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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

THE DARK TRIAD PREDICTS ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEGATIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS

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Abstract

The Dark triad (narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism) studied intensively in the last decades, but the association with attitudes towards negative personality traits doesn't attract any attention. At the same time, these attitudes indicate not only the Dark Triad trait but also extended representations of negative personality traits. This study aims to reveal the structure of attitudes towards negative traits; associations between attitudes and the Dark triad traits as predictors. A sample size of 531 undergraduate students (full- and part-time) aged 18-35 ($M = 21.81$; $SD = 2.82$) participated in the study. Short Dark Triad scale was used to obtain narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and list of negative personality traits with instruction to evaluate them. The attitudes towards negative personality traits resulted in a five-component solution. Findings of the regression attitudes factors showed that Machiavellianism and narcissism are also frequent predictors. Besides, it was revealed the significant role of sex for attitudes towards negative traits. Notwithstanding the initial view that attitudes match three Dark Triad traits more detailed structure was found, and the role of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy in were defined.

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Keywords: Dark Triad, narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, attitudes, personality traits.



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1. Introduction

1.1. The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy) (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) attract growing interest in exploring the dark side of personality in contrast with bright or neutral traits like the Big five characteristics. The Dark triad traits are characterized by entitlement, superiority, dominance (i.e., narcissism), glib social charm, manipulateness (i.e., Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes, impulsivity, and interpersonal antagonism (i.e., psychopathy). The Dark Triad structure and its elements' distinctiveness are still discussed, but many studies replicated the association between these three traits (Lee & Ashton, 2005). The previous studies' findings examining the relationships between Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and other personality and behavioral features separately formed a base of conceptualizing the Dark triad as a unique construct.

Individuals characterized by narcissism are likely to be egocentric with a sense of grandiosity (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Impulsivity, engagement in risky behaviors and moral indifference are the core of psychopathy (Jonason & Krause, 2013). Machiavellianism, unlike the other two traits, does not have a psychiatric "heritage" and describes by the tendency to manipulate with others, materialistic and selfish attitude (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Dark Triad traits have been reported to link positively with one or the other negative social behavior patterns. High Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy relate with authority and leadership (Jonason & Webster, 2012), self-promotion, and exploitation in an interpersonal relationship (Furnham et al., 2013), higher sexual attractiveness (Jonason et al., 2009).

There are substantial sex differences in the Dark Triad trait's manifestation (e.g., Semanya & Honey, 2015). For instance, men tend to be more impulsive and use aggressive, manipulative strategies, while women use charm and deception (Jonason & Webster, 2012). Since the first studies, the difference between dark and other people in interpersonal relationship strategies were mentioned. The "cheater strategy" - manipulateness, deception, and selfishness explain by the evolutionary advantages than traditional altruistic strategy (Jonason & Webster, 2012).

1.2. Attitudes towards personality traits

Attitude is a psychological tendency to evaluate objects with some degree of favor or disfavor. A general function of attitudes is that they enable people to understand their environment efficiently. In comparison with traits, attitudes may be stable or unstable while personality differences like extraversion usually tend to be relatively stable (Chaiken, 2001).

Attitudes towards different objects and the Dark Triad are prominent research problem. In some recent studies were found, for example, a positive relationship between the endorsement of good citizenship and narcissism, and a negative relationship for psychopathy was documented (Pruysers et al., 2019). The dark-side traits (excitable, skeptical and bold) were predictors for both positive and negative organisational attitudes (Palaiou et al., 2016); individuals with higher levels of the Dark Triad demonstrated less positive attitudes towards animals and reported engaging in more acts of animal cruelty (Kavanagh et al., 2013).

2. Problem Statement

Personality traits are a rare object for studies of attitudes, but they can be evaluated as well as any other objects. Detailed investigate on of attitudes towards personality traits was made by Shchebetenko (2014). This study tests the questions about the factor structure of attitudes toward traits and its fit to the factor structure of five-factor personality model traits, associations of attitudes and corresponding traits. The main results are that attitudes toward traits establish a five-factor structure closer to that of the Big Five traits. Personality traits may determine the attitudes toward traits, and they are more changeable and socially determined structures (Shchebetenko, 2014). On the basic ideas of this study, the current work was performed.

3. Research Questions

Do the attitudes towards negative personality traits reflect the structure of the Dark triad and can be grouped in psychopathic, narcissistic and Machiavellians attitudes?

Do the narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism predict the positive evaluation of negative personality traits?

Are there a sex and age differences in attitudes towards negative personality traits?

4. Purpose of the Study

In this study, we attempt to understand the structure of attitudes towards negative personality traits and their associations with the Dark Triad. The objectives of this study are:

1. The attitudes towards negative personality traits tend to the structure of Dark Triad, presenting three factors related to psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism.

2. The Dark Triad traits predict positive attitudes towards negative personality traits.

Besides, the role of sex differences and age in attitudes towards negative personality traits will be clarifying.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Participants

The sample consists of 531 undergraduate students (full- and part-time) aged 18-35 ($M = 21.81$; $SD = 2.82$), 61.8% female recruited to participate in the study in exchange for psychology course credits. Participants received a brief introductory talk about the study aims, completed questionnaires and provided their demographic details. Informed consent was obtained for each participant. Participants completed a battery of paper and pencil questionnaires in one setting. They were instructed to take as long time as needed to complete the questionnaires. Upon completion, the participants were debriefed and thanked.

5.2. Measures

The Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy traits were measured using the 27-items Short Dark Triad scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) was adopted in Russian by Egorova et al. (2015). The participants

were asked to choose to which they agreed (1 = disagree strongly; 5 = agree strongly) with the following statements related to one of the trait: psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism.

Attitudes towards negative personality traits were measured with a list of negative personality traits (17 items) and instruction. The instruction was the following: Please, evaluate several personality traits in terms of their attractiveness to you. Do you think this or that personal quality is good or bad? It does not matter whether you have this trait or not: it is important whether you like it? Please rate them from 1 (“totally unattractive”) to 5 (“very attractive”). We also add five traits (in terms of five-factor personality structure) as fillers.

We proposed that manipulatives, incredulity, reticence, emotional coldness, social influence are related to Machiavellianism. Cynicism, antisociality, dominance, impulsivity is linked with Psychopathy. Finally, uniqueness, grandiosity, demonstrativeness, social attractiveness, selfishness are referred to as Narcissism. Two traits vanity and envy relate to Dark Triad traits but cannot be precisely related to one of them. All the characters were chosen from theoretical and empirical studies. Some features like social influence or social attractiveness cannot be strictly evaluated as negative or positive, but they were included in the description of Dark Triad traits or have a significant association with them.

6. Findings

6.1. Factor structure of attitudes towards negative personality traits

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation of the attitudes towards negative personality traits scales to explore their underlying structure was performed. This resulted in a five-component solution explaining 53.88% of the variance.

Factor loadings are displayed in Table 1. Factor 1, accounting for 12.89% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.19), includes cynicism, antisociality, vanity, and manipulatives. Factor 2 accounted for 10.93% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.86) and is incorporated incredulity, reticence, and emotional coldness. The third factor (10.61%; eigenvalue = 1.80), represented by uniqueness, grandiosity, and demonstrativeness. Social influence and social attractiveness enter Factor 4, accounting for 10.28% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.75). The final factor (9.16%. eigenvalue = 1.56) included attitudes towards envy, selfishness, pragmatism. Two traits (dominance, impulsivity) enter to the factor structure but have insufficient loadings. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin statistic = 0.78, and Bartlett’s test was $X^2(136) = 1472.65$; $p < 0.01$, indicating the sample was enough and suitable for analysis.

Table 01. Factor structure of attitudes towards negative traits

Attitude	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Cynicism	.772*	.135	-.125	-.022	-.012
Antisociality	.656	.239	-.028	-.114	.017
Vanity	.613	.053	.322	.130	.055
Manipulatives	.481	.268	.231	.429	-.13
Incredulity	.108	.767	-.106	.000	-.047
Reticence	.143	.759	-.026	.12	.132
Emotional coldness	.198	.564	.312	-.147	-.127
Uniqueness	-.157	-.095	.705	.033	.015
Grandiosity	.079	.149	.674	-.049	.097
Demonstrativeness	.360	-.106	.493	.221	.323
Dominance	.355	.280	.394	.330	-.106

Impulsivity	-.272	.079	-.343	-.238	.133
Social Influence	.078	.133	-.081	.804	-.014
Social attractiveness	-.105	-.147	.155	.731	-.020
Envy	.186	-.022	.009	-.040	.733
Selfishness	-.030	0.181	0.145	-0.26	0.683
Pragmatism	-.273	-0.16	-0.036	0.172	0.595

Notes: *marked loadings greater than 0.45.

The names of the traits with the highest loadings in each factor were used to name the whole factor. Thus, the factor structure of attitudes towards negative traits includes five factors: Cynicism (factor 1), Incredulity (factor 2), Uniqueness (factor 3), Social Influence (factor 4), Envy (factor 5).

6.2. Associations between factors of attitudes towards negative traits and Dark Triad

We began by correlating the Dark Triad traits and attitudes towards negative personality traits. Table 2. All Dark Triad traits positively correlated with Cynicism (factor 1). At the zero-order level, Machiavellianism is positively associated with Incredulity (factor 2), Social Influence (factor 4), and negatively with Envy (factor 5). Narcissism is positively correlated with Uniqueness (factor 3), and Social Influence (factor 4). Psychopathy also has a positive correlation with Incredulity (factor 2), and negative with Envy (factor 5).

Table 02. Correlations between Dark Triad traits and factors of attitudes towards negative personality traits

Dark Triad traits	Factors of attitudes towards negative traits				
	Cynicism (factor 1)	Incredulity (factor 2)	Uniqueness (factor 3)	Social Influence (factor 4)	Envy (factor 5)
Machiavellianism	.207**	.200**	.065	.248**	-.203**
Narcissism	.199**	-.054	.246**	.252**	-.019
Psychopathy	.372**	.150**	.042	.000	-.128**

Note: ** $p < .01$;

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses explored associations between attitudes towards negative traits and Dark Triad subscales. Age and gender were controlled for in the first step of each model, and the Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy entered in the second step to assess their contribution to the variance. Table 3 displays the final β values for each model.

Table 03. Associations between Attitudes towards negative traits and Dark Triad

Dark Triad Scales	Cynicism (factor 1) β	Incredulity (factor 2) β	Uniqueness (factor 3) β	Social Influence (factor 4) β	Envy (factor 5) β
<i>Step 1</i>					
Age	-.017	.037	.043	-.102 ($p < .05$)	-.072
Sex	-.173*	-.241*	.124*	.068	.032
<i>Step 2</i>					
Age	-.66	.030	.032	-.102 ($p < .01$)	-.060

Sex	-.94 (p<.05)	-.215*	.115 (p<0.01)	.041	.006
Machiavellianism	-.32	.246*	-.038	.287*	-.226*
Narcissism	.091 (p<.05)	-.167*	.264*	.205*	.092
Psychopathy	.344*	.007	-.008	-.206*	-.021

Note: Cynicism (factor 1): R2 = .03* for Step 1; ΔR2 = .13* at Step 2.

Incredulity (factor 2): R2 = .06* for Step 1; ΔR2 = .05* for Step 2.

Uniqueness (factor 3): R2 = .02; (p<.05) for Step 1; ΔR2 = .06* for Step 2.

Social Influence (factor 4): R2 = .02; (p<.01) for Step 1; ΔR2 = .12* for Step 2.

Envy (factor 5): R2 = .01 for Step 1; ΔR2 = .05* for Step 2.

Sex was coded as follows: Male = 1; Female = 2.

Findings of the regression on Cynicism (factor 1) scores showed that Sex was the strongest predictor, then Psychopathy and Narcissism are also the predictors. Incredulity (factor 2) is positively associated with Machiavellianism and negatively with Sex and Narcissism. The strongest predictor for Uniqueness (factor 3) is Narcissism, and Sex is the significant predictor. Social Influence (factor 4) is positively associated with Machiavellianism as the most reliable predictor, and Narcissism, and negatively with Psychopathy, and Age. Machiavellianism is negative and significant predictors of Envy (factor 5).

6.3. Discussion

The present study's goal was to identify the structure of attitudes towards negative traits and to find their associations with Dark Traits.

Several noteworthy results were obtained. Our results revealed attitudes towards negative traits referred to a five-factor solution of higher order factors. These factors are conceptually linked with Dark Triad construct but don't reflect Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism directly. Cynicism (factor 1) can be observed as more psychopathic attitudes, Incredulity (factor 2) as Machiavellian attitudes, and Uniqueness (factor 3) as narcissistic attitudes. Two factors — Social Influence (factor 4), and Envy (factor 5) referred to Machiavellian views, and narcissistic attitudes, and can be interpreted partly as psychopathic attitudes. This leads to the conclusion that attitudes towards negative traits can be presented as more differential characteristics but combined into a wider factors structure than the structure of the Dark Triad.

We may propose an explanation that negative characteristics describe different aspects or facets as well as facets of the five-factor model. The Dark Triad traits share these facets. For example, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism include callousness and manipulate in social relations (Book & Quinsey, 2004), narcissism and psychopathy include dominance, and exploitativeness (Brunell & Buelow, 2018). Discussing psychopathy in detail Jones and Figuerdo (2013) and others (Book et al., 2007; Jones & Paulhus, 2010) provided evidence that while the erratic lifestyle and antisocial behavior distinguish Psychopathy from Machiavellianism and Narcissism. Besides callous and manipulative represents are the core of all three dark personalities (Jones & Figuerdo, 2013). The other testimony is the results of Russian and French SDT scale adaptation that scale's items assess some characteristics shared by the three Dark triad constructs (Egorova et al., 2015; Gamache et al., 2018).

Findings showed that individuals who are more likely to be psychopaths and narcissists are those who tend to evaluate high cynicism, antisociality, vanity, and manipulatives as an attractive personality trait. Such traits configuration is typical for a psychopathic person who appears as carefully planned and

acted out in a cold-blooded or instrumental manner (Cima & Raine, 2009), they don't care that they have caused harm to someone (Hare & Neumann, 2008). Incredulity, reticence, and emotional coldness are more pleasing to Machiavellian people with lower narcissism as Machiavellianism represents tendencies towards emotional coldness, strategic manipulation, and lack of conventional morality (Christie & Geis, 1970; Szijjártó & Bereczkei, 2015). The more narcissistic individuals tend to assess uniqueness, grandiosity, and demonstrativeness as more attractive, that's not surprising. In this vein entitlement, exploitativeness, and grandiosity are named as the main facets of narcissism (Brunell & Buelow, 2018). Social influence and social attractiveness traits are more appealing for Machiavellian and narcissistic people with lower psychopathy. It was well established that Machiavellian adolescents were socially skilled, liked by their peers, and were well-adjusted (Hawley, 2003), and narcissism remains the most socially desirable aspect of the Dark Triad (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). Machiavellian individuals evaluate Envy, Selfishness, and Pragmatism as less attractive traits. Relations between envy and the traits of Machiavellianism (Vecchio, 2000) and narcissism (Morris et al., 2005) have also been noted.

So, we can say that narcissism and Machiavellianism are the most frequent predictors for factors of attitudes towards negative characteristics.

It is already well established that men are more narcissistic, (Foster et al., 2003) as well as men show higher levels of sub-clinical psychopathy than women (Lee & Ashton, 2005). More Machiavellian men are more motivated by mate seeking and status seeking than women are (Semenya & Honey, 2015). Our findings revealed the significant role of sex for four among five factors of attitudes towards negative traits, but their meanings are different. So, men tend to evaluate higher qualities referred to Cynicism (factor 1), Incredulity (factor 2), but women to Uniqueness (factor 3). Younger individuals prefer social Influence (factor 4) for the most part. The facts about Machiavellianism and psychopathy are analogical to the previously mentioned sex differences in Dark Triad traits. Therefore, we can say that men not only more Machiavellian and psychopathic but also evaluate higher these characteristics. Contrary, women evaluate narcissistic features higher which can be explained that women may use more indirect and discreet ways to fulfill their narcissistic goals (Blinkhorn et al., 2015). As a result, they rate higher uniqueness, grandiosity, and demonstrativeness as personality traits. Besides, narcissism appears to be linked to a more opportunistic strategy than an exploitive mating (Jonason et al., 2009).

Generalizing, higher attractiveness and more positive attitudes towards negative traits characterize younger male individuals with high narcissism, and with a tendency to Machiavellianism. Indirectly the attractiveness of negative personality traits can be supported by studies about the high physical attractiveness of Dark Triad persons (Holtzman & Strube, 2010; Carter et al., 2014).

7. Conclusion

The present article represents a study in identifying attitudes towards negative personality traits that may have been overlooked in previous. Specifically, we have identified a set of facets or aspects of negative personality traits representing the Dark Triad known to challenge contemporary personality frameworks. Based on aspects of Dark Triad, the attitudes towards negative personality traits were evaluated. Despite the initial idea that attitudes reflect three DT traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy the five-factor structure of attitude was found. Narcissism and Machiavellianism as personality traits are the main

predictors for factors of attitudes towards negative characteristics. Also, the significant role of sex in attitudes towards negative traits was discovered. Summing up, we have extended work in studying attitudes towards personality traits, while simultaneously elaborating on existing research regarding the Dark Triad.

7.1. Limitations

Of course, the present study is not without limitations. The results of the present study need to be discussed concerning the completeness of the list of negative traits. Further research assessing the association between self-evaluation of facets of negative traits, Dark Triad, and its attitudes towards negative personality traits are needed.

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