

# In search of the corporate psychopath



# Our agenda for this evening

- Research aim
- Setting the context
- What is a psychopath and corporate psychopath?
- Research carried out and results
- Workplace problems associated with psychopathy.
- Identifying the psychopath.
- What can we do?
- Questions and answers.

# Research aim

- *To identify the prevalence of corporate psychopathy across professions in New Zealand.*

And more specifically;

- *Are corporate psychopaths active in New Zealand based professions?*

# Personality serves as the foundations of this research

- Personality is a valid predictor of workplace performance
- There are two ways of measuring a personality disorder
  - > Disease based approach – diagnosis is made
  - > Dimensional approach – personality disorders are at an extreme end of normal personality

# Dysfunctional dispositions at work

(Hogan & Hogan, 1997; 2001)

## PD Themes

Borderline

Paranoid

Avoidant

Schizoid

Passive-aggressive

Narcissistic

**Antisocial**

Histrionic

Schizotypal

Obsessive-compulsive

Dependent

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## Dispositions

Volatile (Excitable)

Mistrustful (Skeptical)

Cautious

Detached (Reserved)

Passive-aggressive (Leisurely)

Arrogant (Bold)

**Manipulative (Mischievous)**

Dramatic (Colourful)

Eccentric (Imaginative)

Perfectionistic (Diligent)

Dependent (Dutiful)

# Welcome to the dark side...

- ◎ Corporate psychopathy falls under an 'umbrella' that looks at dysfunctional **personalities** in the work place referred to as – 'the dark side'
  - > 'Machiavellianism'.
  - > 'psychopathy – corporate psychopathy'.
  - > 'Narcissistic leaders'
- ◎ The most well known are called the dark triad...

# What is a psychopath?



# What is a psychopath?

- Psychopaths characterised by:
  - Impulsiveness.
  - Disinhibition.
  - Pathological lying.
  - Excitement-seeking.
  - Egocentrism.
  - Charm.
  - Manipulation of others.
  - Lack of conscience (or super-ego).
  - Lack of remorse or guilt.
  - Lack of sense of loyalty.
  - Low empathy.
  - Low anxiety (unless about to be caught!).
- Also they can show aggression, are not always in control, and are associated with crime..

# The corporate psychopath

- little is known about these psychopaths as they have avoided the criminal justice system.
- 1% of population 'true' psychopaths (Hare, 1993).
- Prevalence of Antisocial Personality Disorder in general population 3% in males, 1% in females (DSM-IV-TR).
- Significant elements of psychopathy in CEOs & senior managers in leading UK companies (Board & Fritzon, 2005).
- More with psychopathic 'traits'.

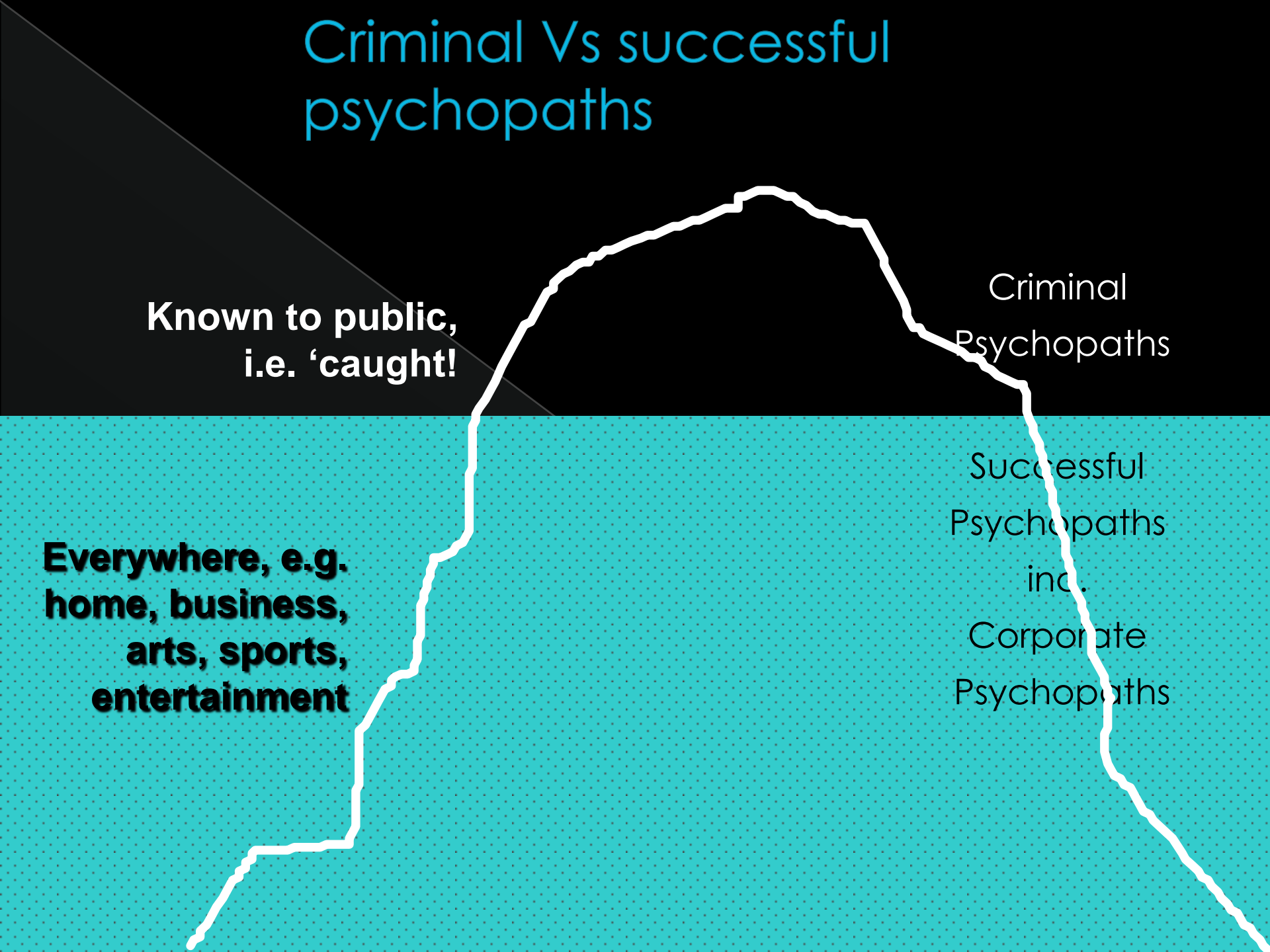
# Criminal Vs successful psychopaths

Known to public,  
i.e. 'caught!

Criminal  
Psychopaths

**Everywhere, e.g.  
home, business,  
arts, sports,  
entertainment**

Successful  
Psychopaths  
inc.  
Corporate  
Psychopaths



# Ok, so what's a Corporate psychopath?

(Hare, 1993)

- Otherwise known as successful psychopaths, or 'snakes in suits', their common traits include:
  - Fast-talking.
  - Charming & charismatic.
  - Self-assured.
  - Often good looking
  - At ease in social situations.
  - Cool under pressure.
  - Unfazed by the possibility of being found out.
  - Totally ruthless.
- *Hold on, these sound just like traits for a successful leader!!*

And so they can find themselves in positions of leadership.....



# Who are they?

- Attracted to prestige, money, and power;
- And larger, growing, and dynamic organisations
- Find their way into organisations by manipulating tests, and interviewers
- Their aim to climb the corporate ladder to satisfy their attraction to the characteristics above..
- To achieve this, they charm, and manipulate, use 'pawns' for their gain, and create a following; run over the top of anyone who gets in their way

# Associated workplace problems

(Giacalone & Greenberg, 1997)

Blackmail.

Bribery.

Discrimination.

Espionage.

Extortion.

Fraud.

Violence.

Kickbacks.

Lawsuits.

Lying.

Sabotage.

Sexual harassment.

Theft.

Violations of confidentiality.

- *Can affect an organisation on three levels- individual, team, and the wider organisation,*

# Corporate psychopathy is dynamic!

- ◎ The severity of psychopathy and derailment is dependent on moderating and mediating variables
  - > Gender
    - Society sex roles: aggression, dominance vs. nurturing, warmth
  - > Age
  - > Culture
  - > Intelligence

# Research method: How are we going to find out the prevalence of corporate psychopaths?

## ● Participants

- > Four professions were chosen that embodied prestige, money, and power, including one profession to compare against
- > 190 participants (81 male, 109 female) from:
  - > Accounting (35)
  - > Academia (42)
  - > Law (27)
  - > customer service (28)

## ● Materials

- > Levensons self-report psychopathy scale: 26 item survey to measure psychopathy;
  - “For me, what’s right is whatever I can get away with”
- > Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised Abbreviated: 6 items
  - “Have you ever taken advantage of someone?”

# Results: General

		<i>N</i>	Mean
LSRP	Customer Service	46	51.67
	Accounting	21	45.14
	Academic	27	42.81
	Law	74	45.06
	Mean	168	46.52
Lie	Customer Service	49	3.69
	Accounting	21	3.28
	Academic	29	2.79
	Law	78	3.92
	Mean	177	3.59

# Results: according to gender

		N	Mean	S.D	P
LSRP	Male	79	48.45	10.77	.02
	Female	98	45.00	8.69	
Lie	Male	74	3.69	1.57	.45
	Female	94	3.52	1.52	

# So what?..Interesting findings

- Customer Service participants scored the highest on the LSRP
  - > Why?
    - Profession vs Occupation
    - Relaxed HR policy
    - Association with larger organisations
    - Corporate sociopathy
- This proves that corporate psychopaths could be in many professions, not just ones that embody prestige, money, and power!
  - However, may not be successful psychopaths and fill leadership positions.
- Males were found to be significantly score higher on the LSRP than females!
- Lawyers scored the highest on the Lie scale, hence, did they try to manipulate the LSRP to avoid being found out? Therefore is that the true indication of psychopathy?

# Identifying the psychopath

- Observe behaviour.
- External professional advice.
- Clinical measures.
- Personality questionnaires.

# Dealing with psychopaths

(McCormick & Burch, 2005).

## ◉ What organisations can do.

### > Recruitment & selection.

- Understand the concept of psychopathy.
- Check references.
- Profile candidates.
  - Personality.
  - Behavioural event interviewing.

### > Promotion.

- Take care – use cross checks.
- Use 360° feedback.
- Use internal & external customer satisfaction surveys.

### > Get rid of them!

# Dealing with psychopaths

- ◎ What individuals (victims) can do.
  - > Get help, e.g. external coaching psychologist.
  - > Do not try reason.
  - > Do not plead.
  - > Establish a power base.
  - > Exercise power with care.
  - > Refuse to be drawn into unethical/illegal activities – are they prepared to go to jail with their boss or colleague!!!
  - > And, if your boss is a psychopath - Transfer out!

# Bibliography & further reading

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