

# High self-control may support ‘success’ in psychopathic leadership: Self-control versus impulsivity in psychopathic leadership

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## ABSTRACT

In the last few years scholars have postulated that non-institutionalized psychopathic individuals may be overrepresented in leadership positions. In this paper we juxtapose theory and research on the profile of those high in psychopathy in leadership positions with the traditional profile of those high in psychopathy in prisons and institutions. We hypothesize that the psychopathic leader has a unique combination of traits that enables and drives such a leader to be ‘successful’ in a position of power. We propose that the differentiating trait in the profile of the psychopathic leader may be the trait high self-control. This is in contrast with the traditional profile of institutionalized psychopathic individuals in which levels of self-control are typically low. Furthermore, we hypothesize that although the traits of high self-control and impulsivity are apparently contradictory, the conjunction of high self-control with one specific domain of impulsivity could further amplify the ‘success’ of the psychopathic leader.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years the attention of scholars and laypeople has shifted from imprisoned psychopathic individuals to those high in psychopathy that live among us. Since the last global economic crisis Cleckley's (1941) case studies on ‘successful’ or semi-‘successful’ psychopathy have echoed among scholars (Benning, Venables, & Hall, 2018; Boddy, 2011; Dutton, 2012; Gao & Raine, 2010; Hall & Benning, 2006; Lilienfeld et al., 2012; Mullins-Sweatt, Glover, Derefinko, Miller, & Widiger, 2010; Palmen, Derksen, & Kolthoff, 2018; Steinert, Lishner, Vitacco, & Hong, 2017; Stevens, Deuling, & Armenakis, 2012). Psychopathy among individuals in high profile positions, particularly in leadership positions, has intrigued many within and without the fields of psychology and psychiatry (Lilienfeld et al., 2012; Lilienfeld, Watts, & Smith, 2015; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Palmen et al., 2018).

Unfortunately there is a lack of knowledge and insight in the topic of psychopathic leadership for several reasons. In the following section we outline the main barriers.

First, defining the concept of ‘successful psychopathy’ as related to psychopathic leadership, remains complicated (Benning et al., 2018; Gao & Raine, 2010; Hall & Benning, 2006; Lilienfeld et al., 2015; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Steinert et al., 2017). This definition mainly depends on the perspective of successfulness, either that of the psychopathic individual, or the organization or government for which the individual works. For this reason this manuscript employs ‘successfulness’ in the context of psychopathy to indicate the ambiguity of

the terminology (Steinert et al., 2017).

Second, the limited access researchers have to the business world, non-profit organizations, and the world of politics impedes collecting data on the subject (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Palmen et al., 2018; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

Third, we postulate that the psychological profile of the psychopathic leader may be difficult to recognize. Some scholars have suggested that these leaders are better equipped to keep up appearances than their institutionalized counterparts (Babiak & Hare, 2007). Other scholars hypothesize that these two groups may differ on key psychopathic traits (Benning et al., 2018; Gao & Raine, 2010; Hall & Benning, 2006; Ishikawa, Raine, Lencz, Bihle, & Lacasse, 2001; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Palmen et al., 2018).

Despite these issues discussed above, researchers assert that it is essential to collect more data on this subject because the study of psychopathic leadership is still in its infancy (Hall & Benning, 2006; Ishikawa et al., 2001; Palmen et al., 2018; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). Further research may shed more light on different manifestations within the psychopathy construct, such as non-criminal psychopathy, ‘successful’ psychopathy, or even truly socially adaptive forms of psychopathy. Additionally, scholars point out the societal necessity of researching the subject of psychopathic leadership because such leadership may negatively impact employees' wellbeing and the finances of an organization (Babiak, 1995, 1996, 2007, 2016; Babiak & Hare, 2007; Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010; Blickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, & Klein, 2006; Boddy, 2011; Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010; Boddy &

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Taplin, 2017; Bucy, Formby, Raspanti, & Rooney, 2008; Clarke, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2012; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mathieu & Babiak, 2015; Mathieu, Neumann, Babiak, & Hare, 2014; Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Babiak, 2014; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Palmen et al., 2018; Ray, 2007).

To advance the research on the subject, it is imperative to clarify the profile of this psychopathic leader. This clarification may improve the identification of psychopathic individuals in high profile positions (Benning et al., 2018). Outlining the specific traits of the profile of the psychopathic leader may be a first step in achieving these goals.

In this paper we present a model which outlines the specific psychological profile of the psychopathic leader. We hypothesize that the profile of the psychopathic leader differs from the traditional psychopathic profile on several key traits. In addition, we hypothesize that as well as a group of core psychopathic traits, the leadership profile includes three additional traits (moderators) that may motivate and enable this psychopathic type to be 'successful' in a position of power. To define a manifestation of 'successful' psychopathy in this manner is in consistency with the work of Steinert et al. (2017), who propose that the behavior in 'successful' psychopathy can best be outlined by defining the interplay between core psychopathic traits and different moderating variables.

Our proposed model of the psychopathic leader (hereafter, PL model) is based on a theoretical division of psychopathy subtypes by Yildirim and Derksen (2015a). In an extensive review of the literature, these scholars analyzed the most important theoretical conceptualizations of psychopathy by clinicians and the theoretical models underlying the most important contemporary assessments utilized to measure psychopathy. These insights were then combined with data from cluster analytic studies on personality aspects and etiological divergences in different psychopathic samples. As a result of this process, these scholars were able to delineate four psychopathic subcategories. We believe that, when comparing the data and theories on psychopathic leadership with each of these four psychopathy subtypes, one type most closely resembles the psychopathic leadership portrayals. The proposed model of the psychopathic leader was created based upon this specific psychopathy subtype.

In addition to a group of core psychopathic traits, we hypothesize that the first moderating variable in the PL model is the trait high self-control. In our model the trait self-control is defined as a structural moderator as described in the work of Steinert et al. (2017). These scholars have introduced an elaboration of the moderated expression model of successful psychopathy by Hall and Benning (2006). In this model moderating factors (e.g. intelligence or SES) may moderate the non-adaptiveness of the core psychopathic traits (Hall & Benning, 2006). Steinert et al. (2017) have elaborated on this model by defining different types of moderators (structural, environmental, and contextual). They define the structural moderator in their model as a characteristic in an individual that is an enduring aspect of someone's personality. This structural moderator is different from the core traits of psychopathy but it may temper the behavioral outcomes initially activated by the core traits of psychopathy.

In this paper we posit that the trait high self-control in the PL model may be the key trait that supports 'success'. The interaction between high self-control and one specific form of impulsivity will be the focus of attention in this paper. We hypothesize which type of impulsivity may work in tandem with high self-control and how this fusion of traits may increase 'success' in psychopathic leadership. This aspect of our proposed model is in accordance with Poythress & Hall's postulation that although psychopathic individuals are impulsive, the precise operationalization of impulsivity may vary per psychopathic subtype. Furthermore, these scholars posit that although most forms of impulsivity may be maladaptive, some forms of impulsivity may be adaptive in achieving preset goals (2011). They argue that 'future models of psychopathy need to consider more complex associations among the various manifestations of these two constructs [impulsivity

and psychopathy]' (p. 120).

In our view, the underlying motivator that draws this psychopathic type to positions of power may be the need for domination (also a structural moderator in the model of Steinert et al., 2017). Certain research studies indicate that psychopathy correlates with a preference for social group inequality (Glenn, Efferson, Iyer, & Graham, 2017; Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009; Kramer, Cesinger, Schwarzsinger, & Gelléri, 2011) and refers to this concept as social dominance orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Furthermore, some scholars hypothesize that certain individuals high in psychopathy may be attracted to leadership positions because in those roles they can dominate and control others (Fennimore & Sementelli, 2016). This trait will not be analyzed in detail in this paper but will be addressed in a future paper by the same authors.

Finally, although psychopathic leadership may be considered a form of 'successful' psychopathy, we will argue that those high in psychopathy may only *outwardly* flourish in business or political arenas. Several studies show that psychopathic leaders may be a risk regarding finances, ethics, and the well-being of those who depend on them or are in their environment. In most cases the psychopathic leader may be the only person who actually benefits (Babiak, 1995, 1996, 2007, 2016; Babiak et al., 2010; Babiak & Hare, 2007; Blickle et al., 2006; Boddy, 2011; Boddy et al., 2010; Boddy & Taplin, 2017; Bucy et al., 2008; Clarke, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2012; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mathieu et al., 2014a; Mathieu et al., 2014b; Mathieu & Babiak, 2015; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Palmen et al., 2018; Ray, 2007).

## 2. The traditional profile of psychopathy

### 2.1. Criminal psychopathy

Psychopathy is a personality disorder that has simultaneously mesmerized and horrified clinicians and researchers for decades. These contrasting perceptions are invoked by the intriguing configuration of two seemingly opposite personalities, united in the syndrome. Psychopathy combines an outward personality that appears to be charming and amiable, with an inward personality consisting of a defective conscience, an egotistical nature, and a predatory callousness (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Hare, 1993).

Those high in psychopathy have often been responsible for heinous crimes and severe antisocial behavior that has affected society in a profound manner. Not surprisingly this has motivated scholars to intensely study the construct for many years (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Hare, 1993, 1996; Hare & Neumann, 2010). Most of the data on this disorder have been gained through the use of Hare's PCL and PCL-R (Psychopathy Checklist, and the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised) (Hare, 1980, 1991, 2003), regarded by many as the gold standard for assessing psychopathy in prison samples (Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013). On the grounds of the underlying theoretical construct of this assessment-tool most scholars divide the psychopathy construct into two components: the affective/interpersonal traits (Factor 1) and the lifestyle/antisocial traits (Factor 2) (Poythress & Hall, 2011; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). The first group includes the traits callousness, lack of empathy, remorse or guilt, shallow emotions, not accepting responsibility for one's actions, glibness, superficial charm, grandiose sense of self, pathological lying, and cunning and manipulative behavior. The second group is represented by the need for stimulation/proneness to boredom, a parasitic lifestyle, lack of realistic long-term goals, impulsivity and irresponsibility, poor behavioral control, behavioral problems in early childhood, and antisocial behavior in adulthood (Hare, 2003) (Table 1).

Although several scholars consider the Factor 1 traits to be essential to the syndrome, there is an ongoing debate about certain features of Factor 2 (Steinert et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is highly challenging to assess psychopathy in subclinical samples utilizing certain items in Factor 2. The criteria that represent the item violation of parole and traits related to a criminal record are not available to diagnose

**Table 1**  
Factor structure derived from Hare (2003).

Psychopathy checklist revised (PCL-R)
<b>Factor 1 (affective and interpersonal traits)</b>
<b>Affective</b>
Lack of empathy, lack of remorse or guilt, callousness, shallow emotions, not accepting responsibility for one's actions
<b>Interpersonal</b>
Superficial charm, glibness, grandiose sense of self, cunning and manipulative behavior, pathological lying
<b>Factor 2 (lifestyle and antisocial traits)</b>
<b>Lifestyle</b>
A parasitic lifestyle, lack of realistic long-term goals, impulsivity, irresponsibility, the need for stimulation/proneness to boredom
<b>Antisocial</b>
Poor behavioral control, behavioral problems in early childhood, and antisocial behavior in adulthood
<b>Independent items</b>
Many short term marital relationships, promiscuous sexual behavior, revocation of conditional release

psychopathy outside prison walls.

## 2.2. Theoretical shifts in the debate

In recent years the debate on psychopathy has undergone some interesting theoretical shifts. Later in this paper we will illuminate why these theoretical shifts are salient to the conceptualization of the psychopathic leader.

First, in the last few years many scholars have begun to feel that psychopathy should be defined as a dimensional construct, rather than a category (psychopathic or not psychopathic). As such, the differences between people with a psychopathic personality and other people can be considered as differences in degree rather than in kind (Skeem, Poythress, Edens, Lilienfeld, & Cale, 2003).

Second, some scholars have questioned whether criminal or overt antisocial behavior are in fact central components of psychopathy (Skeem & Cooke, 2010). The PCL-R Factor 2 criteria focus on measuring overt antisocial behavior and criminal conduct. Several researchers suggest that while these are crucial facets to assess psychopathy within prison populations, they may not be vital criteria in subclinical psychopathy (Skeem et al., 2003; Skeem & Cooke, 2010). In that sense, Cleckley's portrayals of (semi)-'successful' psychopathy in his book *The Mask of Sanity* (1941), may describe this last group more accurately, than the theoretical construct underlying the PCL-R (Glenn & Raine, 2014; Cooke & Michie, 2001; Skeem et al., 2003). Many scholars emphasize that although criminal behavior may not be a vital part of subclinical psychopathy, antisocial behavior is. They postulate that the interpersonal and affective traits (Factor 1) of this profile will eventually lead to antisocial conduct, although in some cases in more covert forms (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Cooke & Michie, 2001; Hare & Neumann, 2010).

Third, another consequence of the widely use of the PCL-R is that there has been more focus on the nonadaptive traits of psychopathy than on the adaptive features (like charm and charisma). Nevertheless, with the increased attention on the topic of 'successful' psychopathy, the adaptive traits of psychopathy have been part of several studies in recent years (Babiak et al., 2010; Bickel, Schütte, & Genau, 2018; Glenn & Raine, 2014; Ishikawa et al., 2001; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010). The essential questions that can be raised here are: how 'successful' should be defined within the context of psychopathy, and if in fact this "successful" psychopath actually exists. These issues will be addressed in the section on 'successful' psychopathy (Section 4) and psychopathic leaders (Section 5).

Fourth, there is an ongoing dialogue about the existence of different subtypes among those high in psychopathy. These diverse types may be caused by distinctive combinations of psychopathic and non-

psychopathic traits, and variables in levels of these traits (Hicks & Drislane, 2018; Steinert et al., 2017). In this debate, there has been a renewed focus of attention on one specific differentiation: the primary psychopathy type (psychopathy) versus the secondary psychopathy type (sociopathy) (Karpman, 1941; Lykken, 1995; Mokros et al., 2015; Palmen et al., 2018; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). In that theory, most scholars consider primary psychopathy to be determined mainly through inborn predispositions. In contrast, secondary psychopathy is regarded as a disorder that may develop as a result of traumatic events in early childhood in interaction with a genetic vulnerability. In secondary psychopathy these early experiences may alter a person's coping style such that this person appears to be an outwardly callous individual, while in fact being inwardly very vulnerable (Karpman, 1941; Lykken, 1995; Yildirim, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a). Research using cluster analyses indicates that primary psychopathy may be theoretically conceptualized through many of the Factor 1 traits of the PCL-R. Secondary psychopathy may be conceptualized through the traits in Factor 2 of the PCL-R and also with the theoretical concept of ASPD (Antisocial Personality Disorder, as listed in the DSM IV/5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, 2013) (Poythress & Hall, 2011; Skeem et al., 2003).

Thus, there is reasonable discussion to be had about whether there is only one psychopathy construct or whether there are different groups within the psychopathy profile with each group being characterized by a different set of features (Poythress & Hall, 2011; Skeem et al., 2003).

In the next section the division in primary and secondary psychopathy groups will be illuminated (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). This elaboration on the primary and secondary psychopathy distinction is essential for the configuration of the PL model.

## 3. Psychopathic subtypes

Since the inception of the research into psychopathy scholars have speculated on the existence of different psychopathy variants (e.g. Hicks & Drislane, 2018; Karpman, 1941; Lykken, 1995; Mokros et al., 2015; Poythress et al., 2010; Schneider, 1923; Skeem et al., 2003; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). Divergences into several phenotypes have since been made. The most important distinctions found in the literature are: primary versus secondary psychopathy, criminal versus non-criminal psychopathy, 'successful' versus unsuccessful psychopathy, and clinical versus subclinical psychopathy (Skeem et al., 2003).

The data gained through the PCL-R and other tools appear to cluster some of the different subtypes of psychopathy. These clusters may shed light on which variants of psychopathy exist and which differences these types exhibit in their psychopathic and psychological profile. It is speculated that there may also be divergences in etiology, educational levels, parental upbringing, and social economic background among the subtypes (Hall & Benning, 2006; Lykken, 1995; Skeem et al., 2003).

According to Hicks and Drislane (2018), who combined recent studies on variants of psychopathy with an overview of the theoretical divisions in psychopathic subtypes, there is 'compelling evidence for psychopathy subtypes' (p. 297).

### 3.1. Primary and secondary psychopathy

Hicks and Drislane (2018) posit that nearly all of the studies and theoretical models on subtypes they reviewed made the primary-secondary psychopathy distinction.

Karpman, a psychiatrist and a contemporary of Cleckley, was one of the first to identify the division of primary and secondary psychopathic subtypes in his clinical practice. He labeled these two types as 'idiopathic psychopathy' and 'symptomatic psychopathy' respectively (1941). Although Karpman recognized the outward similarities of these two types, he viewed the psychopathic traits in both groups as grounded in a distinct etiology. He regarded idiopathic psychopathy as arising from an inborn defect in affect. Symptomatic psychopathy, in

his view, developed as a coping mechanism after severe trauma in early childhood that transformed a healthy inborn affective life into severe emotional disturbance.

Since then many scholars have divided psychopathy in two subtypes similar to Karpman's dichotomy of idiopathic psychopathy and symptomatic psychopathy. This primary-secondary psychopathy distinction may still be regarded as the most important phenotypical subdivision of the psychopathy concept (Hicks & Drislane, 2018; Skeem et al., 2003).

Building on Karpman's writings, other scholars theorized about what specific biopsychological pathways may underpin each subtype. To further clarify the behavior in each psychopathy type, these researchers elaborated on Karpman's views by incorporating Gray's theory of a motivational system which is fueled by either passive avoidance (BIS; behavioral inhibition system) or a sensitivity for rewards (BAS; behavioral activation system) (Gray, 1987). In this theory the behavioral outcomes in primary psychopathy are mainly determined by low levels of BIS (underactive fight/flight and freeze system), whereas secondary psychopathy is mainly underpinned by high levels of BAS (hypersensitivity for incentives) (Fowles, 1980; Lykken, 1995).

Many of the empirical studies that focused on the divergence within the psychopathy construct through the use of cluster analytic studies found similar phenotypic expressions as defined by Karpman (1941), Fowles (1980) and Lykken (1995) (Hicks & Drislane, 2018; Hicks, Markon, Patrick, Krueger, & Newman, 2004; Mokros et al., 2015; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a).

This important theoretical differentiation between primary and secondary psychopathy appears to have revitalized the interest of scholars in recent years. This distinction has been especially interesting to researchers who are striving to explore and enlighten the differences between those high in psychopathy that end up in prison and those high in psychopathic traits that are able to gain a certain amount of 'success' in life (Chiaburu, Munoz, & Gardner, 2013; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010). Researchers of 'successful' psychopathy debate whether the defined set of traits to describe psychopathy in prison populations is adequate to define subclinical psychopathy, particularly 'successful' psychopathy (Benning et al., 2018; Chiaburu et al., 2013; Steinert et al., 2017).

To illuminate the concept of psychopathic leadership, we postulate that it is important to designate which of the two theoretical phenotypes (primary versus secondary psychopathy), and which of the underlying traits reflect psychopathic leadership the best. Therefore this paper will first delineate a theoretical distinction of two primary and two secondary psychopathy types (Yildirim, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

### 3.2. A new continuum of primary and secondary psychopathy

In alignment with earlier conceptualizations of primary and secondary psychopathy, Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) reviewed the theoretical conceptualizations underlying the most important contemporary instruments to assess psychopathy in combination with the literature on theoretical differentiations of primary and secondary psychopathy. These scholars then combined these insights with data from cluster-analytic studies of psychopathy in youngsters, adult offender samples, and community samples. In this review they identified homogeneity in four different psychopathy groups and introduced a new typology of two primary and two secondary psychopathy subcategories. These four types are based on dissimilarities in etiology as well as in bio-behavioral and biosociopsychological pathways.

Before outlining the four types, the most important differences between primary and secondary psychopathy portrayed in this theoretical division will be clarified. Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) posit that the behavioral representation of primary versus secondary psychopathy might appear superficially similar, especially to the untrained eye. However, under this outward resemblance lie important divergences in

etiology that are expressed as different variants of psychopathy, each with a distinct set of traits (Karpman, 1941; Skeem et al., 2003).

#### 3.2.1. Etiological differences between primary and secondary psychopathy

Karpman (1941) considered primary psychopathy to be the only 'true' form of psychopathy. He regarded primary psychopathy as idiopathic psychopathy and secondary psychopathy as a symptomatic form of psychopathy. Yildirim and Derksen's (2015a) study clarifies that most cluster analyses indicate that the differences between primary and secondary psychopathy are largely caused by etiological divergences.

Primary psychopathy may predominately stem from genetic inborn temperamental features and secondary psychopathy may mainly be caused by intrusive traumatic events in early childhood that interact with plasticity genes (Karpman, 1941; Lykken, 1995; Yildirim, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

Before outlining the theoretical subdivisions of primary and secondary psychopathy according to Yildirim and Derksen (2015a), it is important to note that in this theory the different types all exist on a continuum. That is these subtypes differ in degree rather than in category. The four types all exist on a continuum that ranges from low to high levels of emotionality (from primary to secondary psychopathy) (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a).

#### 3.2.2. Primary psychopathy: two types on a continuum

Schneider portrayed primary psychopathy in 1923 and referred to this type as 'the self-seeking psychopath'. In his view such an individual can appear outwardly charming and likeable but is in fact antisocial in his acts. The antisocial conduct of this self-seeking psychopath is a logical consequence of the underlying psychopathic traits of egocentrism, shallow affect, and low empathy. Schneider also posited that it is conceivable that many of the traits of this psychopathy type may enable 'success' in life, in different layers of society. In some cases such individuals may even gain positions of power and leadership.

Karpman was one of the first to differentiate two types of primary psychopathy. Karpman (1955) made a division in the aggressive/predatory type and the passive/parasitic type of primary psychopathy. Since then several clinicians and researchers have theorized and studied whether there are different subtypes of primary psychopathy (Blackburn, Logan, Donnelly, & Renwick, 2008; Coid, Freestone, & Ullrich, 2012; Mokros et al., 2015; Vincent, Vitacco, Grisso, & Corrado, 2003; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a, 2015b).

Model-based cluster analytic studies with imprisoned and community samples show that subdivisions between different primary psychopathic groups can be made. One group is described as more aggressive, criminal, impulsive and non-successful. The other group appears to be more 'successful', shows adaptive features, is deceitful, and possesses high levels of self-control (Blackburn et al., 2008; Coid et al., 2012; Mokros et al., 2015; Vincent et al., 2003). Similar primary psychopathic subcategories were also delineated in several empirical studies. In these studies one group was identified with high levels of impulsivity, low levels of both (socio)-cognitive functioning and conscientiousness and another group with low levels of impulsivity, high levels of (socio)-cognitive functioning and high levels of conscientiousness (Gao & Raine, 2010; Ishikawa et al., 2001; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Poythress & Hall, 2011; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015b).

Based on their review study, Yildirim and Derksen (2013, 2015a, 2015b) hypothesize that an inborn hyperstable serotonin system may underlie the affective and interpersonal deficits in primary psychopathy. Such a neurophysiological profile is immune to short-term, acute stressors (fearlessness) and long-term situational stress (low anxiousness), especially when coupled with additional risk factors such as high testosterone. Furthermore, such a profile may also reduce the dependence on the social environment which in other people serves the function of regulating one's emotional states. The serotonergic hyperstability may cause people to be emotionally unaffected by



circumstances or interactions with others even those with whom they are close, like family and friends. These scholars propose that this may explain the callousness, the shallow emotions, the absence of fear (hypo-responsiveness of the fight-flight response), and the lack of anxiety (low levels of stress) in primary psychopathy (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015b).

In their review they were able to make a theoretical subdivision of primary psychopathy and delineated *the controlled primary psychopathic type* and *the disinhibited primary psychopathic type*. The dissimilarities between these two subtypes appear to be caused by differences in genes and the hormonal system. These dissimilarities are possibly further exacerbated by divergences in SES (Social Economic Background) and education (Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a, 2015b).

Yildirim and Derksen (2015a, 2015b) hypothesize that the first type, *the controlled primary psychopathic type* combines the affective and interpersonal traits of the PCL-R (Factor 1) with low levels of fear and anxiety. Furthermore, they propose that this type is calm and stable, and due to a healthy maturation of the PFC and the hippocampus is also goal-orientated and focused in his behavior.

In this theory the controlled type scores high on levels of social competency, self-control, and broad executive functioning. The combination of these features may enable such a personality to be 'successful' in a number of professions where such traits are desirable, such as in business and politics (Babiak et al., 2010; Babiak & Hare, 2007; Board & Fritzon, 2005; Cleckley, 1941; Dutton, 2012; Gao & Raine, 2010; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Lykken, 1995; Widom, 1978). Moreover, because this type may have a desire to dominate other people, this type may prefer to be in positions of leadership and power (Fennimore & Sementelli, 2016; Glenn et al., 2017; Hodson et al., 2009; Kramer et al., 2011; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a).

The second type in this theoretical division, *the disinhibited primary psychopathic type*, is portrayed equally fearless and emotionally shallow as the controlled type (Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a, 2015b). However, these scholars propose that due to a disturbed maturation of the PFC and the hippocampus, this type may be less conscientious and goal-orientated. Furthermore, this subtype may also lack the need to dominate other people.

These scholars hypothesize that such personalities may combine their emotional hyper-stability with high levels of impulsivity, irresponsible behavior, and a proneness for impetuous risk taking. Moreover, although this disinhibited behavioral pattern may originate from the same inborn deficiency of the serotonin system as the controlled type, it may be combined with a higher inborn sensitivity to rewards (higher BAS), lower overall levels of executive functioning, and an attentional hyposensitivity for risks and errors (Gao & Raine, 2010; Ishikawa et al., 2001; Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a, 2015b). Their unfocused, impetuous lifestyle may make them unsuccessful members of society and can leave them dependent on friends and family for the majority of their lives (Cleckley, 1941; Lykken, 1995; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a, 2015b).

### 3.2.3. Secondary psychopathy: two types on a continuum

Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) postulate that although the behavioral manifestation of secondary psychopathy may appear superficially similar, on closer observation the differences with primary psychopathy may be apparent. Karpman's (1948) description of secondary psychopathy as symptomatic psychopathy is accurate because it precisely reveals the core of this psychopathic type. In accordance with Karpman, Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) hypothesize that the psychopathic behavioral traits that emerge in this type are symptoms, rather than personality traits. These symptoms manifest to unconsciously cope with intense feelings of inferiority caused by severe abuse and neglect in early childhood in combination with 'plasticity' genotypes such as emotional lability (Lykken, 1995; Yildirim, 2016).

Based on their review, Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) hypothesize that an serotonergic deficiency may underlie the affective and

motivational deficits in secondary psychopathy. Individuals in this group may not be emotionally shallow and fearless like the primary psychopathic group but may suffer from a neurophysiological profile that is dysfunctional in the top-down appraisal and regulation of emotions (Yildirim, 2016). They either subconsciously suppress their intense feelings of fear and anxiety most of the time, or live in a constant state of stress (depending on their position on the secondary psychopathy continuum). For this reason, individuals of this secondary subtype may have a hostile attitude toward others and may be more impulsive in their actions.

These scholars hypothesize that this group lacks the outward appearance of normality and charm which individuals in the primary psychopathic group so prominently display. The review of Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) distinguishes two subtypes on the secondary psychopathic continuum: *the detached secondary psychopathic type* and *the unstable secondary psychopathic type* (Yildirim, 2016).

In the theoretical division of Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) individuals in *the detached secondary group* have the most phenotypical resemblance to the primary psychopathic group (Yildirim, 2016). These scholars propose that the affective and interpersonal traits of this detached type generally manifest themselves in a behavioral pattern that appears to be a combination of emotional detachment and low anxiety (emotional hypoappraisal). However, in the detached type the outward appearance of boldness may in fact be a trait-like coping mechanism that develops in early childhood to allow the individual to cope with stressful situations through dissociation of emotion and cognition. This contrasts with the boldness in primary psychopathy which is not a coping mechanism according to these scholars, but an actual trait.

Furthermore, these scholars hypothesize that when the detached type is provoked in a way they perceive as threatening, individuals in this group can experience strong emotions of frustration and anxiety and may then react with impulsive aggression. However, although a detached secondary psychopathic person may unleash aggressive and impulsive behavior under extreme circumstances, they are not necessarily emotionally defective. These scholars hypothesize that this type has many similarities with the criteria of the ASPD (Antisocial Personality Disorder) and NPD (Narcissistic Personality Disorder) of the DSM IV/5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, 2013), although in a more severe form (Poythress, Skeem, & Lilienfeld, 2006; Yildirim, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a).

Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) postulate that individuals from *the unstable secondary psychopathic group* may suffer from dysphoria and neuroticism (emotional dysregulation). These scholars hypothesize that this type experiences high levels of stress and anxiety and is impulsive in their behavior. Furthermore, those high in this unstable secondary psychopathy type may have strong feelings of hostility and fear toward others and the outside world. Moreover, they may externalize their fear and anxiety-based aggression by lashing out at others in an extremely aggressive and neurotic manner. Their instability in affect and outward expression of this intrapsychic turmoil may take others by surprise, as it can be fueled by minor offensive remarks or perceived threats.

These scholars suggest that in comparison to the personality disorders in the DSM IV/5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, 2013) this type may show similarities not only to ASPD but also to BPD (Borderline Personality disorder) (Karpman, 1941; Yildirim, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2013, 2015a).

In the next two sections (Section 4: 'Successful' psychopathy and Section 5: Psychopathic leadership), we will explore which of the theoretical psychopathic subtypes proposed by Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) we believe best fits the profile of the psychopathic leadership type, as a manifestation of 'successful' psychopathy.

## 4. 'Successful' psychopathy

One of the psychopathic subtypes that has also received more attention from scholars in recent years is the so-called 'successful'

psychopath'. Researchers have studied leaders such as politicians, managers, CEO's, as well as lawyers and psychology professors as manifestations of 'successful' psychopathy (Babiak, 1995, 1996, 2007, 2016; Babiak et al., 2010; Babiak & Hare, 2007; Blickle et al., 2006; Boddy, 2011; Boddy et al., 2010; Boddy & Taplin, 2017; Bucy et al., 2008; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mathieu et al., 2014a; Mathieu et al., 2014b; Mathieu & Babiak, 2015; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Ray, 2007).

Although most of the research on psychopathy is associated with negative outcomes, the question that may arise is whether psychopathic individuals can be successful in organizations or in politics. The concept of 'successful' psychopathy raises two main issues. The first problem involves how to define 'success' in 'successful' psychopathy. The second difficulty entails the complexity of determining 'successful' psychopathy phenotypically. Furthermore, because it is challenging to study this psychopathic type outside of the prison setting there is a lack of research on psychopathic individuals who flourish in society (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Palmen et al., 2018; Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013).

#### 4.1. Defining success in 'successful psychopathy'

Steinert et al. (2017) discuss the difficulty of defining success, and conclude that so far the literature has not been able to decide on a common definition for 'success' in this context. Most conceptualizations define 'successful' psychopathic individuals as those high in psychopathy that are better at evading incarceration (Benning et al., 2018; Hall & Benning, 2006; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012). For this reason, Steinert et al. (2017) suggest that 'successful' behavior in this context can be defined best by considering 'the outcomes that increase positive consequences for an individual or reduce negative consequences for the individual' (p. 47). These outcomes can then be calculated into net gain (positive consequences relative to negative consequences). Moreover, this net gain can then be examined in terms of duration of the behavior and objective minimal performance, or in comparison to the performance of others. Through such a conceptualization of success in the context of psychopathy, one can define success in any specific situation by considering the meaning of success in that specific context. In this paper we utilize this definition of success when discussing the concept of psychopathic leadership. We also subscribe to the definition of successful psychopathy posited by Benning et al. (2018), which in our view can be combined with Steinert et al.'s definition: 'successful psychopathy represents an expression of core psychopathic traits in ways conducive to attaining prominence in some socioecological niche, while avoiding serious adverse consequences (e.g. ostracization, loss of freedom)' (p. 586).

In this paper we will also discuss whether the 'successfulness' of psychopathic leaders may be beneficial for an organization or for society as a whole, or that only the psychopathic leader profits. This issue will be outlined in Section 5.4. on psychopathic leadership and negative consequences.

##### 4.1.1. The adaptive traits in 'successful' psychopathy

Although the construct of psychopathy has primarily been linked to maladaptive traits, some psychopathic features have shown to be adaptive in certain circumstances. Psychopathic traits such as charm, charisma, and manipulation skills can be instrumental in the workplace, especially to promote oneself and for gaining leadership positions (Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012).

Although those high in psychopathy may achieve 'success' in the workplace and in leadership, in many cases it appears they are mostly successful in managing to give the right impression. Babiak et al. (2010) found that the psychopathic individuals in their study were not competent in their job but managed to project an image of high performance in communication, creativity, and strategic skills. It appears they were able to blind their colleagues with their impression techniques in such a way that these coworkers were not aware of their incompetence.

In politics or in other leadership positions, those with personality traits of low fear, high dominance, and charisma impress their followers or subordinates by presenting an image of a strong and fearless leader. Furthermore, such a leader may be very competent in persuading opponents to cooperate and adjust and may even be able to out-compete them if necessary (da Silva, Rijo, & Salekin, 2015; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012).

##### 4.1.2. Defining 'successful' psychopathy phenotypically

Although the various theoretical conceptualizations of psychopathy define different core traits of psychopathy, most scholars agree that there are two different sets of traits (two factors) (Steinert et al., 2017). These scholars also postulate that the underlying traits may vary in different contexts. The distinction that is most frequently made is the division between the affective-interpersonal traits (Factor 1), and the impulsive-antisocial set of traits (Factor 2) (see Table 1). Researchers agree on most of the different features that are part of the first group. However, several of the traits in the second group are subject of debate (Steinert et al., 2017). Different scholars have questioned the necessity of the traits *overt criminal behavior* and *impulsivity* as core features of psychopathy (Cooke & Michie, 2001; Karpman, 1948; Poythress & Hall, 2011; Skeem & Cooke, 2010).

When defining 'successful' psychopathy (e.g. psychopathic leadership), there are two main theories (Poythress & Hall, 2011). Gao & Raine postulate that 'successful' psychopathic individuals are phenotypically indistinct from those high in psychopathy in prison but they are better at avoiding detection of their antisocial behavior (2010). The second theory suggests that those high in 'successful' psychopathy exhibit the affective-interpersonal traits (Factor 1) of psychopathy but lack the traits of the Self-Centered Impulsivity domain or Factor 2 (Lilienfeld, 1998; Lykken, 1995). Furthermore, some scholars suggest that this 'successful' group may have some additional, adaptive features that the unsuccessful group lacks. The 'successful' psychopathic type may score higher on skills of information processing, higher-order cognitive skills, cognitive empathy, and autonomic reactivity levels (Gao & Raine, 2010; Ishikawa et al., 2001). The discussion of whether the trait fearlessness is part of the psychopathy construct is still ongoing (Poythress & Hall, 2011). In the Fearless Dominance component of the well-validated self-assessment psychopathy questionnaire PPI-R (Psychopathic Personality Inventory—Revised) by Lilienfeld & Widows, (2005), the traits *fearlessness* and *low anxiety* are part of the psychopathy construct. However, the theoretical conceptualization underlying the PCL-R does not explicitly include these traits (Hare, 2003).

#### 4.2. Research on 'successful' psychopathy

Research on subclinical psychopathy is more challenging than studying psychopathy in prison settings. Prisoners are more inclined to participate in studies because of boredom, or to gain more privileges in the prison environment. Furthermore, research on psychopathy outside prison walls is more difficult because of the lower prevalence rates (20–30% psychopathic individuals in prison samples compared to approximately 1% in the general population) and problems with assessment (e.g. lack of collateral information that is imperative when conducting the PCL-R) (Babiak & Hare, 2007; Hare, 2003). To collect data on psychopathic individuals that have been 'successful' in society is even more complicated.

At present there have been several studies that have researched 'successful' psychopathic individuals outside prison walls (Babiak, 1995, 1996, 2007, 2016; Babiak et al., 2010; Blickle et al., 2018; Board & Fritzson, 2005; Boddy, 2011; Boddy et al., 2010; Boddy & Taplin, 2017; Chiaburu et al., 2013; Gao & Raine, 2010; Ishikawa et al., 2001; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mathieu et al., 2014a; Mathieu et al., 2014b; Mathieu & Babiak, 2015; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Ten Brinke, Kish, & Keltner, 2018; Ulrich, Farrington, & Coid, 2008; Widom, 1978). The studies on 'successful' psychopathy that are relevant for the

subject of psychopathic leadership will be outlined in the next section on psychopathic leadership.

## 5. Psychopathic leaders

Since [Cleckley \(1941\)](#) scholars have speculated about the existence of people with a psychopathic profile who exhibit outwardly normal lives, and who may more or less have adapted to the community. Among them may be individuals who have gained societal success. However, in the intervening years the attention for the societal adaptiveness of the psychopathic profile has been pushed to the background because of the intense study of those high in psychopathy who are institutionalized. These data have enlightened the specific traits of the psychopathic profile in such a way that we are now able to broaden our horizons and search for data on the subject in other places in society ([Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013](#)). Hervey Cleckley was the first scholar to describe several case studies of ‘successful’ psychopathic individuals in high functioning positions such as a businessman, a psychiatrist and a physician (1941). Since then researchers have speculated about those high in psychopathy that live among us, and in some cases practice high end jobs, such as leadership positions in business or politics ([Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013](#)).

### 5.1. Adaptive psychopathic traits and leadership

The research of ‘successful’ psychopathy has had one specific focal point of attention in the last few years: that of the ‘successful’ psychopathic leader. The subject of psychopathic leadership has gained more interest in recent years, especially since [Hare \(2002\)](#) stated that those high in psychopathy may flourish in the world of business, particularly in the boardroom. Babiak confirmed Hare's statement by postulating that psychopathic traits can be easily mistaken for talented leadership competencies ([Babiak, 1995, 1996; Babiak et al., 2010](#)).

These hypotheses on the ‘successfulness’ of psychopathic individuals in leadership positions are indeed feasible. The superficial charm and impression management skills that psychopathic individuals exhibit in interpersonal communication are also infamous in the criminal justice system. Although research shows higher rates of recidivism among psychopathic prisoners compared to non-psychopathic offenders, the first group successfully manages to persuade the parole board to grant their application for conditional release, two and a half times more often than their non-psychopathic counterparts ([Porter, ten Brinke, & Wilson, 2009](#)). Such positive self-representation competencies are also beneficial in obtaining leadership positions in for-profit or nonprofit environments ([Babiak & Hare, 2007; Dutton, 2012](#)). We hypothesize that especially the controlled primary psychopathic group, which may combine higher levels of the Factor 1 traits and fearlessness with high levels of self-control, may successfully climb the career ladder. In the aforementioned environments they may employ their social skills and goal-oriented behavior to impress important decision makers in the organization ([Hall & Benning, 2006; Lykken, 1995; Palmen et al., 2018; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a](#)). Furthermore, individuals high in psychopathy are often very self-confident, not easily affected by criticism, and are not quickly emotionally overwhelmed when having to make harsh business decisions (e.g. executing plans for the reduction of staff). These are all desirable assets in leadership positions ([Babiak & Hare, 2007; Dutton, 2012](#)).

[Babiak \(1995, 1996\)](#) posits that it is conceivable that every one of the psychopathic traits may be misinterpreted as features of talented leadership, especially when those high in psychopathy first enter an organization. The specific misinterpretations individuals in the hiring process may make when interviewing a candidate high in psychopathic traits are outlined in [Table 2 \(Babiak, 1996\)](#).

**Table 2**

Psychopathic traits versus talented leadership derived from [Babiak \(1996\)](#).

Psychopathic traits	Labeling of these traits in organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charm and charisma</li> <li>• Has grandiose ideas</li> <li>• Deceptive and manipulative</li> <li>• No conscience or feelings of guilt</li> <li>• Impulsive, fearless</li> <li>• Low affect</li> <li>• Narcissistic</li> <li>• Easily bored, thrill-seeking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Vision</li> <li>• Motivated, influential, persuasive</li> <li>• Able to make fierce business decisions, action oriented</li> <li>• Energetic, courageous</li> <li>• Able to control emotions, a strong person</li> <li>• Self-confident</li> <li>• A good multi-tasker</li> </ul>

### 5.2. Research on psychopathic leadership

Studies on psychopathic individuals in leadership positions are limited, especially in contrast with the large body of research of psychopathy in prison samples ([Smith & Lilienfeld, 2013](#)). There are a few studies confined to psychopathic leadership that show some interesting data on the subject ([Babiak et al., 2010; Blickle et al., 2006; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mathieu et al., 2014a; Mathieu et al., 2014b; Mathieu & Babiak, 2015, 2016; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Sanecka, 2013; Ten Brinke et al., 2018; Westerlaken & Woods, 2013](#)).

The largest study on psychopathy and leadership is a longitudinal study by [Babiak et al. \(2010\)](#) in which a sample of 203 subjects that entered a management training program in their organization were assessed through the use of the PCL-R. Half of this group had at that time been selected as future executives and managers of their organization. All of the data that were gathered about the subjects before, during, and after this management program provided these scholars with sufficient collateral data to conduct a PCL-R assessment per individual. The goal of the management program was to provide the organizations with leaders that scored high on two profiles: the good communicator with charisma and the responsible performer with management skills. In the group of 203 individuals, 3.9% scored at or above the cut-of score for psychopathy on the PCL-R. These individuals high in psychopathy also scored high on one of the organization-desired profiles: the profile of the good communicator with charisma. However, this group's scores on the second desired profile, the good performer with management skills, were lower. Despite these low performance rates, these individuals high in psychopathy were all labeled as (future) successful leaders in their companies. It appears that the social poise of charisma and charm masked the actual performance of these psychopathic management trainees with high potential.

Another large study on psychopathic leadership, in this case, political leadership, was conducted by [Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al. \(2012\)](#) based on the PPI-R. The focus of this study was to assess psychopathic traits in the 42 American Presidents (not including President Obama and President Trump). These scholars then studied how these traits correlated with presidential performance. A group of 121 experts (including journalists, biographers, and scholars), all established authorities on each of these presidents, filled out different well-validated personality tests (aimed at personality features and also specifically on psychopathy) about these 42 presidents. Utilizing these data the scholars were able to estimate the scores for the PPI-R for each of these presidents. These scholars found that the first factor of the PPI-R, Fearless Dominance (FD) correlated positively with objectives for positive job performance. However, there was also a positive correlation with objectives for negative job performance on the higher-order scale of Self-Centered Impulsivity (SCI).

In a further study, [Mathieu et al. \(2014b\)](#) researched the correlations between psychopathic traits in managers and employees' feelings of distress, job satisfaction, and work-family conflict. In this study, 115 managers working in two different organizations (a financial



organization and a public service organization) were assessed through the use of the B-Scan 360 tool (Babiak & Hare, 2014). This instrument, which measures psychopathy in business settings, is filled out by people in the psychopathic individual's environment (hence the term 360). This assessment instrument consists of four factors which mirror the four PCL-R factors. In consecutive order, the four factors of the B-Scan 360 are: Manipulative/ Unethical, Callous/ Insensitive, Unreliable/ Unfocused, and Intimidating/ Aggressive. This assessment tool was filled out by 377 employees to assess the perceived psychopathic traits of their managers. The employees also filled out questionnaires on psychological distress, job satisfaction, and work-family conflict. Data showed that the perceived supervisors' psychopathic traits were positively correlated with work-family conflict and job dissatisfaction, but not with psychological distress (Mathieu et al., 2014b).

In another study by Mathieu et al. (2014a) data were collected from two large groups of employees (491 civil servants and 116 employees working in finance). These employees filled out The B-Scan and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ; Avolio & Bass, 2004) about their direct supervisor. In this study the correlations between the scores on the B-Scan 360 and different types of leadership as represented by the Full-Range Leadership Model were assessed. All four factors of the B-Scan correlated positively with the leadership style of Laissez-Faire Leadership, the leadership style that is related to dissatisfaction with one's job and discontent with one's direct manager. Moreover, the B-Scan was also negatively correlated with the two forms of positive leadership within the aforementioned model: Transactional and Transformational Leadership. An earlier study by Westerlaken and Woods (2013) showed the same correlations between psychopathic traits and the different models within the Full-Range Leadership Model. In this study 115 students with self-reported management experience were assessed on psychopathic traits through the SRP-R (a self-assessment version based on the PCL-R) (SRP III-R12; Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007).

In a study by Mathieu and Babiak (2015) that focused on employees attitudes, 423 subordinates evaluated their supervisors (total of 74 supervisors) on psychopathic traits, utilizing the B-Scan 360. These scores correlated positively with higher levels of job dissatisfaction, higher turn-over intentions, higher job-neglect, and lower work motivation. Additionally, in this study, the B-Scan 360 predicted employees attitudes better than the different styles of leadership in the Full-Range leadership model.

A more complex correlation was found in Mathieu and Babiak's (2016) study in which the relationship between psychopathic leadership traits and abusive supervision was directly measured and showed a high correlation. In this study 97 employees filled out the B-Scan 360 for their direct manager (a total of 22 managers). The data from this study showed that the abusive supervision influenced job satisfaction negatively. However, higher turn-over intentions were influenced directly by the psychopathic traits of the supervisor.

Another study by Sanecka (2013) used a sample of 153 employees to assess their perception of their supervisor's psychopathic traits through the use of Patrick's Triarchic Psychopathy Measure (TriPM; Patrick, 2010) and their levels of satisfaction with their job, their supervisor, and their commitment to the organization they work for. The TriPM measures psychopathy through three concepts which differ in their phenotypes: boldness, meanness, and inhibition. In the underlying model, boldness reflects high social potency and low levels of fear and anxiety. The meanness dimension incorporates antisocial and aggressive behavior, lack of empathy, and callousness. The dimension of disinhibition includes low levels of self-control, impulsivity, and lack of planning skills (Patrick & Drislane, 2015). Results showed that employees' perception of their supervisor as psychopathic negatively influenced job satisfaction, the employees' satisfaction with this supervisor, and commitment to their organization.

### 5.3. Studies on high-functioning psychopathic individuals

Research by Mullins-Sweatt et al. (2010) on different manifestations of 'successful' psychopathy did not specifically focus on psychopathic leadership but studied individuals with psychopathic traits in high functioning positions (e.g. a police detective, a psychology professor, a dean from a university, a mayor). In this sample some of those high in psychopathy worked in leadership positions. These scholars surveyed forensic psychologists, as well as clinical psychology professors and attorneys, about psychopathic people they knew or had known. They were given a short definition of psychopathy based on Hare's quotation from 1993: "social predators who charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly plow their way through life. Completely lacking in conscience and feeling for others, they selfishly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret" (Hare, 2003, p. xi). After being provided this definition the group was asked if they personally knew or had known people who fit this description and if so, whether they regarded them as (mostly) successful in their psychopathic ventures. The participants also filled out the Five Factor Form (FFF; Mullins-Sweatt, Jamerson, Samuel, Olson, & Widiger, 2006) about those they regarded as 'successful' psychopathic individuals. This study showed that these 'successful' psychopathic individuals in high-level positions scored not only high in psychopathic traits, but also exhibited elevated scores on conscientiousness, operationalized through the Five Factor Form (FFF). The Five Factor Form is based on the Five Factor Model (FFM) that measures conscientiousness through the following facets: Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement-striving, Self-discipline, and Deliberation. This high score on conscientiousness in this 'successful' psychopathic group, is in contrast with the traditional psychopathic profile of the 'unsuccessful' psychopathic group (institutionalized psychopathic individuals) who score low on conscientiousness and high on impulsivity (Lynam & Widiger, 2007; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010).

In conclusion, most of the studies outlined above found that those high in psychopathy find their ways to leadership positions and in most cases their leadership had a negative influence on the organization and its staff. This is outlined further in the subsequent paragraph on psychopathic leadership and negative consequences (5.4).

### 5.4. Psychopathic leadership and negative consequences

#### 5.4.1. Are psychopathic leaders competent in their leadership?

Several of the studies outlined above give rise to speculation about whether the outward successfulness of the psychopathic leader is based on actual good performance rates or whether it is merely a reflection of their excellent self-presentation skills. Many scholars also speculate that this 'successfulness' is foremost beneficial for the psychopathic leader (Babiak et al., 2010; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010).

Babiak and colleagues found that although the individuals seen as having high management potential were regarded as 'good communicators with charisma', they scored low on the profile of 'the responsible performer with management skills' (2010). The low job performance rates of psychopathic leaders were confirmed by the study of Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al. (2012). Their research showed that those presidents with high levels on the Self-Centered Impulsivity scale of the PPI-R or those with high levels on the SCI scale and the Fearless Dominance scale also scored high on objectives for negative job performance (2012).

A study on the Dark Triad, (psychopathy, Machiavellism and narcissism), also found low performance rates of managers high in psychopathy; the researched hedge fund managers with higher psychopathic tendencies earned lower absolute returns than their colleagues with low psychopathic traits (Ten Brinke et al., 2018).

A further study by Blickle et al., 2018 found that managers' psychopathic profile had a negative effect on job performance, especially



for those psychopathic managers who scored high on the meanness dimension of the Triarchic model. In this study the managerial sample was also compared to a prison sample on the boldness, meanness, and disinhibition dimensions of the TriPM and on the overall psychopathy scores. It was found that the overall psychopathy score was higher in the group of managers in comparison to the group of prisoners. The mean scores on boldness and meanness were higher in the managerial group and only disinhibition was higher in the prisoners sample (Blickle et al., 2018).

#### 5.4.2. Psychopathic leadership and negative consequences for employees

Some of the studies outlined above have also found that the presence of a psychopathic leader in the workplace has several negative consequences for the employees with whom they work. These employees demonstrated less commitment to their organization and they were dissatisfied with their supervisor and with their job. Furthermore, these employees also had higher turn-over intentions, lower work motivation, higher job-neglect, and they experienced more work-family related conflict (Mathieu et al., 2014a; Mathieu et al., 2014b; Mathieu & Babiak, 2015, 2016; Sanecka, 2013).

Moreover, two studies found high correlations between leaders with psychopathic traits and their leadership style: leaders high in psychopathic traits more often employed the Laissez-Faire Leadership style. This style is related to employees' dissatisfaction with their direct manager and also unhappiness with their job (Mathieu & Babiak, 2015; Westerlaken & Woods, 2013).

#### 5.4.3. Psychopathic leadership and white-collar crime

Whether the conduct of these psychopathic leaders outlined above exceeded legal boundaries is unclear. There are some studies that indicate that psychopathic leaders may be involved in criminal activities, especially white collar crime (Bucy et al., 2008; Lingnau, Fuchs, & Dehne-Niemann, 2017). These scholars found that leaders high in psychopathic and narcissistic traits are at risk for conducting acts of fraud, embezzlement or other forms of white-collar crime.

Those studies that focused on the personalities of these white-collar criminals found that these leaders were obsessed with being in control, showed extreme ambition, demanded admiration by others, and exhibited entitled behavior. These behavioral traits are also part of the psychopathic profile (Benson & Simpson, 2015; Bucy et al., 2008; Kolthoff, 2016; Lingnau et al., 2017).

According to Ray (2007) the white-collar criminal can be portrayed as someone who employs manipulative, exploitative, and deceptive behavior to reach his egocentric goals. The psychopathic individual achieves his goals in the same manner (Babiak & Hare, 2007).

#### 5.4.4. White-collar crime, conscientiousness and self-control

Research on white collar crimes committed by leaders that scored high on the psychopathic profile, may also give clues about whether these individuals may have different traits than the average psychopathic criminal. A study by Blickle et al., (2006) found that the psychopathic white-collar criminal scored high on the trait conscientiousness. Ray's (2007) study in which white-collar and blue-collar criminals were studied on dissimilarities in features also found that the white-collar criminal was more self-reflective and had higher levels of self-control in comparison to the blue-collar criminal.

The high scores on traits related to overall executive functioning, especially conscientiousness and self-control, may enable the white-collar criminal high in psychopathic traits to plan their crimes more effectively.

## 6. The profile of the psychopathic leader: a proposed model

Although research on psychopathic leadership is still scarce, scholars hypothesize that the features in the profile of the psychopathic leader may diverge in important ways from the features in the

traditional profile of the institutionalized psychopathic individual (Bucy et al., 2008; Gao & Raine, 2010; Gustafson & Ritzer, 1995; Hall & Benning, 2006; Ishikawa et al., 2001; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Perri, 2011; Poythress et al., 2010; Ray, 2007; Skeem et al., 2003; Widom, 1978). To accurately obtain new data on the subject of psychopathic leadership, it is essential to define psychopathic leadership as precisely as possible, based on the current body of knowledge on the subject.

In this section the theoretical model of the psychopathic leader (the PL model) is presented. The set of traits in this model is built through two pathways. The first route is to establish which of the different theoretical primary and secondary psychopathy types (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a) (Section 3), resembles the portrayals of the psychopathic leadership type the best, as the research and literature in Section 4 ('Successful' psychopathy), and Section 5 (Psychopathic leaders) outline. The second route is to compare these first findings with the data from research on white collar criminals with a psychopathic profile and the dissimilarities between white-collar and blue collar criminals (5.4. psychopathic leadership and negative consequences).

To clarify the PL model the core set of traits are proposed first, after which the additional traits are outlined. We hypothesize that these additional traits are specific for the psychopathic leader and are different from the traits in the traditional criminal psychopathic profile. In Section 7, the concept of high self-control in psychopathic leadership is outlined (the first trait). Then it is illuminated how this trait may correlate with one specific form of impulsivity (the second trait). The conjunction of these two traits is the focus of this paper. The need for domination trait will only be addressed briefly in this paper because it will be examined in a future paper by the same authors.

### 6.1. The controlled primary psychopathic type

On grounds of the research into psychopathic leadership and psychopathy in other high profile positions, we hypothesize that the psychopathic leader is charismatic, self-confident, and conscientious. We propose that such a leader is not hindered by emotions of fear or stress or by feelings of empathy, remorse or shame. In our proposed model such an individual is bold and relentless, but also in control of his or her decision-making. By means of excellent self-presentation skills, such a leader creates an image of an exceptional performer (Babiak et al., 2010; Babiak & Hare, 2007; Dutton, 2012) although actual achievements are poor (Babiak et al., 2010; Blickle et al., 2006; Lilienfeld, Waldman, et al., 2012; Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2010; Ten Brinke et al., 2018).

Regarding the theory on the four psychopathic types presented in Section 3 on psychopathic subtypes, we hypothesize that the psychopathic leader most closely resembles the theoretical subtype of the controlled primary psychopathic type (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). We propose that individuals of this type may skillfully utilize the interpersonal and affective traits of Factor 1 to charm and shamelessly manipulate themselves into a position of power. This is in line with Harpur, Hakstian, and Hare (1988) who consider the interpersonal and affective Factor 1 traits to be the personality features that are central to the psychopathy syndrome. We speculate that this controlled primary psychopathic type combines the Factor 1 traits with low fear (low levels of fight-flight response), which explains his fearless and stress-resistant character that may be considered an asset in a demanding leadership position (Palmen et al., 2018; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a).

In addition to the core psychopathic traits of Factor 1 and trait fearlessness, the profile of the psychopathic leader contains three additional traits. Defining psychopathic leadership in such a manner is in line with Steinert et al. (2017). These scholars have suggested a flexible format to phenotypically define the different manifestations of 'successful' psychopathy by defining a group of core psychopathy traits, and a group of moderators.

The idea that certain personality traits (moderators) may

compensate the negative outcomes of the core psychopathic traits is based on Hall and Benning's moderated expression model of successful psychopathy (2006). Some evidence for this model is found in studies that researched age as a moderator of the non-adaptive outcomes of psychopathy. However, there was no evidence found for parenting, S.E.S, or for intelligence as potential moderators of the negative outcomes of the core psychopathic traits (Benning et al., 2018). Nevertheless, these scholars posit that executive functioning may be a good candidate for a moderator in models of 'successful' psychopathy.

When comparing the theory and research on psychopathic leadership and 'successful' psychopathy with the traits of the controlled primary type (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a), we hypothesize that the moderator self-control in the psychopathic leadership profile may best support the 'successfulness' of the psychopathic leader in comparison with the traditional psychopathic profile. This additional trait may account for this type's competence in not only acquiring but also remaining in such a position of power for prolonged periods of time. Self-control in this model is defined in line with Mao et al. (2018), as a skill central to the self which adapts behavior in line with desired outcomes by overruling upcoming thoughts and emotions as well as controlling behavioral tendencies when necessary.

Research that compared psychopathic leaders who committed white-collar crimes with blue collar criminals may confirm the high scores on self-control. These studies found that perpetrators of white-collar crime with a psychopathic profile were conscientious in their endeavors (Blickle et al., 2006). Moreover, those studies that analyzed the dissimilarities between personality traits between white-collar and blue-collar criminals, found that the first group scored higher on self-control and was more self-reflective than the second group (Ray, 2007).

Additionally, Hare (1993) postulated that the business world may be a perfect feeding ground for those psychopathic individuals to commit crimes (white-collar crime). He posits that the legal punishments are mild in such cases and the chances of being arrested are rather small. Both of these factors make white-collar crime attractive for the psychopathic leader. Furthermore, we hypothesize that the psychopathic leader knows how to charm and manipulate those around them. The combination of these skills with the other features of psychopathy makes these individuals more capable than the average person of covering up their crimes for prolonged periods of time (Babiak & Hare, 2007).

We propose that the first additional trait, the trait of *high self-control*, may enable this psychopathic leadership type to stay focused and organized in their planning and flexibility, to achieve their goals, and to remain in the desired position as long as planned.

Furthermore, we hypothesize that the second moderator, *sensation-seeking*, may work as a motivator to seek out positions of power. The study by Mullins-Sweatt et al. (2010) showed that the successful psychopathic individuals in high-end jobs (including leaders) were rated high in excitement seeking. In such exhilarating environments psychopathic individuals find the excitement for which they have a special appetite.

Additionally, we propose that the third moderator, *need for domination*, may be another motivator for achieving positions of power. Research by Glenn and colleagues showed that in a large online sample ( $N = 3521$ ), those higher in subclinical psychopathy were motivated by seeking power and may prefer to be in control over others (2017). We hypothesize that for this psychopathic individual, the need for domination (Glenn et al., 2017; Hodson et al., 2009; Kramer et al., 2011) strongly underlies the attractiveness of positions of power (Fennimore & Sementelli, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). This controlled primary psychopathic type may be motivated to maneuver themselves into a leadership position because of their need to dominate others.

The most important differences between the traditional psychopathic profile and the proposed profile of the psychopathic leader is summarized in in Table 3.

In the next section, we will illuminate the second moderator,

**Table 3**

Differences in trait levels between the traditional psychopathy profile and the proposed profile of the psychopathic leader.

Traits	Traditional psychopathy profile (PCL-R $\geq 30$ )	Psychopathic leadership proposed profile
F1 (PCL-R)	Medium to high	High
F2 (PCL-R)	Medium to high	Low
Fearlessness	Low to high	High
Self-control (high PFC)	Low	High
Need for domination	Low to high	High
Impulsivity	Medium to high	Low to medium

sensation-seeking, as one domain of impulsivity. We hypothesize that in our proposed model sensation-seeking interacts with the trait self-control.

## 7. Self-control versus impulsivity in psychopathic leadership

In this section we will focus on the trait high self-control as outlined in the proposed model of the psychopathic leader in the previous section. We will hypothesize how this trait may interact with one specific domain of impulsivity, sensation-seeking. Furthermore, we will elucidate how, in our view, this conjunction of traits may support 'success' in psychopathic leadership. In the PL model, self-control is described as one of the three additional traits combined with the core traits of Factor 1 and core trait fearlessness. In this profile the high score on the trait self-control may most strongly support the 'successfulness' of the psychopathic leader in comparison with the average psychopathic individual in prison.

The high score on self-control in this profile is in contrast with the traditional conceptualizations of psychopathy, in which those high in psychopathy in prison are described as low in self-control and high in the trait impulsivity (DeLisi, Tostlebe, Burgason, Heirigs, & Vaughn, 2018; Hare, 2003). Indeed, lack of self-control is traditionally related to criminal behavior. In Gottfredson and Hirshi's *general theory of crime* lack of self-control is considered to be the cause of crime, anti-social behavior, and other social problems such as unemployment and divorce (DeLisi & Vaughn, 2008). The non-adaptiveness of psychopathy is also considered to be related to lack of self-control and to high levels of impulsivity (DeLisi et al., 2018). There are studies in which incarcerated samples show high levels of executive functioning (e.g. Baskin-Sommers et al., 2015; Hicks et al., 2004), or use of instrumental aggression among juvenile offenders (which may indicate higher levels of self-control) (e.g. Vitacco, Neumann, Caldwell, Leistico, & Van Rybroek, 2006). Nevertheless, we hypothesize that levels of self-control on average are higher in psychopathic individuals in leadership positions than in psychopathic offenders in prison because attaining and maintaining a position of leadership requires a higher level of self-control for a prolonged period of time. Furthermore, we hypothesize that those psychopathic individuals with higher levels of self-control in prison populations are part of the primary controlled psychopathic subtype group (Hicks et al., 2004; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a, 2015b).

Although the trait impulsivity appears to be incongruous with high self-control, this assumption requires examination and refinement, as this apparent incompatibility may depend on the specific operationalization of the impulsivity concept (Poythress & Hall, 2011). In this section the four broad domains of impulsivity that are employed in research are outlined (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). Also discussed is which domain of impulsivity correlates positively with trait high self-control in the PL model. Furthermore, we will hypothesize how this specific conjunction of traits supports 'successfulness' in psychopathic leadership.

### 7.1. Impulsivity as a key feature in the traditional conceptualization of psychopathy

In most conceptualizations of psychopathy impulsivity is defined as a key feature of the psychopathy syndrome. Indeed, Hare (2003) considers impulsivity as ... one of the hallmarks of psychopathy” (p.139). However, since scholars have speculated about the existence of “successful’ psychopathy’, it has been questioned whether impulsivity is also central to each psychopathy subtype (Poythress & Hall, 2011). These doubts date back to Karpman (1941), who clinically observed that the levels of impulsivity vary among the psychopathic subtypes of primary and secondary psychopathy. He postulated that although impulsivity may be a core feature of secondary psychopathy, it may not necessarily be a key feature of primary psychopathy.

This is in line with the study of Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) in which two theoretical types of primary psychopathy and two theoretical types of secondary psychopathy are differentiated. These scholars hypothesize that in three of the four theoretical types (disinhibited primary psychopathy, detached secondary psychopathy and unstable secondary psychopathy), impulsivity is a core feature. However, one of the four types, the controlled primary psychopathic subtype is in this theory defined as having lower levels of impulsivity and high levels of self-control, a trait that is considered to be the antagonist of impulsivity (Poythress & Hall, 2011). Furthermore, Depue and Collins (1999) also suggest that there may be different operationalizations of the impulsivity concept which are reflected through the variety of measures to access this construct. It is possible that some forms of impulsivity may be more maladaptive and some variants may be more adaptive for obtaining success in life. Moreover, it is possible that some conceptualizations of impulsivity are part of the profile of one psychopathy subtype, but not of another.

### 7.2. Different types of impulsivity

#### 7.2.1. Various operationalizations in the impulsivity research

A first step to re-examine whether impulsivity is a core trait of psychopathy is to define the different operationalizations of impulsivity that are employed in studies that focused on the impulsivity concept (Poythress & Hall, 2011). Whiteside and Lynam (2001) found four broad domains underlying the impulsivity construct by factor analyzing scores of 437 students on a large number of impulsivity scales used regularly in research. The four domains they delineate in their UPPS-P model of impulsivity are: Urgency, lack of Premeditation, lack of Perseverance, and Sensation Seeking. These facets will first be defined, followed by an outline of which impulsivity domain correlates more strongly with primary psychopathy and which with secondary psychopathy, as reviewed in a study by Poythress and Hall (2011). Poythress and Hall (2011) combined the insights of empirical studies that used cluster analysis on primary and secondary subtypes and empirical studies on dimensions of psychopathy with different forms of impulsivity (including the four broad domains from the UPPS-P model as described above). Based on this outline we hypothesize that one specific operationalization of impulsivity converges with one of the four psychopathy subtypes as proposed by Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) (Section 3). In addition, we hypothesize which of these impulsivity types may most closely correlate with psychopathic leadership and how this type of impulsivity may support ‘successfulness’. Finally, we will elucidate how, in our view, this type of impulsivity may have strong correlations with the trait self-control in the PL model.

#### 7.2.2. A four-domain framework of impulsivity

Whiteside and Lynam (2001) describe the first impulsivity domain, Urgency, as a persistent need to react as a way to deal with the negative emotions one feels. Lack of Premeditation, the second domain, is defined as a proclivity to react immediately, without thinking through how to act (little planning) and what the consequences of these sudden

actions may entail. The third domain, lack of Perseverance, relates to low self-discipline and deficits in holding attention long enough to complete tasks. Finally, Sensation Seeking is described as a propensity to take pleasure in and pursue new and exhilarating activities and events. In the analyses of the different impulsivity scales Whiteside and Lynam (2001) found that among the scales that loaded on the impulsivity form of Sensation Seeking, was Dickman's (1990) functional impulsivity (FI) scale. Functional impulsivity “requires that one be aware of and consider alternative courses of action and likely outcomes” (Smillie & Jackson, 2006, p. 75). Furthermore, the study by Whiteside and Lynam (2001) also showed that Sensation Seeking additionally loads on Eysenck's Venturesomeness scale which measures behavior of an individual in which this person undertakes certain actions even though this individual is conscious of the risks (Poythress & Hall, 2011).

### 7.3. The four impulsivity domains and primary and secondary psychopathy

#### 7.3.1. The dual process theory of psychopathy and impulsivity

Hall and Benning (2006) postulate that in manifestations of ‘successful’ psychopathy, the differences between the etiology of Factor 1 and Factor 2 behavior of psychopathy are apparent. This postulation is based on the dual process theory of psychopathy by Fowles and Dindo (2006). This theory regards the etiology behind the affective and interpersonal traits (F1) as underpinned by fearlessness and the antisocial traits (F2) as underpinned by deficient inhibitory control (Fowles & Dindo, 2006; Patrick & Bernat, 2009). This suggests that those high in secondary psychopathy may score high on all four domains of impulsivity as outlined by Whiteside and Lynam (2001) (Karpman, 1941: Yildirim, 2016; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). Furthermore, in the theory of Fowles and Dindo (2006) impulsivity may be a separate trait from the affective and interpersonal dimension (Factor 1) of psychopathy. These scholars also suggest that Factor 1 psychopathy, or primary psychopathy, may be associated more with one specific type of impulsivity that they describe as: “one of willingness to take risks even after considering the consequences” (2006, p. 26). This may indicate that there is a type of ‘semi’ impulsive risk taking that correlates with a form of forethought based on self-control (Poythress & Hall, 2011). This is in line with the fourth impulsivity domain by Whiteside and Lynam (2001), Sensation Seeking. In their study, data showed that the domain of Sensation Seeking loads on Dickman's Functional Impulsivity scale (FI) and Eysenck's Venturesomeness scale (Eysenck, Pearson, Easting, & Allsopp, 1985; Poythress & Hall, 2001). These scales measure those forms of impulsivity in which one is aware of the consequences of the actions that will be undertaken and in which the pros and cons of these possible consequences have been considered before acting (Dickman, 1990; Poythress & Hall, 2011).

#### 7.3.2. Research on the four impulsivity domains and primary and secondary psychopathy

The fourth domain of impulsivity found by Whiteside and Lynam (2001), Sensation Seeking, may represent the urge for seeking sensation but without recklessness in following through on this desire, instead considering the possible positive and negative outcomes of these actions (Poythress & Hall, 2011). This is congruent with data that were found through cluster analyses of PCL-R scores in prison samples, in which subgroups emerged that resemble Karpman's description of primary and secondary psychopathic groups (Hicks et al., 2004). The secondary group in this study can be characterized as aggressive, not reflective or planful or cautious in their personality, but high in impulsivity. In contrast, within the primary psychopathic sample of this study, subjects were not impulsive but instead showed greater planning skills and scored higher on levels of inhibitory control. These data suggest that this primary group may be more calculating and cautious. They may carefully plan and premeditate their actions and in some cases may even be strategic planners (Hicks et al., 2004).



We hypothesize that although both the primary and secondary psychopathic types seek thrills and sensations, the controlled primary type fulfills this need in a more calculated and premeditated manner than the two secondary psychopathic types or the disinhibited primary type would employ to achieve the same ends (Mullins-Sweatt et al. 2010; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). Research that utilized the PPI-R and the PCL-R to assess psychopathy supports this idea (Gray, Weidacker & Snowden, 2019; Poythress & Hall, 2011). Poythress and Hall (2011) used the UPPS-P model to analyze associations between the two factors of the PPI-R and the PCL-R and the domains of the UPPS-P model. They found that the Self-Centered Impulsivity domain of the PPI-R (SCI) (represented through the subscales: blame externalization, carefree non-planfulness, Machiavellian egocentricity, impulsive non-conformity, and related psychopathic traits) correlates positively with all four domains of the UPPS-P model of impulsivity (Urgency, lack of Premeditation, lack of Perseverance, Sensation Seeking), with the exception of one specific subpart of Sensation Seeking, functional impulsivity. The PCL-R data employed in the review study of Poythress and Hall (2011) shows strong associations between Factor 2 and the first three impulsivity domains, but not with Sensation Seeking. Factor 1 of the PCL-R shows no associations with any of the four impulsivity domains. In contrast, the Fearless Dominance domain (FD) (represented through the subscales social potency, fearlessness, and stress immunity) correlates only with Sensation Seeking, and possibly correlates with functional impulsivity (Poythress & Hall, 2011).

A similar association was found in a study by Weidacker, O'Farrell, Gray, Johnston and Snowden (2017) on the TriPM and the UPPS-P model. These scholars found that boldness related to high Sensation Seeking. The facet of meanness related to all four UPPS-P impulsivity dimensions, and disinhibition was associated with lack of Premeditation and Urgency.

More recently Gray et al. (2019) summarized studies on the relationship between psychopathy and the UPPS-P model (including the aforementioned review study by Poythress and Hall (2011)). Based on this summary Gray and colleagues (2019) conclude that the studies after 2011 (and which were thus not included in the Poythress and Hall study of 2011), appear to show some similar patterns regarding psychopathy and the UPPS-P model as outlined by Poythress and Hall (2011). On grounds of their summary Gray et al. (2019) postulate that Urgency, lack of Premeditation and lack of Perseverance may be associated more with the lifestyle and anti-social traits (F2) and not with the interpersonal and affective traits of psychopathy (F1). The findings regarding the correlation between Sensation Seeking and Factor 1 were mixed according to these scholars: Berg and colleagues (2015b) found strong relations, although Miller et al. (2011) found a weaker correlation (Gray et al., 2019).

Based on these results these scholars conducted their own study on the correlations between the two psychopathy factors of PCL-R/PCL-SV (Hart, Cox & Hare, 1995) and the UPPS-P scale in patient and prison samples. Factor 1 (foremost the interpersonal facet) was negatively related to Lack of Premeditation, lack of Perseverance and Urgency. Factor 2 was positively related to almost all of the four impulsivity facets from the UPPS-P scale (Gray et al., 2019).

One can imagine that those individuals who score high on the FD scale, but low(er) on the SCI scale, will take risks for the thrill of it or possibly because they desire a specific goal about which they are excited. They may also be more inclined to take these risks because of their low levels of fear and anxiety. However, they may think about the consequences and plan the precise steps they must take before acting. This subgroup may be the same group that scores high on the affective-interpersonal scale of psychopathy Factor 1 but lower on the lifestyle antisocial Factor 2. Such individuals may be better at planning their actions and they may also have higher levels of self-control. This may make them more capable of being more 'successful' in their approaches (Gray et al., 2019; Yildirim & Derksen, 2015a). It is unclear whether such a person refrains from severe antisocial behavior. It is also possible

that because of their high self-control and good planning skills, they are very effective in evading capture for their antisocial acts (Poythress & Hall, 2011).

Research on the etiological differences between the PPI-FD and the PPI-SCI of the PPI-R indicate that the PPI-SCI scale is related to emotional dysregulation, problems with the self-monitoring of behavior, high levels of reward sensitivity, and defaults in attention allocation to stimuli relevant to a certain task. PI-FD is associated with defects in reacting to fearful and threatening stimuli, but not with defects in inhibitory control of behavior (Benning, Patrick, Blonigen, Hicks, & Iacono, 2005; Benning, Patrick, & Iacono, 2005; Poythress & Hall, 2011). Although these differences may be inborn, Hall and Benning suggest that these differences may be further amplified by the effect of parenting, education, SES, or other aspects related to personality or neurobiology (2006).

Research conducted with an assessment instrument that specifically measures sensation-seeking, Zuckerman's (1990) Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS scale), may further illuminate which subscales of this trait are correlated to the various scales of different psychopathy measures (Poythress & Hall, 2011). The SSS scale comprises four lower order scales: Thrill an Adventure Seeking (TAS), Experience Seeking (ES), Disinhibition (Dis), and Boredom Susceptibility (BS). The TAS-scale measures sensation-seeking that is focused on risky but exciting activities and sports. The ES-scale measures sensation-seeking by the degree of attraction to novel sensory and mental experiences and a non-conventional lifestyle. The DIS-scale assesses behavior that includes social contact with others and disinhibition through social drinking. The BS-scale focuses on an antipathy for a lack of variety and experiencing restlessness in the absence of variety (Zuckerman, 1990).

Research with the PPI-R, the PCL-R and the TriPM found that Thrill and Adventure seeking and Experience Seeking, but not Disinhibition and Boredom Susceptibility, correlated with FD (Benning, Patrick, Blonigen, et al., 2005; Benning, Patrick, & Iacono, 2005; Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005), Factor 1 (Hall, Benning, & Patrick, 2004; Harpur, Harpur, Hare, & Hakstian, 1989; Poythress & Hall, 2011), and boldness (Sellbom & Philips, 2013). Although Poythress and Hall (2011) did not find associations between Factor 1 of the PCL-R and the broad domain of Sensation Seeking in their study, they did find a correlation between the lower order scales of the SSS scale (Thrill and Adventure seeking and Experience Seeking) and Factor 1.

#### 7.4. Self-controlled impulsivity may support 'success' in psychopathic leadership

##### 7.4.1. Sensation-seeking and self-control in psychopathic leadership

Differentiating between the various operationalizations of impulsivity may shed more light on which of the four impulsivity domains as outlined by Whiteside and Lynam (2001), are more maladaptive and which are more adaptive forms of impulsivity. Through their research it has become clear that the domain of Sensation Seeking may be regarded as the most adaptive form of impulsivity (see also Berg, Latzman, Bliwise, & Lilienfeld, 2015). The other three domains either emanate from negative emotions that need to be regulated (Urgency), or may be described as a need to react instantly without forethought or planning (lack of Premeditation), or are defined as behavior based on low self-discipline and a lack of concentration to follow things through (lack of Perseverance). These three domains appear to be more maladaptive in their definition.

Sensation Seeking, the fourth impulsivity domain, is the only domain that does not include behavior that arises in order to deal with negative emotions, nor does it describe maladaptive behavior such as a lack of concentration or acting without planning. Sensation Seeking in Whiteside and Lynam's (2001) description is phrased in words that appear to connote more positive emotions e.g., take *pleasure* in, and engage in *exhilarating* activities (Berg et al., 2015a).

Furthermore, Sensation Seeking although defined as 'a propensity to



take pleasure in, and pursue new and exhilarating activities and events', is also connected to a form of planfulness, forethought, and inhibitory control (Gray et al., 2019; Poythress & Hall, 2011; Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). These are all aspects that require a person to score high on the trait self-control. The underlying constructs of Sensation Seeking, Functional impulsivity and Venturesomeness, include the combination of a desire to take risks and experience new things without thoughtlessness in undertaking these actions (Poythress & Hall, 2011).

This in line with Patrick, Fowles, and Krueger's (2009) description of *judicious risk-taking*. According to these scholars, judicious risk-taking is part of the Fearless Dominance domain of the PPI-R. Together with social dominance, assertiveness and self-composure, these traits resemble Patrick's boldness concept of the Triarchic model (Patrick et al., 2009).

Judicious risk-taking, or as we refer to it our conceptualization, self-controlled sensation-seeking (sensation-seeking that includes planning and forethought), may be especially beneficial in leadership positions. Those studies that applied the SSS-scale of sensation-seeking found that the lower order-scales of Thrill- and Adventure Seeking (TAS) and Experience Seeking (ES) correlated with boldness (TriPM) (Sellbom & Philips, 2013), Factor 1 (PCL-R) (Hall et al., 2004; Harpur, Harpur et al., 1989; Poythress & Hall, 2011), and Fearless Dominance (PPI-R) (Benning et al., 2005; Benning, Patrick, & Iacono, 2005; Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005; Poythress & Hall, 2011). The lower order scales Disinhibition (DIS) and Boredom Susceptibility (BS) of the SSS-scale are not correlated with these domains in the aforementioned studies. These findings may indicate that the actions that are undertaken are strongly triggered by a need to engage in exhilarating behavior that stimulates the senses and the mind (TAS en ES). However, actions may not be undertaken because of the socializing aspect of behavior (DIS), for reasons of boredom, or restlessness induced by boredom (BS). The low correlations with DIS is in accordance with the profile of primary psychopathy in which there are low levels of affiliation (Yildirim & Derksen, 2015b). The low correlations with BS fit the earlier profile in which restlessness can be regarded as a more negative emotional state that has to be 'fixed' through sensation-seeking.

The boldness required to take risks at crucial moments is important in a leadership position. The chances of obtaining the right objectives for successfulness are greatly enhanced by proper planning, waiting for the right moment, and strategic thinking before acting. All of these behaviors depend on self-control, especially in moments where fast and accurate decision-making is essential. Furthermore, having a special appetite for exploring new territories and finding new adventures exhilarating, instead of experiencing stress and anxiety at such moments, is an important asset required for successful leadership. We hypothesize that when sensation-seeking (as a domain of impulsivity) is combined with high self-control, this conjunction of traits may support the 'successfulness' of such a psychopathic leader. Especially in conjunction with the Factor 1 traits, fearlessness, and the moderator the need to dominate others, this combination of traits may facilitate 'success' for such a leader for prolonged periods of time.

7.4.2. Research on 'successful' psychopathic leaders, conscientiousness and excitement seeking

The study of Mullins-Sweatt et al. (2010) confirms the

mentioned hypotheses on the conjunction of self-control and impulsivity. This study showed that those 'successful' psychopathic individuals in high positions (including leaders) who were researched exhibited higher scores on conscientiousness combined with higher scores on excitement-seeking. Conscientiousness was assessed through the Five Factor Form (FFF), which subdivides six facets of conscientiousness: Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement-striving, Self-discipline, and Deliberation. These 'successful' psychopathic individuals scored high on Competence, Order, Achievement-striving and Self-discipline.

Several studies have reported that conscientiousness is positively correlated to successfulness in several aspects in life (e.g. Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Roberts, Jackson, Fayard, Edmonds, & Meints, 2009). Furthermore, Clower and Bothwell (2002) found that in imprisoned psychopathic samples lower levels of conscientiousness predicted higher rates of arrest.

The differences between the scores on the levels of the four impulsivity domains of criminal psychopathic individuals and the hypothesized scores on the levels of the four impulsivity domains for psychopathic leadership are outlined in Table 4.

In this section we have elaborated on the conjunction between sensation-seeking and high self-control as is outlined in the proposed model of the psychopathic leader (see Fig. 1).

8. Conclusion and future directions

This paper focuses on one manifestation of 'successful' psychopathy and discusses hypotheses on the distinguishing features of the psychopathic leader in comparison with the traditional profile of psychopathy in prison samples. The few studies that have been conducted on psychopathy and leadership indicate that psychopathic leaders share many of the dark traits with their overtly criminal counterparts in prison but that there may also be some important dissimilarities.

This paper presents a theoretical model of the psychopathic leader (PL model) with core psychopathic traits and three moderating variables. The PL model is based on data from studies on psychopathic leadership and other high functioning psychopathic individuals as well as studies on white collar versus blue collar crime. These data were compared with a theoretical division of primary and secondary psychopathy types. We argue that the core psychopathic traits in this model are a combination of the Factor 1 traits and fearlessness. These core traits may be moderated into a more adaptive expression through the additional traits of high self-control, sensation-seeking, and need for domination. These additional traits are defined as structural moderators in the PL model.

The focus in this paper is the conjunction of the trait high self-control with one impulsivity domain, Sensation Seeking. First, the four impulsivity domains that are studied in impulsivity research: Urgency, lack of Perseverance, lack of Premeditation and Sensation Seeking were outlined. Second, it was illuminated which of these domains may be adaptive or maladaptive in gaining 'success' in life. Third, the four psychopathy subtypes were combined with the four impulsivity domains from the UPPS-P model. Finally, the most adaptive form of impulsivity, sensation-seeking, was integrated in the PL model. Sensation Seeking may be regarded as the most adaptive domain of impulsivity, as it is the only impulsivity domain that emerges out of pleasant emotional experience and among the four impulsivity domains, the operationalization of Sensation Seeking is most strongly related to self-control. We believe that the conjunction of high self-control with sensation-seeking most strongly supports the 'successfulness' in psychopathic leadership, in comparison to the institutionalized psychopathic individuals.

The third structural moderator, the need for domination, may further amplify the 'successfulness' of the psychopathic leader. In the PL model, the need for domination may function as a behavioral motivator to seek out and remain in positions of power. This trait will be outlined in a future paper by the same authors.

Table 4  
Impulsivity domains and criminal psychopathy and psychopathic leadership (hypotheses) compared.

Impulsivity domains (retrieved from Whiteside & Lynam, 2001)	Criminal psychopathy	Psychopathic leadership
Urgency	Medium to high	Low
(Lack of) perseverance	Medium to high	Low
(Lack of) premeditation	Medium to high	Low
Sensation Seeking	Low to high	High

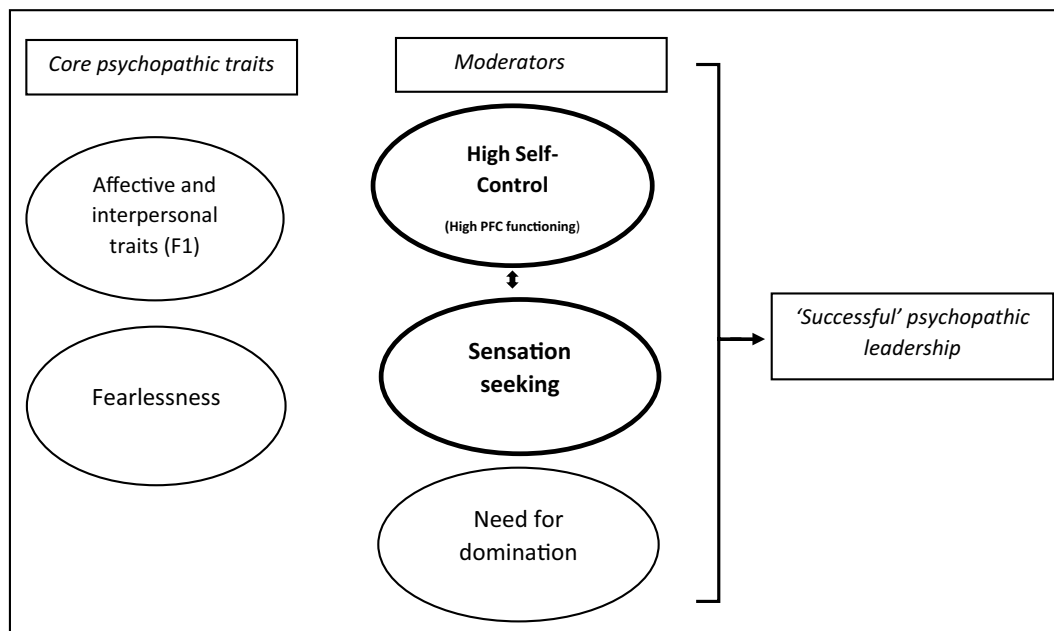


Fig. 1. The proposed model of the psychopathic leader (the PL model).

## 9. Future directions

There is an urgent need for more data on psychopathic leadership, and this proposed model may facilitate further research on the subject. The model of the psychopathic leader is not yet empirically established and we suggest directions to verify this model in future studies. Additionally, several questions regarding the two models underlying the theoretical profile of the psychopathic leader still need to be answered. These issues will be discussed first.

First, the theoretical differentiation of the subtypes of primary and secondary psychopathy as proposed by Yildirim and Derksen (2015a) should be verified empirically in different samples. Such studies may further clarify which are the core traits of primary psychopathy and secondary psychopathy as well as which traits show heterogeneity among the primary and secondary subdivisions. Additionally, by verifying the four types in different samples it may illuminate which of the subdivisions are more prevalent in prison samples, in community samples, or in groups of 'successful' psychopathic individuals such as psychopathic leaders.

Second, the elaboration of the moderated expression model of successful psychopathy by Steiner et al. (2017), based on the moderated expression model by Hall and Benning (2006), should be subjected to systematic research. Data are needed that establish whether certain moderating traits mitigate the non-adaptive outcomes of the core traits of psychopathy, and if so, in which ways they support 'success' (Benning et al., 2018). Importantly, some studies have found that certain core psychopathic traits are not only correlated with maladaptive outcomes, but also with adaptive outcomes. These scholars found that the boldness facet of the Triarchic model is primarily related to adaptive outcomes but also to some maladaptive outcomes (Patrick & Drislane, 2015; Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011). The disinhibition and meanness facets mainly reflect maladaptive tendencies (Drislane, Patrick, & Arsal, 2014; Sellbom & Philips, 2013; Stanley, Wygant, & Sellbom, 2013; Venables et al., 2015; Venables & Patrick, 2012). Therefore, a focus of investigation should include how these outcomes relate to the hypothesis that moderating factors influence the non-adaptive outcomes of the core psychopathic traits in the elaborated model of the moderated expression model. Additionally, Hicks and Drislane (2018) propose that the boldness and the disinhibition facets are orthogonal (lack of correlation), but the meanness facet is relatively

highly correlated with disinhibition and moderately correlated with boldness (Patrick & Drislane, 2015). The lack of correlation between boldness and disinhibition may facilitate interactions between these two facets (Hicks & Drislane, 2018). Interestingly, these authors propose that boldness in the outcomes of boldness x disinhibition interaction may manifest itself as a moderator on the non-adaptive outcomes of the disinhibition facet. The combination of the two facets results in behavior that is highly antisocial, but at the same time is accompanied by good interpersonal functioning and emotional stability (Hicks & Drislane, 2018). This is consistent with Cleckley's portrayals of antisocial behavior that is hidden behind a mask of normality (1948). However, it is noteworthy that in several of the studies that have focused on the possible interactions between boldness (or FD) and disinhibition (or SCI) the results are mixed concerning these interactions and in some cases these studies showed almost no interactions between the two factors (e.g. Miller & Lynam, 2012; Vize, Lynam, Lamkin, Miller, & Pardini, 2016). Further research on the interactions between boldness and disinhibition is needed.

## 10. Future research on the model of the psychopathic leader

To verify the theoretical model of the psychopathic leader we suggest several directions for future research. Because our model is built as a configuration of a set of different personality traits, we propose to operationalize our model by outlining which statistical interactions among the different traits should be tested. In our view the following hypotheses should be empirically established in future research.

First, it should be tested if there is a statistical interaction between each of the three moderators (high self-control, sensation-seeking, need for domination) and the core psychopathic traits in the PL model. An additional research question is whether, if such interactions are found, they support 'success' in psychopathic leadership.

Second, future research should establish if there is a positive correlation between the first moderator, high self-control, and the second moderator, sensation-seeking. Furthermore, new research should investigate whether this correlation between the two traits also interacts with the core psychopathic traits in the PL model, and if so, whether this interaction supports 'success' in psychopathic leadership.

Third, Hicks and Drislane's (2018) hypothesis that boldness may also function as a moderator in the boldness x disinhibition raises

several questions. Do the core psychopathic traits of Factor 1 in our proposed model function as a moderator for the other traits in the PL model? Does the core psychopathic trait, fearlessness in our proposed model function as a moderator for the other traits in the PL model? Additionally, if one or more of the core psychopathic traits function as a moderator, does this amplify the 'successfulness' of the psychopathic leader?

Fourth, the focus of this paper is the conjunction of the trait high self-control with sensation-seeking in psychopathic leadership. The majority of the studies used in the section on the conjunction of these traits in psychopathic individuals utilized the PPI-R. Some scholars have challenged the relevance of the Fearless Dominance factor of the PPI-R for psychopathy (Lynam & Miller, 2013; Miller & Lynam, 2012; Neumann, Uzieblo, Crombez, & Hare, 2013). For a response to these critiques see: Crego & Widiger, 2015, 2016; Lilienfeld, Watts, & Smith, 2018; Lilienfeld, Patrick, et al., 2012; Murphy, Lilienfeld, Skeem, & Edens, 2016; Patrick & Drislane, 2015. We propose that in future research other measures, such as the PCL-R/SV and the TriPM, should also be utilized to establish the hypothesized conjunction between the traits high self-control and sensation-seeking in our model.

## 11. Additional research questions

Future studies should also focus on several other research issues that are important to empirically establish the PL model.

First, studies should focus on whether those individuals in leadership positions show higher levels on the Factor 1 traits and Fearlessness, and lower levels on the Factor 2 traits of psychopathy, as proposed in our model. Second, it is important to precisely define the moderator sensation-seeking in our model. Employing the different definitions of the four variants of sensation-seeking as outlined by Zuckerman's (1990) SSS-Scale could be helpful to resolve this issue. Third, it is crucial to precisely define what 'successfulness' embodies for the psychopathic leader, his subordinates, and for the organization as a whole. Fourth, research should establish whether the trait need for domination functions as a motivating factor in searching out leadership positions and if so, in what way. Furthermore, another unknown aspect is whether certain leadership positions are more alluring than others to satisfy the need for domination.

Finally, as in all manifestations of 'successful' psychopathy, the most salient question is whether psychopathic leaders are truly successful in their leadership, or that they should be considered an organizational or societal risk. Further studies should focus on the competencies of the psychopathic leader and possible white-collar crimes committed by leaders with a psychopathic profile. This type of research could provide valuable insights and empirical evidence about these particular facets of psychopathic leadership.

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