



## Who are we as Psychopaths?

## Quem somos nós enquanto Psicopatas?

**José Martins Barra da Costa<sup>1</sup>**

*1. Phd in Psychology by Aveiro University (UA). Bachelor in Anthropology, a graduate degree in Criminal Sciences and Psycriminal Studies and a Master in Intercultural Relations.*

Barra da Costa, Corresponding author, Email address: [jbarra@netcabo.pt](mailto:jbarra@netcabo.pt)

**Abstract**

Not all psychopaths are murders or criminals, although the latter are the less well succeeded. Successful ones are fully integrated in socio-professional contexts where they occupy, in most cases, key positions in companies and institutions, politics and government. How to interpret the recent corruption cases, with accusations that reach all and some, including those who we are supposed to respect? Manipulation is a central aspect to the psychopath definition, both criminal as the seemingly non-criminal.

**Keywords:** psychopathy, politics, criminality, manipulation.

**Resumo**

Nem todos os psicopatas são assassinos ou criminosos, sendo que estes são os mal-sucedidos. Os bem-sucedidos encontram-se plenamente inseridos no seu contexto sócio-profissional, onde ocupam, na maior parte das vezes, cargos de relevo em empresas e instituições, na política e nos governos. Como interpretar os últimos casos de corrupção, com acusações que atingem todos e mais alguns, incluindo aqueles que é suposto o povo respeitar? Manipulação é um aspeto central à definição de psicopata, tanto o criminoso como o aparentemente não-criminoso.

**Palavras-Chave:** psicopatia, política, criminalidade, manipulação.

## Introduction

*Are we all psychopaths?* No, we are not. On one hand, a psychopath profile should take into account the indication of the most defining traits of that disorder: self-centeredness; superficial charm and good intelligence; hallucinations inexistence or of other forms of irrational thinking; absence of nervousness or neurotic manifestations; inability to love; overall poverty in major affective relationships; impersonal, trivial and non-integrated sex life; absence of feelings of guilt, shame or remorse; inability to respond in most interpersonal relationships; irresponsibility associated with impulsivity; compulsion to lie; recurrent rules violation and exhibition of anti-social behaviour without apparent qualms. On the other hand, not all psychopaths are murderers or criminals, although the latter are the less well-succeeded. Successful ones are fully integrated in their socio-professional context, where they occupy, in most cases,

key positions in politics and governments, institutions, business, science or even in police. There are psychopaths parents, psychopaths bosses, psychopaths husbands, political psychopaths, psychopaths entrepreneurs, psychopaths co-workers. Most of them will never be arrested and never commit a crime. But they generally deceive, manipulate and ruin finances and the life of those who have bad luck or carelessness to join them personally or professionally. Their motivations are focused on power ideals and social status, at the expense of empathy and attachment. The psychopath has no ability to feel sadness, despair, discouragement or sorrow for the loss of someone, establishing itself as a being without true feelings, a “soulless”.

Transplanting it to reality, another question arises, requiring exemplification: How to interpret the latter corruption cases, with accusations that reach all, including those

that are we are supposed to respect? Are they the psychopaths or are the others? They are. Some of the general characteristics of psychopaths, such as aggressiveness, impulsiveness, lack of self-control and the fact that they prove to be emotionally cold, rejecting social norms and showing great irresponsibility, may lead these individuals to commit crimes. There are individuals who have, in a continuous manner, a highly aggressive capacity, both in physical and psychologically, through hostility and manipulation behaviours that they "hide" by their outward appearance: confident, presentable, well-adjusted psychologically and with a great sense of self-esteem.

At present we are more aware about criminality that generates immediate insecurity, alarm and disturbance: for stretching theft, for sexual crime or for murder. Meanwhile, we fail to 'discover' on corruption, influence trading or money laundering. And yet this is what constitutes true "multinational crime." These are

OPINION

people who are not worth to apply the social reintegration theories. They are in the official receptions. Only limited to be the "companies" administrators, where they "only" receive the profits of an economy market. The white-collar crime, for example, is made by respectable people, being practiced in the exercise of their profession. The penalties applied to them are not high and admit substitute mechanisms of liberty deprivation; are more personal than monetary, all based on the idea of no need of a rehabilitation for such offenders. It can be said that the white-collar crime is a "criminal specie" treated with special gentleness, being this unequal treatment unfair because it is not even a socialization defect.

A third point arises due to the crisis (material and values) we are living: can this have consequences in the Portuguese social attitudes, making them psychopaths? This time the answer requires prior clarification: a priori we all are potential victims and potential

perpetrators. Or, if we will, the crime is like the sun, when born is for everyone. In this context, the psychopath sees the "other" as a prey, in terms of power relationships, thus serving it to maintain its grandeur structure, although these ties ends, of course, by enhancing the danger degree.

In today's society success is synonymous with wealth. In a modern organization, employees are asked not to be obedient, or submissive, but only conformists. And this responsibility clearance mechanism degenerates in situations that are often the first step to psychopathic behaviour. And yet, we can develop and use for our advantage some of our peers features, associated with psychopathy. The medicine coldness, the defense of a criminal and the business world, foster psychopath attitudes, and that's socially acceptable. We all have psychopathic characteristics, it's true, some dependent on genetic predisposition, others resulting from the tendency to violence, others yet

as a consequence of our intelligence level. But most of us affects these features to needs, as is the case of the surgeon.

Finally, what are the moments that led or lead more the Portuguese to commit acts that can be confused with psychopathic acts? Here is a point that is itself a founder matrix of criminology: the man follows the example and the example comes from above. From the regent, the father, the teacher, the boss. There was in Portugal, recently, moments assumed by professional politicians and their acolytes, based on a psychopathic matrix, careful on the serious consequences for the most disadvantaged people in socio-economic terms, in particular, the closure of health centers, schools and courts, the official reforms and holiday and Christmas bonuses theft, the jobs goggle, wages and rights, social atrophy by taxes or the compulsory employees removal under the cohort look of a medieval justice system. These are examples of deliberate cruelty, coldness and lack of remorse of those who

have more and do nothing (apart from consuming), to those who produce (the most disadvantaged in social and economic terms), yet as a rule, these “responsible”, seemingly non-criminal psychopaths, invite us to understand this psychopathy as a “need”, a collective plan, under the guise of an “economic recovery” or a “return to the markets”!

The neurological links of psychopaths are different from "normal" people, in a way that psychopaths are psychological chess players and manoeuvre people as pawns in a tray. A prime minister or a finance minister are not concerned if they condemn a population to hunger or stimulate a war. Making politics is to choose and an education minister who does not care to lay off thousands of teachers, just to save a few pennies - forgetting that a colleague chose to purchase a submarine, spending an amount that would be enough to pay those teachers

and staff salaries for five years – nothing worries him, as long as the personal and political needs are met. The difference between this “people” and con artists or killers is none.

The ambition to take up a dominant position, the assumption of an effective power, glory, the desire for personal ownership and values, are motivations - either of an affective domination nature, or as the result of a criminal intolerance – often leading the psychopath to crime and prison.

In two words: manipulation and deceit are central aspects to the definition of psychopath, both the criminal, as the seemingly non-criminal. And, as has been observed, the “intelligence” variable seems not being allowing them to establish interpersonal relationship strategies so assertive that can easily mistake the justice system.