brief introduction to Psychopathy…

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Overview…

- Why psychopathy?
- The case of Michael Stone
- What is psychopathy and why so much confusion?
- Reassessing diagnosis and measurement
- Emergence of the Comprehensive Assessment of Psychopathic Personality

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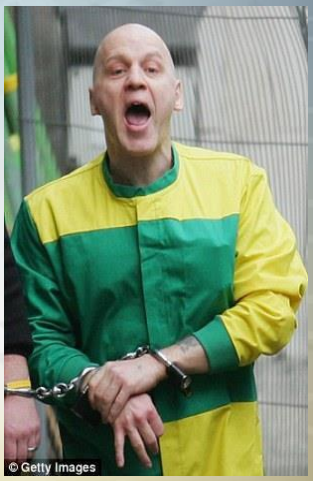
The case of Michael Stone…
and his
"Dangerously Severe Personality Disorder"



- career criminal - significant documented personality disorders
- Repeatedly disclosed violent detailed fantasies
- Released regardless…carried out his fantasies
- Public outcry…media uproar…
- Previous law around treatment of PD abolished
- Emergence of "Dangerous and Severe Personality Disorder Units"

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Now for the 'paths....

- Psychopath
- Sociopath
- Anti-social Personality Disorder
- What's the difference...why the confusion?

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Psychopathy…

- Absence of "moral compass"-devoid of fear
- Lack of (inability?!) to feel empathy and remorse
- Superficially charming/glib/garrulous
- Meticulous in carrying out crimes/plots to avoid detection/risk to self
- Likely genetic-sig research shows underdeveloped parts of the brain

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Sociopathy…

- No genetic causes-The clue is in the name!-societal/external forces to blame
- Moral compass skewed rather than absent
- Can interact with the social world in a meaningful way
- Have a sense of fear & "right and wrong"

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Anti-social personality Disorder

- Ongoing pattern of disregard and violation of the rights of others
- Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviour
- Deceitfulness/impulsivity
- Irresponsibility/aggressive/ manipulative behaviour
- Evidence of conduct disorder before aged 15

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Psychopaths…but not criminals "Successful psychopaths"

- Traditional approaches don't fit
- ASPD is not always evident in psychopathy
  - more likely in sociopathy
- Hare-Snakes in Suits

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PCL-R:
The holy grail of Psychopathy?

- Has the measure become confused with the construct?
- Issues around using PCL-R outside of a forensic and male population
- Newer approaches moving away from a "lifetime score"

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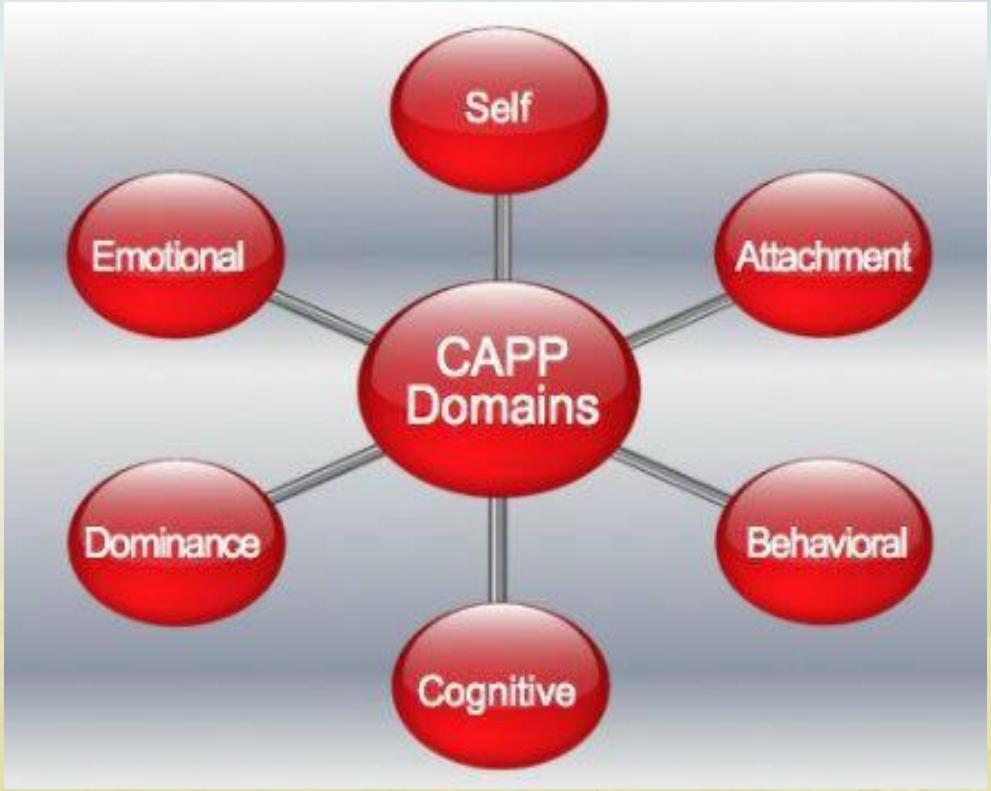
Comprehensive Assessment Psychopathic Personality



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Questions…

and maybe answers…!

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"Has the measure become confused with the construct?"

This refers to the potential issue where tools or instruments used to assess psychopathy (the measure) are being conflated with the actual concept or nature of psychopathy itself (the construct).

Construct
Definition: A construct is a theoretical concept that represents something we want to study or understand. In psychology, constructs are often abstract concepts such as intelligence, anxiety, or in this case, psychopathy.

Psychopathy Construct
includes underlying traits and characteristics that define psychopathy, such as lack of empathy, superficial charm, manipulativeness, and antisocial behaviours.

MeasureDefinition: A tool or instrument used to assess or quantify a construct. This could be a questionnaire, a rating scale, or a structured interview. Common measures of psychopathy include the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R), self-report questionnaires.

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The Issue of Confusion

Confusion Between Measure and Construct: Occurs when the measure (e.g., the PCL-R) is seen as synonymous with the construct of psychopathy itself. In other words, people might start to think that the specific items or criteria on the PCL-R fully define what psychopathy is, rather than seeing the PCL-R as one way to assess the broader and more complex construct of psychopathy.

Implications

When this confusion happens, there is a risk that the richness and complexity of the construct (psychopathy) are reduced to what is captured by a specific measure. This can lead to a narrow or potentially biased understanding of the construct. For instance, if the PCL-R heavily focuses on certain traits or behaviours, those aspects may be over-emphasised in research and practice, while other important facets of psychopathy might be overlooked.

Importance of Distinguishing the Two

1. Theoretical Understanding: maintain a clear distinction between the theoretical construct of psychopathy and the tools used to measure it to ensure that research and clinical practice accurately reflect the full scope of the construct.

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2. *Development of Measures*: By keeping the construct and the measure distinct, researchers can develop and refine assessment tools that more comprehensively and accurately capture the construct, leading to better diagnosis, treatment, and understanding.

In brief, the phrase "Has the measure become confused with the construct" highlights the importance of not equating the tools used to assess psychopathy with the full theoretical understanding of what psychopathy entails. It encourages ongoing critical evaluation and development of both the measures and the construct itself.

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