Calling it ‘evil’ – the easy way out?
Dr Maria Kaspersson, University of Greenwich
Starting point

Evil does not just happen, it is done
Evil people / characters – rare
Evil acts – most of us are capable
The evil label removes our responsibility
The label ‘evil’ is problematic

“All of these cases [...] appeal to a kind of imaginative laziness in us. We prefer to understand evil in terms of archetypical horrors, fictional villains, and deep viciousness, rather than to strain our capacities for intuitive understanding towards a grasp of the difficult truth that people much like us perform acts that we find unimaginably awful” (Morton 2004:102).
Evil labels hamper our comprehension

Process of othering
Dramatisation of evil
Personalisation

Monster labels cloud the context
- Particularly when female offenders
Evil labels make us miss the point

‘Paedophiles’ – characterised by a process of othering and penal populism

Stranger Danger

No room for rehabilitation or reintegration

Hide risks in the family and home

Evil labels remove community responsibility
Evil labels exclude non-ideal victims

Nils Christie – ideal victims

Roy Baumeister – the myth of pure evil
  ◦ Benefits the victims

In cases where victims are not ideal, the violence they suffer is minimised, the offender is excused and the victim is blamed
  ◦ Confrontational violence
  ◦ Domestic violence and rape – mainly female victims
Conclusions

Process of othering
Dramatisation of evil – personalisation
Hampers comprehension
Removes our responsibility
Stranger danger in focus
Evil labels benefit victims and society
Non-ideal victims – justice not done
Evil labels – appealing as ‘we’ benefit, but problematic as ‘our’ role is not in focus
References

