

Psychopathy and Machiavellianism in Two Judicial Samples: Inmates and Attorneys

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Abstract: The present study examined the specific features of psychopathy and Machiavellianism in two judicial samples, one of inmates and one of attorneys. Participants included 225 prisoners (135 males and 90 females) and 38 lawyers (16 males and 22 females) that completed *Hare Self-Report Psychopathy Scale Version III (SRP-III)* and *Mach-IV* scale for Machiavellianism. We expected that psychopathic manifestations would be more prevalent in the prison sample and that lawyers would have *Mach* scores similar to inmates, due to their constant interaction with the criminal environment. Surprisingly, results showed that male attorneys scored higher than male inmates on the "Interpersonal Manipulation", "Callous Affect", "Erratic Lifestyle" subscales, and Machiavellianism, while in the female sample, the differences confirmed our expectations. These findings suggest that psychopathic and Machiavellian characteristics could not always be directly linked to criminal behavior and that psychopathic personality features can emerge in the absence of antisocial behavior.

Keywords: psychopathy, Machiavellianism, inmates, lawyers.

Introduction

The concept of psychopathy has been a seducing area of interest since the first conceptualization of Cleckley in 1941, who advanced 16 diagnostic criteria for psychopathic personality. The described key traits were: pathological egocentricity, insincerity, poor affective reactions and antisocial behavior (Cleckley, 1955). During the time, this personality disorder was more often identified in psychiatric or forensic environments and high levels of the trait have been associated with criminal recidivism, violence and antisocial behavior

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Note: Throughout this paper the words *attorney* and *lawyer* both refer only to the defender, and not the prosecutor status. In the Romanian judicial system the defenders are considered a separate profession, with different professional training, admission requirements, and professional regulations.

in both forensic and general populations (Flores-Mendoza et al., 2008; Vitacco, Neumann, & Jackson, 2005).

Trying to clarify the structure of the concept, Hare et al. (1990) developed a set of 20 diagnostic criteria (*Psychopathy Checklist, PCL*) that has become the most important assessment tool for psychopathy. Another approach was put forth by Levenson in 1995 (*Levenson Self Report Psychopathy Scale - LSRP*, Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) who distinguished between primary psychopathy (callous, selfish and manipulative personal attitudes) and secondary psychopathy (high impulsivity and emotional instability, coupled with a self-defeating lifestyle), a two factor structure confirmed and replicated several times thereafter (Brinkley, Schmitt, Smith, & Newman, 2001; Lynam, Whiteside, & Jones, 1999).

Throughout the general population, psychopathic personality disorder is rarely diagnosed due to the absence of recorded criminal behavior, even though some specific traits are quite common. In this context, some authors bring into discussion the existence of the "successful psychopath", the individual that has no record of criminal behavior, but meets the psychopathic personality description (Gao, Raine, & Phil, 2010; Mullins-Nelson, Salekin, & Leistico, 2006; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010). Not only they do not engage in antisocial behavior or avoid being caught, but they even manage to succeed in social and professional areas of their lives, having highly respected professions such as lawyers, professors, businessmen or politicians.

If psychopathy describes a major personality disorder with obvious pathological manifestations, Machiavellianism is the related concept that describes a set of beliefs and attitudes similar to the ones of psychopaths, but has debatable pathological significance. The most important difference between the two constructs is that a Machiavellian person does not (necessarily) have an antisocial behavior and poor affective reactions, but (s)he does have a life philosophy that approves lying to or exploitation of others as useful means for fulfilling personal needs or desires and interpersonal manipulation as a valid method of getting ahead.

Inspired by Niccolo Machiavelli's writing "*Il Principe*", a Renaissance book of advice on how to acquire and stay in power through expediency, manipulation, or other methods that do not take into account the traditional virtues of trust, honor and decency, Christie and Geis (1968, 1970a, 1970b) built an assessment tool for this set of attitudes, used nowadays in its forth version, the *Mach-IV*. The authors tried to distinguish between people who lead their lives by this type of beliefs (called *high-Machs*) and the ones who did not approve such ideas (called *low-Machs*).

Some authors claim that psychopathy and Machiavellianism measure the same clinical concept under different names (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998) but, in contrast, the diagnostic criteria and the assessment instruments

describe psychopathy as a personality disorder, a psycho-biological dysfunction, while Machiavellianism is regarded as a non-pathological distortion of the core beliefs about people and the interactions between them. In the context of differentiating the two above mentioned concepts we aimed two different but related populations: on one hand, prisoners, among whom psychopathic personality and antisocial behavior are more often present (Assadi et al., 2006; Cooke, 1996; Hare, 2009; Moran, 1999; Ullrich, et al., 2003), and on the other hand, attorneys, who have frequent contact with the criminal world, but have no records of antisocial behavior. While inmates would be more likely to reveal their psychopathic personality, we expected that attorneys might show a bias towards Machiavellian characteristics due to possible changes of their personal beliefs and attitudes during years of practicing their profession. On the other hand, if the differences between the two groups are limited only to the absence/presence of criminal behavior, the intriguing question of whether psychopathy should be considered a pathological disorder the first place is brought into discussion.

Moreover, we expected to find a correlation between the amount of professional experience and Machiavellianism scores, which could indicate either that being a lawyer could enforce Machiavellian beliefs, or that this legal profession may attract from the beginning *high-Mach* individuals.

Method

In the current research we evaluated the relationship between psychopathy and Machiavellianism in two judicial environments - the prison population and lawyers, active in the field of criminal law. The methodology of the study was designed in accordance to the ethical guidelines for psychological research involving human subjects and the principles stated in the *Declaration of Helsinki*, and was reviewed and approved by a local Research Ethics Committee.

Participants

The sample chosen for this study consisted of inmates with at least four years of education and lawyers active in the field of criminal law. While prisoners are known to represent a group with a high prevalence of psychopathic personality disorder (Assadi et al., 2006; Cooke, 1996; Hare, 2009; Moran, 1999; Ullrich et al., 2003), attorneys are a professional category with frequent interaction with the criminal environment, but with no records of criminal behavior, and regarding whom very few is known about the level of their psychopathic characteristics.

There were a total of 225 inmates, 135 of which were men from *Iași* County Penitentiary and 90 women from *Bacău* County Penitentiary. We excluded 22 participants (14 men and 8 women) because the assessment toolbox they handed in was partially incorrect or data was missing. This group proved

not significantly different from the study group in terms of age and educational level. The sentence lengths of the inmates ranged from 6 months to 22 years and prisoners were aged from 18 to 67 years ($M=36.49$, $SD=10.83$). The lawyers' sample was comprised of 38 participants (22 women and 16 men, all members of Iași Barr). A greater number of lawyers was invited to take part in the research, but most of them politely refused to participate invoking "the lack of free time". In the lawyers' group the age was ranged between 24 and 61 years ($M=34.84$, $SD=10.74$) and the professional experience in the criminal law field was ranged from 3 months to 34 years.

Instruments

A Romanian version of each instrument was developed by the researchers, which were then back translated by a native English speaker. Discrepancies were consensually resolved by the authors.

The Hare Self-Report Psychopathy Scale - Version III, (Paulhus, Hemphill, & Hare, 2007, research edition) is a 64-item measurement psychopathy, scored on a 5-point Likert scale with subscales of 16 item each: "Callous Affect" (CA, Cronbach's Alpha CA = .64), "Interpersonal Manipulation" (IM, Cronbach's Alpha IM = .69), "Erratic Lifestyle" (EL, Cronbach's Alpha EL = .63), and "Antisocial Behavior" (AB, Cronbach's Alpha AB = .77).

Most participants had difficulties understanding the negative items (in Romanian language the double negation resulting from the pairing of a negative item and the answer options can be sometimes confusing for some individuals, as it can be considered either a positive statement or a strengthening of the negation), so we decided to eliminate 13 items from our analysis. The resulting scale contains 51 items, 14 for "Callous Affect" and "Interpersonal Manipulation", 13 for "Erratic Lifestyle" and 10 items for the "Antisocial Behavior" subscale and so, the final scale was even less loaded with the antisocial component.

Mach-IV Scale (Christie, 1970a) was the instrument used to assess Machiavellianism. Consisting of 20 items, the scale evaluates the attitudes about people and human interactions with regard to opportunism and manipulation of others in achieving personal goals. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (considering that 10 of the items are reversed), the total score ranging from 20 to 100. The authors established a cut-score of 60 for the general population, the higher scores representing "high-Mach" and the lower "low-Mach".

Additionally, for each participant a set of personal data was obtained: age, education level, committed crime (e.g. theft, murder, rape, embezzlement), received sentence, recidivism or criminal history information (this information was collected from the inmates' files, and it represents being previously

convicted for at least one felony), professional experience (self-reported by lawyers).

Procedure

After reading and signing the *Informed Consent* and the *Acceptance Form*, each participant completed the *SRP-III Scale* and the *Mach-IV Scale*. The assessment (conducted individually by the main researcher) lasted from 15 to 30 minutes depending on the level of comprehension and reading speed of each participant. All participants were assured of confidentiality and after returning the questionnaire they were debriefed about the purpose of the study. The collected data was processed using SPSS IBM Statistics for Mac OSX.

Results

Preliminary analysis

To test the homogeneity between the analyzed groups we used *Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances*, which proved that the error variance of the dependent variables is equal across groups. The only exception was the "Antisocial Behavior" subscale, for which the error variances were significantly different across groups, result that is justified by the very low scores on antisocial behavior in the lawyers' group and mostly high scores on this subscale in the inmates' group.

Gender differences

The present study first explored the differences between men and women. T-test scores showed that, overall (see Figure 1 for SRP-III scores), men have significantly higher scores than women on global psychopathy ($p = .003$), "Interpersonal Manipulation", "Callous Affect", and "Antisocial Behavior" subscales ($p_{IM} = .038$; $p_{CA} < .001$; $p_{AB} = .001$), but do not differ significantly on "Erratic Lifestyle" subscale ($p_{EL} = .382$), or Machiavellianism ($p_{MACH} = .202$).

Separately, within the inmates' group, we found no significant differences between men and women on SRP-III and Mach-IV scales, while within the attorneys' sample (see Figure 2 for SRP-III scores), results showed that men have higher levels of global psychopathy ($t(36) = 3.176$, $p = .005$), "Interpersonal Manipulation" ($t_{IM}(36) = 2.339$, $p_{IM} = .025$), "Callous Affect" ($t_{CA}(36) = 3.998$, $p_{CA} < .001$) and "Antisocial Behavior" ($t_{AB}(36) = 3.425$, $p_{AB} = 0.003$) when compared to their female counterparts, but there were no significant differences on "Erratic Lifestyle" subscale ($t_{EL}(36) = 1.650$, $p_{EL} = .108$), or Machiavellianism ($t_{MACH}(36) = 1.670$, $p_{MACH} = .104$).

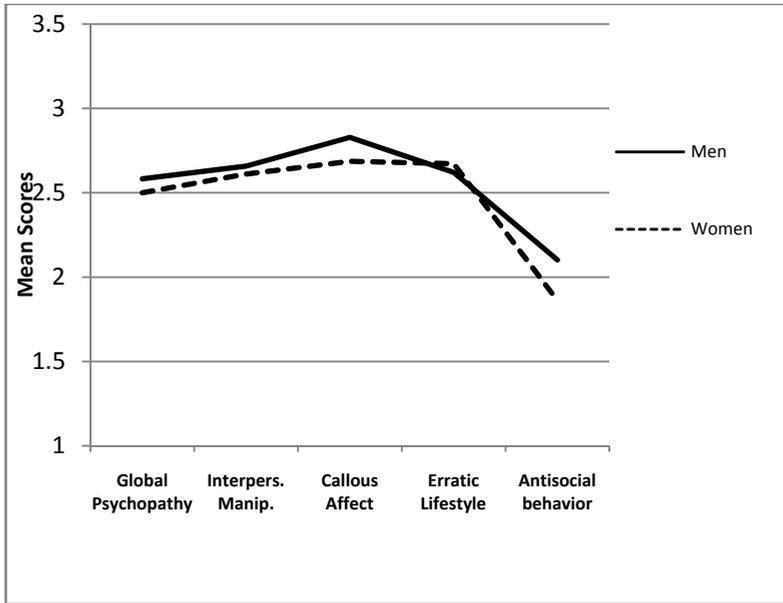


Figure 1. SRP-III scores for inmates and attorneys

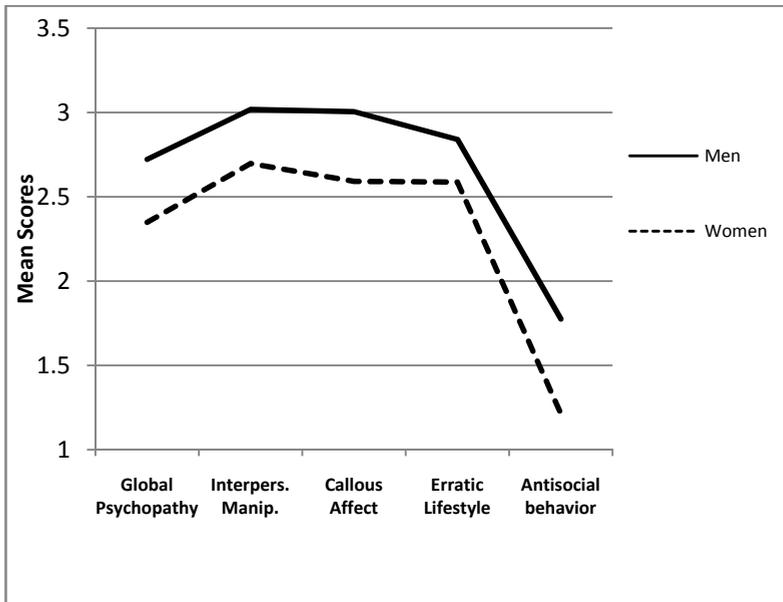


Figure 2. SRP-III scores for attorneys

Inmates vs. attorneys

When contrasting between inmates and attorneys, results proved to be somewhat unexpected: Prisoners had significantly higher scores on the “Antisocial Behavior” subscale ($p_{AB} < .001$) but, contrary to what was expected, lawyers had higher "Interpersonal Manipulation" scores ($p_{IM} = .002$), and did not differ significantly when compared to inmates on callous affect, erratic lifestyle, and global psychopathy levels (see Figure 3).

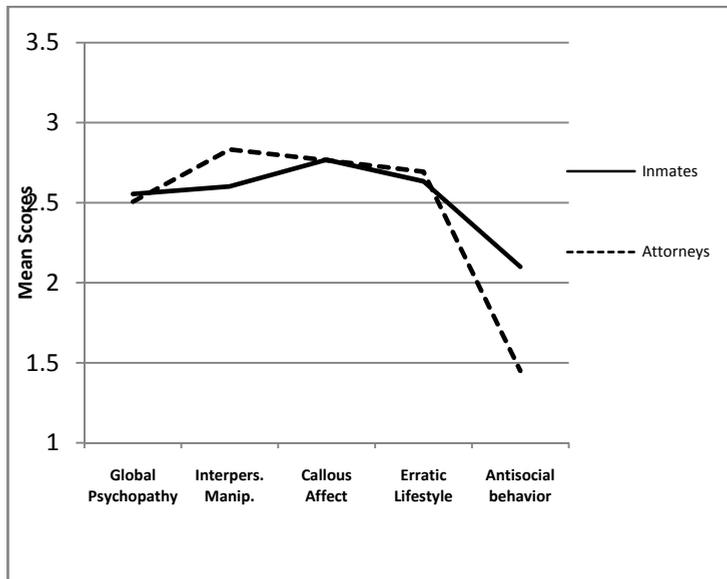


Figure 3. SRP-III scores for men and women

Moreover, lawyers had significantly higher scores than inmates on Machiavellianism ($p_{MACH} = .002$, see Figure 4), scores that suggest that their life philosophy more easily accepts manipulating others, lying and deceiving as useful methods in achieving personal success.

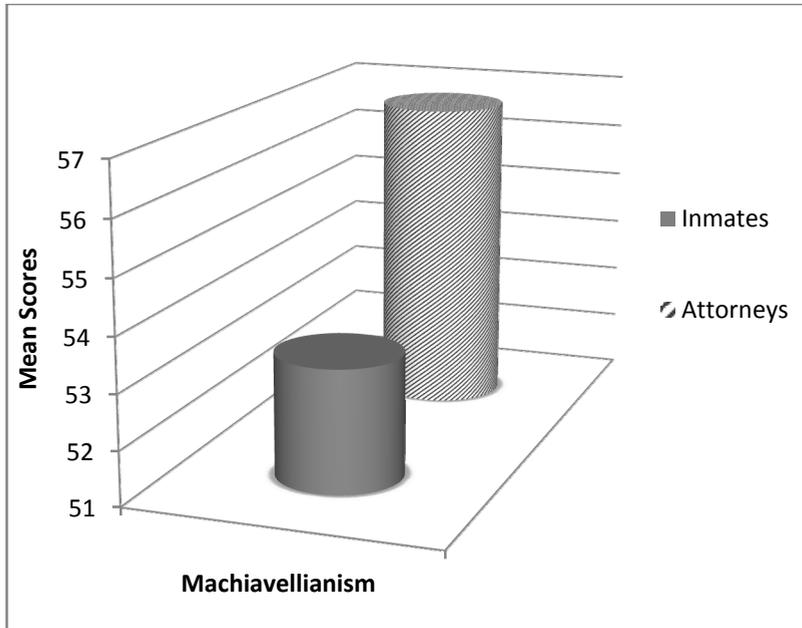


Figure 4. Mach-IV scores for men and women

When analyzed separately within men's group, the differences between inmates and attorneys are even more noticeable (see Figure 5 for SRP-III scores). Lawyers have significantly higher "Interpersonal Manipulation" ($t_{IM}(135) = -3.353$, $p_{IM} = .001$) and Machiavellianism scores ($t_{MACH}(135) = -3.666$, $p_{MACH} = .002$), and additionally, male lawyers have marginally significantly higher scores than male inmates on the "Callous Affect" and "Erratic Lifestyle" subscales ($t_{CA}(135) = -1.969$, $p_{CA} = .051$; $t_{EL}(135) = -1.872$, $p_{EL} = .063$). Offenders, on the other hand, are more prone to criminal and antisocial behavior ($t_{AB}(135) = 2.452$, $p_{AB} = .016$), which suggests that for them, the unlawful conduct is the most significant psychopathic characteristic, while the other specific manifestations of psychopathy are less developed.

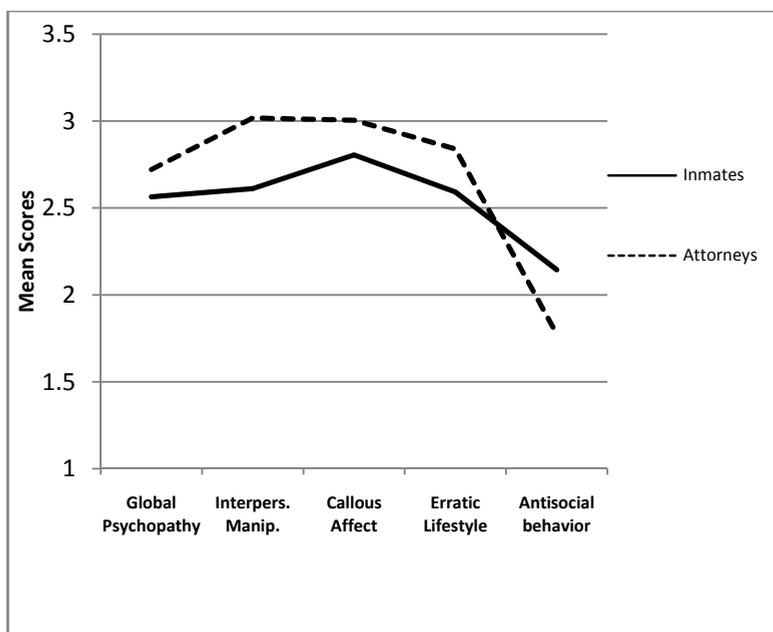


Figure 5. SRP-III scores for men

Women's results were somewhat closer to what was expected for either group (see Figure 6 for SRP-III scores). Female inmates had higher scores on global psychopathy ($t(102) = 3.014, p = 0.004$), "Antisocial Behavior" ($t_{AB}(102) = 9.991, p_{AB} < .001$), and marginally significantly higher scores on "Callous Affect" ($t_{CA}(102) = 1.737, p_{CA} = .088$), while women's scores for "Interpersonal Manipulation" and "Erratic Lifestyle" subscales, or Machiavellianism did not differ significantly ($t_{IM}(102) = .987, p_{IM} = .326$; $t_{EL}(102) = 1.036, p_{EL} = .303$; $t_{MACH}(102) = .930, p_{MACH} = .354$).

Psychopathy and recidivism

Another relationship requiring closer examination is the one between psychopathy and recidivism: previous research has found psychopathy to be a good predictor of the recidivism rate among prisoners (*e.g.* Edens, Campbell, & Weir, 2007), therefore the present study additionally analyzed the relationship between recidivism (criminal records) and psychopathy scores. Results indicated that male recidivists have significantly higher scores only on "Antisocial Behavior" subscale ($t_{AB}(119) = -3.156, p_{AB} = .005$), which was actually comprised of direct questions about past crimes, while female recidivists had higher global scores on SRP-III Scale ($t(78) = -2.105, p = .039$) and higher "Interpersonal Manipulation" scores ($t_{IM}(78) = -2.534, p_{IM} = .013$).

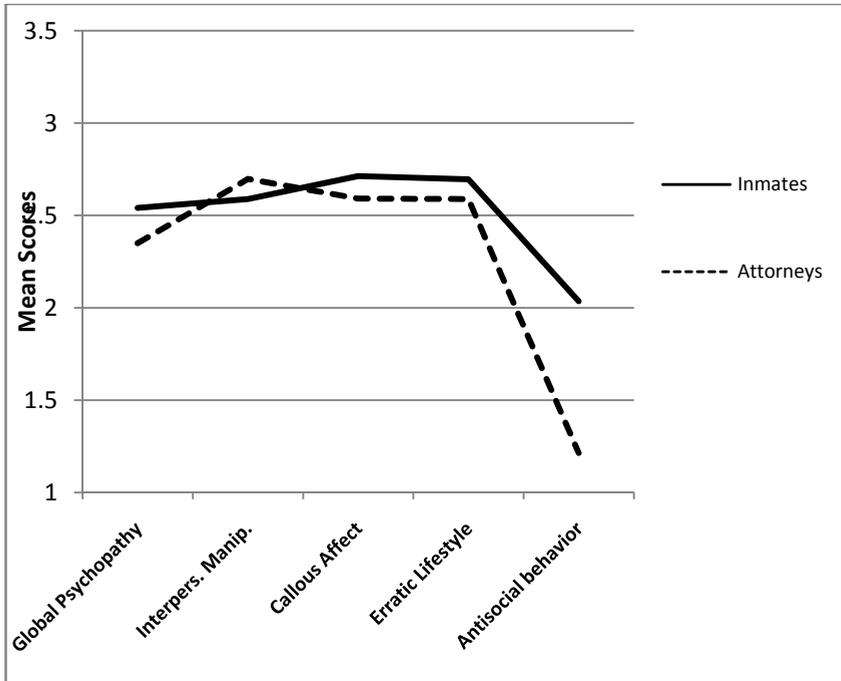


Figure 6. SRP-III scores for women

Correlational analysis

Correlational analysis revealed an unexpected association between years of professional experience of lawyers and two of the explored measures: we found medium correlations between professional experience and Machiavellianism ($r = -.380, p = .019$), and between professional experience and “Erratic Lifestyle” ($r = -.398, p = .013$). This suggests that higher scores on the Mach-IV and “Erratic lifestyle” scales are associated with low experience and, the more years of experience one has achieved, Machiavellian attitudes are less powerful and lifestyle is less erratic.

Discussion

Even though most of the literature on psychopathy did not consider gender differences (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2002; Forth, Brown, Hart, & Hare, 1996; Loucks & Zamble, 2000; Louth, Hare, & Linden, 1998; Richards, Casey, & Lucente, 2003), some previous studies have found differences in the prevalence of psychopathy across gender (Loucks & Zamble, 2000; Salekin, Rogers, & Sewell, 1997; Salekin, Rogers, Ustad, & Sewell, 1998), and also few possible differences were noticed in the core traits of male versus female psychopaths (Forouzan & Cooke, 2005). The present study found that men have higher

psychopathy scores than women, results that might imply the assumption that psychopathy in females has slightly different characteristics than in males. Several authors have argued that the description of psychopathic traits depicts mostly masculine characteristics, and that female psychopaths are less arrogant and less self-absorbed than men, and that their emotional responses are more varied and more intense (Forouzan & Cooke, 2005). In that context, the women's lower scores for global psychopathy, emotional callousness and antisocial behavior might represent a particularity of the female psychopath portrait.

When contrasting between groups, male attorneys proved to have the highest levels of psychopathic characteristics from all participants, relying more heavily on using other people in order to achieve personal success, being more emotionally callous and being more prone to live an unpredictable and dangerous life, yet not engaging in criminal behavior. These surprising findings bring into discussion the concept of "the successful psychopath", described as the individual that cleverly uses his deceiving and manipulating skills in order to avoid been caught or suspected by law enforcements, that keeps himself/herself out of correctional facilities and even achieves success in some areas of his/her life (Mullins-Nelson, Salekin, & Leistico, 2006; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010).

In past decades, theorists have engaged in studying the features of the alleged "successful psychopath" and several authors identified psychopathic personality traits in individuals that have highly respected professions such as lawyers, professors, businessmen or politicians (Hare, 2003; Cleckley, 1988, cited in Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010). These individuals have apparently committed no crimes or have successfully avoided being investigated, but they are described as having superficial charm, being egocentric, irresponsible and manipulative, traits that are the most important psychopathic characteristics. Moreover, in comparison to "unsuccessful psychopaths", they are described to have superior cognitive functioning (Gao, Raine, & Phil, 2010), which helps them achieve their personal goals using nonviolent methods and probably have higher levels of empathy and social skills, which makes them more able to adapt in social communities (Mullins-Nelson, Salekin, & Leistico, 2006).

Male lawyers that participated in the present research resemble the portrait of the successful psychopath: they have higher educational levels, they score higher in "Interpersonal Manipulation", "Callous Affect" and "Erratic Lifestyle" psychopathy subscales and have no criminal records (they have never committed crimes or have never been caught). Lawyers' personality features are probably influenced by the nature of their legal profession - it gives them the mission of defending people that have most likely committed crimes and they have to bend the truth in their clients' favor in order to obtain smaller sentences. Their day-to-day activity sometimes requires using methods that are very much alike interpersonal manipulation and, in order to avoid ethical dilemmas (*e.g.* "Is it moral to defend a pedophile, a murderer or a rapist?") and achieve success in

this particular profession, toughened emotional responses might be useful. Moreover, male lawyers are more often implicated in harsher criminal cases, which imply a more stressful working environment and the development of such personality traits might represent a coping mechanism.

The fact that these differences between lawyers and inmates were found in men but not in women supports the idea that the female psychopaths might have a slightly different portrait, and that the assessment tools might have better captured the masculine personality characteristics. As opposed to male lawyers, female lawyers had lower scores than female inmates, but the measures depicted only the behavioral aspect (antisocial behavior), while the more profound traits regarding female personality did not differ significantly. The differences within the inmates' sample tend to support this idea, female recidivists scoring higher on global psychopathy and interpersonal manipulation. These results show a relationship between repeated illegal actions and psychopathy, but do not reveal more profound personality differences. Further research is required in order to clarify the concept of female psychopathy.

The results on Machiavellianism are consistent with psychopathy scores discussed above, male attorneys having more cynic and egotistic beliefs than male inmates do, while in women, the Mach-IV scores did not differ significantly. These results might imply the idea that being a lawyer could affect men's life philosophy and also the possibility that these cruel attitudes, along with some of the psychopathic personality traits might form a profile similar to that of a "successful psychopath". The "protective" factors that lead to the avoidance of antisocial behaviors in these individuals are worth further investigation.

It remains unclear if either this particular type of work influences men and changes their life philosophy, and sometimes even their personality traits, or if the common "job-description" attracts from the beginning individuals that are more prone to have some specific Machiavellian attitudes and psychopathic traits. The results of this study tend to support the latter approach, by finding a moderate negative correlation of Machiavellianism erratic lifestyle scores with the amount of professional experience. This possible explanation of our results raises several future study directions that could confirm or infirm these findings for larger samples of attorneys and inmates. The use of hetero-administrated psychopathy scales (*e.g.* PCL-R) is recommended in future research.

One limitation of our study is the weak reliability of the assessed sample. The number of lawyers is relatively low in comparison to the number of inmates, due to the fact that most of the attorneys invited to participate politely refused alleging "the lack of free time", despite the fact that the whole procedure duration was no more than a half an hour. Also, the total number of participants was small - a larger sample of subjects must be included in a future research for more accurate and reliable results. Another limitation of the study is the "self-

report" format of the instruments applied. In prison, interactions with outsiders are often seen as evaluative, judgmental, even though the research purpose was clearly explained. This context may have influenced the participants' answers. For future studies, a heteroadministered scale may be an option. Also, the text understanding and interpretation for the inmates group could be considered another limitation. Even though the formal level of education was a condition for participation, we could not assess the real level of understanding of the written text, even though participants did not report any problem. This issue could also be avoided through heteroadministration of instruments.

The findings of our study revealed an interesting perspective over the concepts of psychopathy and Machiavellianism, partially contradicting our expectations and previous findings. The fact that some lawyers had more psychopathic traits than prisoners (except antisocial behavior) raises the intriguing question of whether psychopathy should be considered a disorder in the first place. Further research on representative samples should be conducted in order to clarify this matter. Given these surprising results, research regarding the "successful psychopath" in the field of judicial professions would be worth further investigation.

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