

## Framing Public Policy and the Prevention of Sexual Violence

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*Presentation to The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers  
October 1, 2009*



*Support is appreciated from  
from NIMH, NIDA, and DoE.*

## Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006

"In order to protect the public from sex offenders and offenders against children, and in response to the vicious attacks by *violent predators*...

Congress in this Act establishes a comprehensive national system for the registration of those offenders."

## Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 Upheld by 11th Circuit Court of Appeals on March 26, 2009

"We also concluded the requirement that sex offenders register under § 16913 is *necessary to track those offenders*"

## Individuals Required to Register as a Sex Offender for 15 Years

- College student caught urinating or streaking across campus
- Parent who fails to prevent minor child from consensual sex
- 14-year-old found guilty without a trial by a juvenile court judge
- 70-year-old man who was convicted and released in 1949  
(law is applied retroactively)

Registration required for 15 years, 25 years, or life

## History of the "Super Predator" Metaphor for Juvenile Offenders

- 1960-2000 400% increase in adolescent violence in U.S.
- 1994 Murray & Herrnstein publish *The Bell Curve*
  - \* Criminals are genetically defective\*
- 1995 John Dilulio framed problem as "super predator"  
*Time Magazine*: leather jacket, graffiti wall
- 1995-2000 Dramatic public response and change in policy
  - \* Zero tolerance policies in schools
  - \* Violent Predator Act of 1997: jurisdiction in adult court
  - \* Alternative schools required in many districts
  - \* Metal detectors and School Resource Officers
  - \* Unprecedented building of prisons

## Theses of this Talk

1. Metaphors and frames influence how we conceptualize a problem, its cause, and its solution.
2. The metaphors used to characterize adolescent offenders have been incite-ful but not insightful.
3. Science can inform the accuracy of a frame.
4. It is our ethical responsibility as scientists and professionals to become as accurate as possible.

## Study of Metaphors and Frames in Human Communication

Anthropology (Bateson)

Linguistics (Lakoff)

Cognitive psychology (Schank; Tversky & Kahneman)

Political science "issue definition" (Cobb, Rochfort, Kingdon)

Public policy (Goss)

## Framing Problems in Public Discourse

Metaphors succeed when they lead to:

1. **Assimilation**
  - \* recognizable to listener; fits existing frame
2. **Accommodation**
  - \* invoke a broader schema, script, knowledge;
  - \* leads to reframing the concept for the listener
3. **Action**
  - \* evoke emotional and behavioral response

## Framing Problems in Public Policy

Add Fourth Criterion:

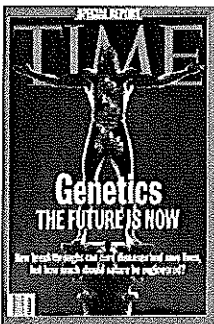
### **Accuracy**

*Consistent with empirical evidence in:  
Developmental science  
Prevention science*

## The "Super Predator" Frame

- 1. **Assimilation:** Animal-like
  - inevitable, vicious, no bounds
- 2. **Accommodation:** Biological/genetic defect
  - fearful affect is evoked; all such persons are similar, unchangeable
- 3. **Action:** Constrain and "track" forever
- 4. **Accuracy?**

## The Genomic Revolution

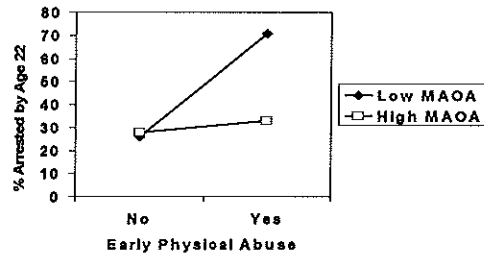


## Framing Genetic Basis of Behavior

- Francis Collins (NIH Director): "We have caught our first glimpse of our own *instruction book* previously known only to God" (June, 2000).
- James Watson: "Our *fate* is in our genes."
- George Annas called the gene a "*future diary*."
- Murray & Herrnstein: Solutions are to "*manipulate fertility*" of poor families and track

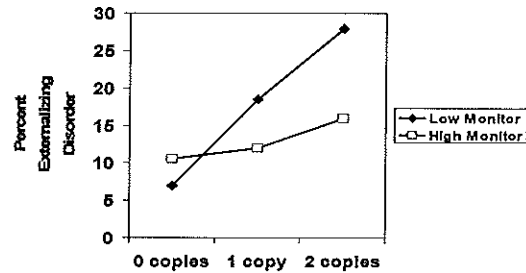
### Genes Interact with the Environment: MAOA Buffers Effect of Abuse on Arrest

(Edwards, Dodge, et al., 2009, *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, *in press*)



### Parental Supervision Buffers Effect of GABRA2 on Externalizing Disorder

(Dick et al., *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2009)



### Frames in Youth Violence

Frame	Cause	Policy	Accuracy
Super predator	biology	incarceration tracking	no

### The "Moral Defect" Frame

William Bennett wrote:

*Body Count: Moral Poverty... (1996)*

John Dilulio (*Weekly Standard*, 11-27-95):

*"moral poverty...creates super-predators"*

Solution?

*"My one big idea is....called religion."*

### Scientific Status of Moral Defects as Cause for Youth Violent Behavior

There is more to "moral" decisions than free will.

Becker won a Nobel Prize for Rational Choice Theory.

Dodge, Bates, & Pettit (1990, *Science*) found that decision to aggress occurs as a function of numerous cognitive and emotional processes:

1. hyper-vigilance to hostile cues
2. making a hostile attribution about others' intent
3. self-defensive goals
4. high accessibility of aggressive responses in memory
5. evaluation that other behaviors will fail
6. low self-efficacy for nonviolent strategies

### Scientific Status of Moral Defects as Cause for Youth Violent Behavior

Furthermore:

Evidence that cognitive/ emotional processes develop through:  
(Dodge, 2006, *Development & Psychopathology*)

- socialization (abuse vs. warmth)
- culture (media, neighborhood)
- intervention (by parents, schools, professionals)

Little evidence that religion leads to improved outcomes.

### Frames in Youth Violence

Frame	Cause	Policy	Accuracy
Super Predator	biology	incarceration	no
Moral Defect	sin	religion	no

### The "Contagious Disease" Frame

Concept is that antisocial behavior is contagious and adolescents are susceptible.

Policy to quarantine antisocial youth from mainstream:

- \* School tracking
- \* Suspension, expulsion, & in-school suspension
- \* Alternative schools
- \* Long-term incarceration
- \* Limit opportunities by design

### The Contagious Disease Frame

Partial evidence in support, but not fully:

Adolescents do learn from older, more deviant peers, but only if somewhat antisocial already

Consequence is iatrogenic effects of aggregating deviant peers in intervention

*(Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2008)*

No adverse effects in classrooms

### Frames in Youth Violence

Frame	Cause	Policy	Accuracy
Super predator	biology	incarceration	no
Moral defect	sin	religion	no
Contagious disease	illness	quarantine	partial

### The "Permanently Broken" Frame: Life Sentence without Parole for Juvenile Offenders

1,200 juveniles/year < age 15 arrested for sexual assault

2,225 individuals serving juvenile death-in-prison terms

U.S. is only country to sentence juveniles to "death in prison"

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child forbids death in prison for anyone under age 18, passed by every country except U.S. and Somalia

### Joe Sullivan v. State of Florida: U. S. Supreme Court, Pending

Sullivan (age 13) and two peers (age 15) arrested for breaking and entering; woman was sexually assaulted.

Peers blamed Sullivan, who is mentally disabled with a history of physically and sexually abused at home.

Trial last one day; six-person jury convicted him.

Sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Appeals denied. Biological evidence destroyed.

## Terrance Graham v. State of Florida: U. S. Supreme Court, Pending

Graham (age 16) armed burglary, 3 yrs probation  
Age 17, violated probation  
Sentenced to life in prison without parole

Trial court reasoned:

1. Graham had willfully thrown away an opportunity to do something with his life and *had decided* to lead a criminal life
2. Nothing could be done to deter him from future crime
3. Community would always need protection from him

## U. S. Supreme Court Considers Life Sentence without Parole for Juvenile Offenders

Whether the Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishments prohibits the imprisonment of a juvenile for life without the possibility of parole as punishment for the juvenile's commission of a non-homicide.

Roper v. Simmons: Court recognized national consensus against death penalty for juveniles and used that fact to disallow it.

## Are Antisocial Adolescents Incorrigible?

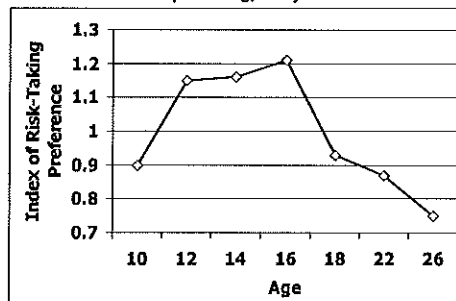
Brain development findings suggest that adolescent impulsivity is temporary. Two processes:

1. Proliferation of dopamine receptors in paralimbic and prefrontal cortical regions in early adolescence.
  - \* Rewarding stimuli are *more* rewarding!
2. Reduction and redistribution of dopamine receptors in adulthood
  - \* Myelination (synaptic pruning and efficiency) occurs into adulthood.
  - \* Executive control occurs later.

"The engine has been turned on, but the driver is not yet in control" (Steinberg, 2009).

## Adolescent Risk-Taking is Neural-Based and Temporary

(Steinberg, 2009)



## Do Antisocial Adolescents Respond to Treatment?

Evidence of efficacy in treatments:

Multisystemic Therapy

Functional Family Therapy

Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care

Cognitive Behavior Therapy

## Frames in Youth Violence

Frame	Cause	Policy	Accuracy
Super predator	biology	incarceration	no
Moral defect	sin	religion	no
Contagious disease	illness	quarantine	partial
Permanently broken	free will	death in prison	no

### Frames in Prevention: Vaccine

September 2005: Robert L. Johnson, M.D., a Rutgers University pediatrician and chair of the Panel for the NIH State-of-the-Science Conference on Preventing Violence in Adolescence, interrupted the proceedings to blurt out his exasperation with the prevention models currently in practice by asking:

*"Why can't there be a 'vaccine' for violence prevention?"*

### Frames in Prevention of Violence

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Policy Action</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
Vaccine <i>(Johnson)</i>	Early inoculation  short curricula D.A.R.E.	no

### Frames in Prevention of Violence

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Policy Action</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
Vaccine	Early inoculation	no
Corrective surgery <i>(Newt Gingrich)</i>	removal from home orphanage	inadequate

### Frames in Prevention of Violence

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Policy Action</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
Vaccine	Early inoculation	no
Corrective surgery	removal from home	inadequate
Chronic disease <i>(Kazdin)</i>	management harm reduction  life-long perpetrator-centered	maybe

### Frames in Prevention of Violence

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Policy Action</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
Vaccine	Early inoculation	no
Corrective Surgery	removal from home	inadequate
Chronic disease	harm reduction	maybe
Cardiovascular disease	multi prevention  distal risks targeted proximal risks urgent	perhaps

### Frames in Prevention of Violence

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Policy Action</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
Vaccine	Early inoculation	no
Corrective Surgery	removal from home	inadequate
Chronic disease	harm reduction	maybe
Cardiovascular disease	multi prevention	perhaps
Preventive dentistry	ongoing multi level universal selective targeted	perhaps

## Frames in Prevention of Violence

Frame	Policy Action	Accuracy
Vaccine	Early inoculation	no
Corrective Surgery	removal from home	inadequate
Chronic disease	harm reduction	maybe
Cardiovascular disease	multi prevention	perhaps
Preventive dentistry	ongoing	perhaps
Illiteracy	education	promising

## Framing Prevention of Violence as a Literacy Issue

Universal schooling for at least 13 years (K-12)

Growing appreciation for importance of early development

Extra support for children with difficulty (special education)

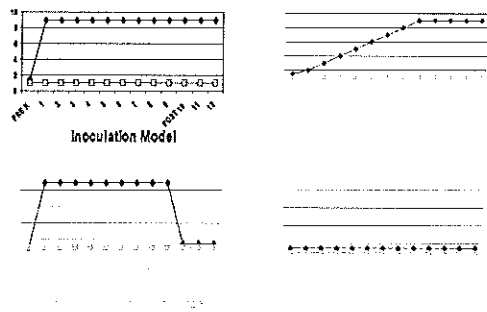
Family shares responsibility; Community support necessary

Role of national government and media

Consequences of failure are not incarceration

## Framing Prevention Impact

(Red line is Intervention effect with a higher score indicating positive impact)

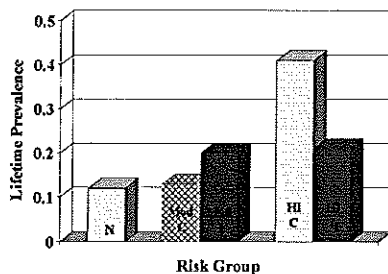


## Fast Track Intervention Components

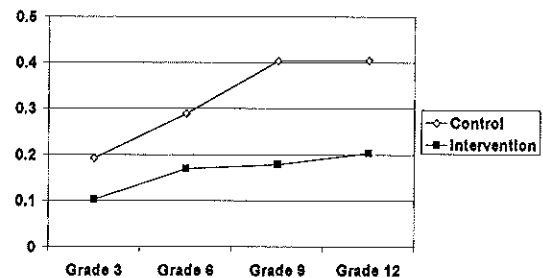
- Parenting** (weekly groups, biweekly home visits)
    - \* Behavior management, warmth, monitoring
  - Peer Relations** (universal, friendship groups, coaching)
    - \* Behavioral and social skills, prosocial groups
  - Social Information Processing** (skills training)
    - \* Problem solving and attributions
  - Academics** (tutoring, after-school groups)
    - \* Reading and organization skills
- Continuously over 10 Years Targeting Developmental Needs*

## Lifetime Prevalence of Conduct Disorder

(Intervention Effect at High Risk:  $p < .05$ )  
(CPPRG, *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 2007)



## Cumulative Effects of Fast Track Intervention to Prevent Conduct Disorder (Highest-Risk Group)



**Components of a National Strategy  
to Prevent Interpersonal Violence**

**1. Top down strategy**

**Framing for media  
Framing for funders/policy makers**

**2. Bottom-up evidence-based programs**

**Build local infrastructure  
Build scientific basis**

**Needed Research in Framing of  
the Prevention of Violence**

**Which accurate frames capture the  
positive interest and behavior of  
policy-makers and the public?**