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### Original Citation

Sherretts, Nicole, Boduszek, Daniel and Debowska, Agata (2017) Differences on Psychopathic traits between Murderers, White Collar criminals and the General Offender Population in U.S. and Polish Prisons. In: The Stockholm Criminology Symposium, 19-21 June 2017, Stockholm. (Unpublished)

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# Differences on Psychopathic traits between Murderers, White Collar Criminals, and the General Offender Population in U.S. and Polish Prisons

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 @nmsherretts

#sthlmcrimsymposium

# Outline

- Theoretical background
- Aim
- Methodology
- Results
- Conclusions



# Introduction

- Psychopathy has been recognised as a crucial psychological construct in the criminal justice system (DeLisi, 2016; Hart & Hare, 1997)
- 35% of homicide offenders were noted for increased psychopathy scores (Hodgins, Mednick *et al.*, 1996)
- Homicidal child molesters scored significantly higher (two SDs above the mean) on total psychopathy than non-homicidal child molesters (Firestone *et al.*, 1998)
- Media portrayals of murderers as psychopaths, alongside the public's fascination with the crime, has led to a common distorted view of a murderer in public perception



# Psychopathy

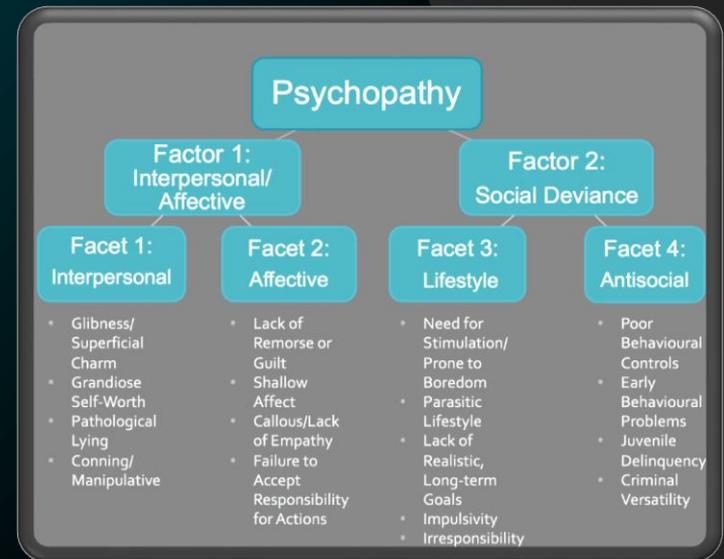
- Psychopathy is a personality characteristic that exists on a continuum.
- Cleckley (1941) proposed the first comprehensive conceptualisation of psychopathy:

1. Intelligence & superficial charm
2. Absence of delusions
3. Lack of neuroticism
4. Unreliability
5. Dishonesty & insincerity
6. Absence of remorse & regret
7. Antisocial behaviour
8. Poor judgment & failure to learn from mistakes
9. Egocentricity
10. Lack of affective reactions
11. Absence of insight
12. Unresponsiveness
13. Bizarre behaviour
14. Infrequently suicidal
15. Impersonal sex life
16. Lack of any life plan



# Hare's psychopathy measures are problematic

- Weighted toward indicators of behavioural expressions of the disorder (Edens *et al.*, 2001; Patrick *et al.*, 2007; Rogers, 1995)
- This can influence the scales' predictive utility for criminal behaviour (Cooke *et al.*, 2006; Kennealy *et al.*, 2010)
- Has potentially led to an overestimation of the prevalence of psychopathy in prison populations (Boduszek *et al.*, 2016)



# Psychopathic Personality Traits Scale



# Aim of the study

To explore differences between homicide offenders, white collar criminals, and offenders from the general population, utilising a new four-dimensional model of psychopathy.



# Method

- Participants
  - 771 offenders incarcerated in Pennsylvania in the US
    - Minimum-security  $n = 112$
    - Medium-security  $n = 186$
    - Maximum-security  $n = 473$
    - Females  $n = 337$
    - Males  $n = 434$
  - 1,261 offenders incarcerated in Poland
    - Medium-security  $n = 558$
    - Maximum-security  $n = 703$

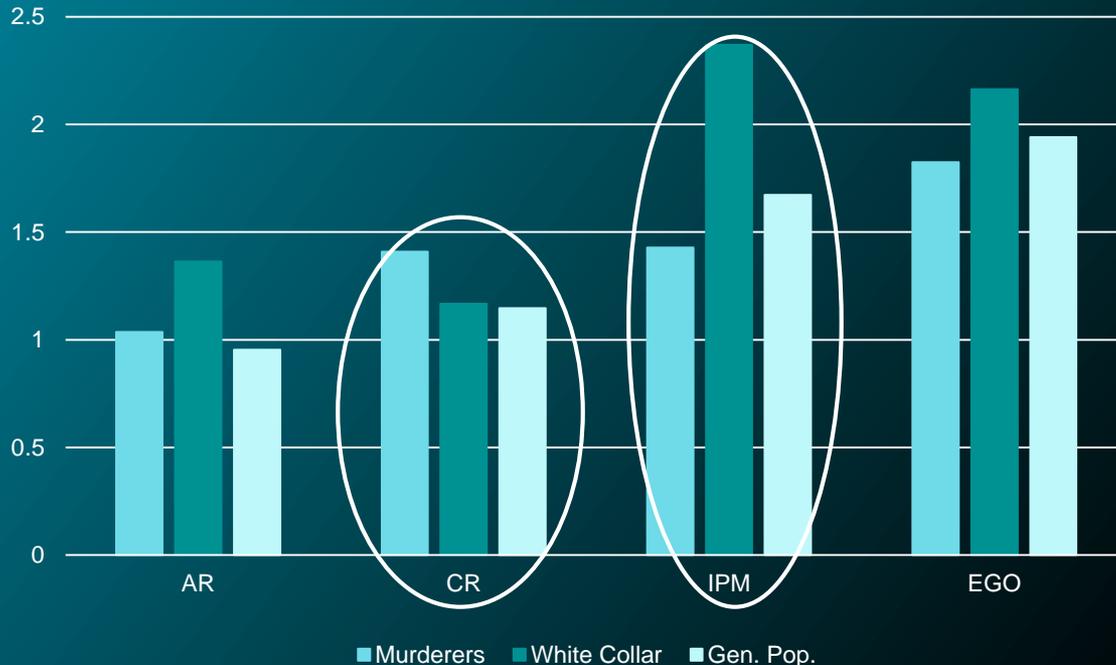


# Method

- Measure
  - The Psychopathic Personality Traits Scale (PPTS; Boduszek *et al.*, 2016)
- Analysis
  - Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)
  - T-test
- Ethics
  - Pennsylvania Department of Corrections  
Polish Prison Service
- Design
  - Cross-sectional, survey research



# ANOVA Results



*Figure 1.* US psychopathy scores for murderers, white collar criminals, and general offender population. AR = Affective responsiveness, CR = Cognitive responsiveness, IPM = Interpersonal manipulation, EGO = Egocentricity. Murderers score higher than gen. pop. on CR, Cohen's  $d = .22$ . White collar criminals score higher than gen. pop. (Cohen's  $d = .43$ ) and murderers (Cohen's  $d = .61$ ) on IPM.

# T-test Results

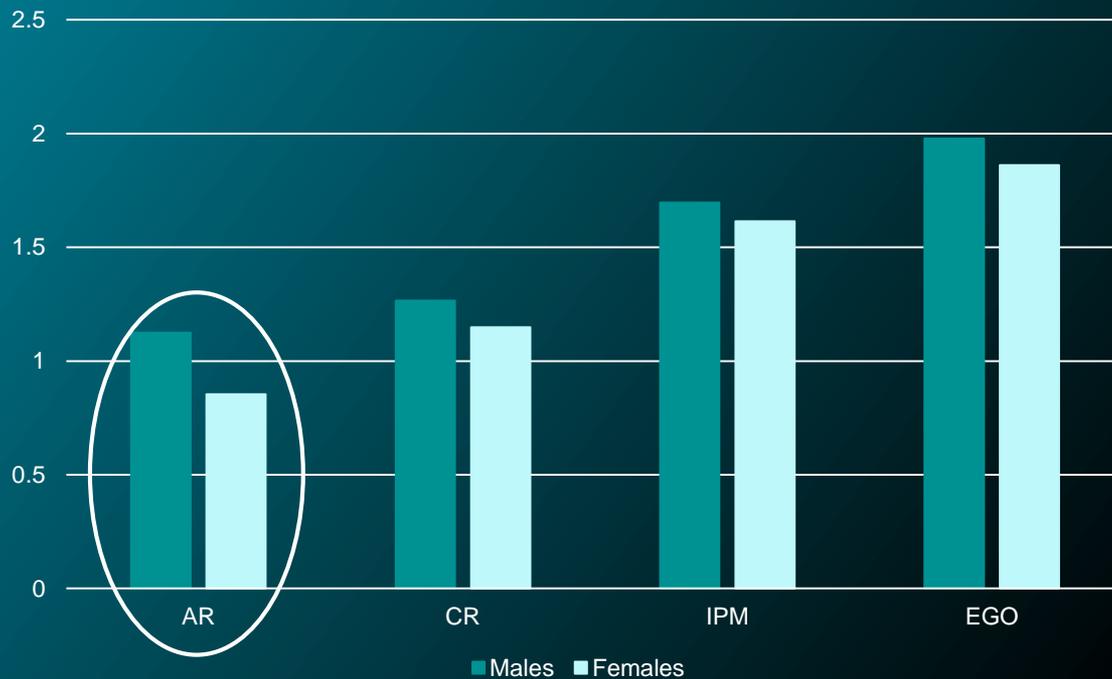
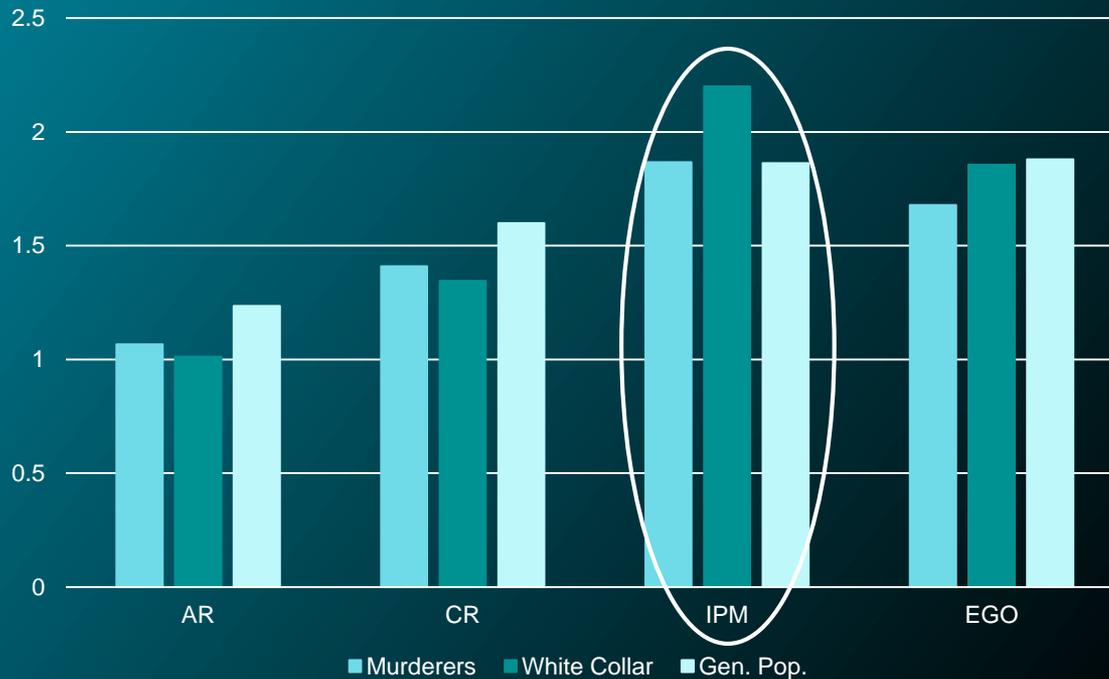


Figure 2. US psychopathy scores for Males and Females. Males score higher than Females on AR, Cohen's  $d = .21$ .

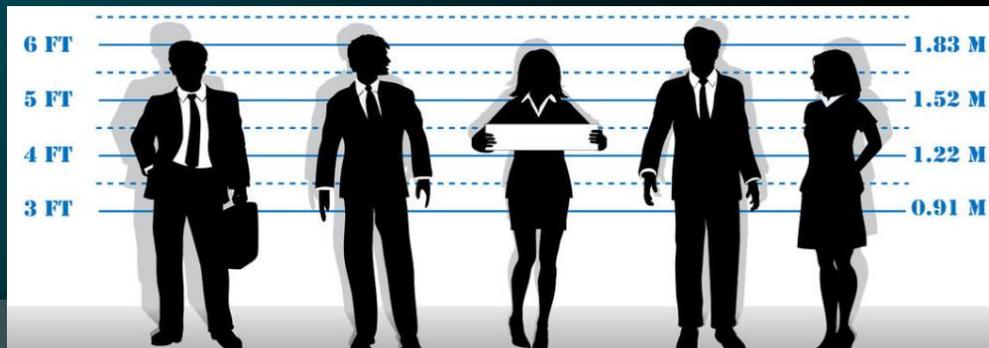
# ANOVA Results



*Figure 3.* Polish psychopathy scores for murderers, white collar criminals, and general offender population. White collar criminals score higher than gen. pop. on IPM, Cohen's  $d = .20$ .

# Results Summary

- United States
  - White collar criminals score higher than the general prison population on IPM
  - White collar criminals score higher than murderers on IPM
  - Murderers score higher than general prison population on CR
  - Males score higher than Females on AR
- Poland
  - White collar criminals score higher than general prison population on IPM



# Contributions

- White collar criminals, rather than murderers, score higher on the interpersonal manipulation factor of psychopathy
- Murderers do not score higher than other types of offenders on affective responsiveness (e.g., emotional empathy)
- Despite being popularised in contemporary media portrayals and sustained by previous research, the notion that murder is intrinsically connected with psychopathic tendencies, is not supported within the present exploration

**“If I wasn’t  
studying  
psychopaths  
in prison,  
I’d do it at  
the stock  
exchange.”  
-Dr Robert Hare**

# Limitations & Future Directions

- Limitations
  - Cross-sectional design was utilised
  - Self-report measures were used
- Future Directions
  - Explore this theory/ new measure of psychopathy & determine if the findings remain consistent in other prison populations
  - Determine if cross-cultural differences remain consistent
  - Investigate differences on psychopathy between single and serial murderers



Questions?  
Thank You!