

DARK TRIAD AND IMPULSIVITY

Dark Triad and Impulsivity

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Abstract

The Dark Triad includes three personality constructs; Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. The three facets of the Dark Triad have been associated with manipulative tendencies and callous behaviors. Calculated actions are associated with Machiavellianism. Lack of empathy and remorse has been linked to Psychopathy. Narcissism is also associated with a lack of empathy, but it also encompasses traits like self-centeredness and entitlement. Impulsivity is defined as acting without thought. The facets of the Dark Triad combined with impulsivity could lead to risky behaviors. My proposed study will examine the unique relationship of impulsivity with psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism. I hypothesize that impulsivity will be strongly related to psychopathy and moderately related to narcissism. However, there likely will be no significant relationship of impulsivity with Machiavellianism. This study uses data previously collected from Amazon MTurk (n=152), including measures of the Dark Triad (i.e., Dirty Dozen, Jonason & Webster, 2010; Elemental Psychopathy Assessment, Lynam et al., 2011; Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory, Glover et al., 2012; Machiavellianism Personality Scale, Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009) and general personality, (i.e., NEO Personality Inventory-Revised, Costa & McCrae, 1992). Implications for research, limitations, and future directions will be discussed.

Introduction

The Dark Triad is a group of personality constructs associated with inappropriate behaviors. The three personality constructs include narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Recently, a potential relationship between these three facets and impulsivity has been examined. Prior research examining this relationship has concluded that there is a significant relationship between impulsivity and psychopathy, a weaker but significant relationship between impulsivity and narcissism, and no relationship between Machiavellianism and impulsivity (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-A). Other research has found a relationship between impulsivity and psychopathy, but little to no relationship between impulsivity and Machiavellianism or narcissism (Malesza & Ostaszewski, 2016). First, I hypothesize that psychopathy will be significantly correlated with impulsivity and the impulsivity facets of low deliberation and low self discipline. Second, I hypothesize that narcissism will be strongly correlated with impulsivity and the impulsivity facets of low deliberation and low self discipline. Third, I hypothesize that Machiavellianism will have little to no relationship with impulsivity.

Individuals high in psychopathy often show little to no remorse. These people tend to be highly manipulative with little regard for the wellbeing of others. No matter what damage their actions may cause, they have no shame. They are high in charm, however, this charm is only a manipulation tactic and therefore it can come off as insincere. Their lack of regard might prevent them from forming emotional attachments (DeShong et al., 2016). It is thought that Psychopaths can be divided into four subgroups. These subgroups include Lifestyle, Interpersonal, Affective, and Antisocial. The lifestyle psychopath is one that is more impulsive, leading to a disheveled lifestyle. The interpersonal psychopath refers to the interactions of a psychopath. Their interactions with others are thought to be superficial and dishonest. The affective psychopath

refers to lack of innate traits relating to empathy and emotion. The antisocial psychopath is one who is more likely to be found incarcerated due to their antisocial behavior (Snowden & Gray, 2011).

Narcissists have been previously labeled as “disagreeable extraverts” (Paulhus, 2001), though this is a very baseline description. The Five Factor Model of narcissism includes fifteen personality traits that are associated with narcissism. These traits include indifference, exhibitionism, a constant seeking of admiration, thrill seeking behaviors, grandiose fantasies, reactive anger, cynicism, entitlement, authoritativeness, seeking of acclaim, arrogance, lack of empathy, manipulative tendencies, exploitativeness, and a need to hide shame (Glover et al., 2012). Narcissists generally present as cold and self-absorbed. Not to be confused with adaptive high self esteem, narcissists view themselves in a positive manner while they view others negatively. Those high in self esteem might view themselves as equal to others (Paulhus, 2001). Narcissism can be split into two different categories, grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism (Malesza & Kaczmarek, 2018). While these two categories share the baseline traits of narcissism, they are differentiated by several factors. Vulnerable narcissism is based on fragility. The narcissistic traits are a way of overcompensating for vulnerable narcissists. Grandiose narcissists come from the other side of this spectrum. They are very sure of themselves and do not need validation from others.

Machiavellianism is a term coined after a man named Niccolo Machiavelli. He was an Italian politician who was born in the late fifteenth century and lived through the beginning of the sixteenth century. Though his credentials and credibility were questionable, he wrote a book called “The Prince.” This book encompassed his ideals on how to reach the top. Consistent with the time, the book was aimed at Princes. The ideologies included in the book were very cynical

and included amoral manipulation tactics. His overall view of achieving success included doing whatever you need to reach the top regardless of what effect that might have on others. The book was a very dark manifesto intended to guide others in the same manner (Dahling et al., 2009). Machiavellianism as a personality construct was developed based on extremist leaders. It is characterized by cold and calculated actions. There are eight general traits and behaviors associated with this personality construct.

The eight traits of Machiavellianism include defection, influence tactics, occupational choice, economic opportunism, leadership, job satisfaction and helping behaviors (Dahling et al., 2009). In order to steer clear of backlash, those high in Machiavellianism tend to defect from groups they have exploited. Influence tactics are employed by a Machiavellian in order to raise their social status. Raising this status results in more power and control. Those high in Machiavellianism tend to work in jobs that involve management or jobs in the field of law (Dahling et al., 2009). Economic opportunism is often present in those with Machiavellianism and is categorized as the boosting of personal financial gain without the consideration of others. Those high in Machiavellianism tend to have status in leadership, however, they may not be very good leaders (Dahling et al., 2009). Job satisfaction is found to be negatively correlated with Machiavellianism. Finally, those high in Machiavellianism are not very keen on helping others (Dahling et al., 2009).

Impulsivity is characterized as sudden action with little to no thought involved with a desire for instant gratification (Tomko et al., 2014). This construct is present in many factors of personality pathology. Lack of perseverance, lack of premeditation, negative urgency, and sensation seeking behaviors are all a part of impulsivity (Glover et al., 2012). A lack of perseverance is characterized by an inclination to cast aside goals when they get stale. Lack of

premeditation is characterized by action with a lack of planning. When negative affect is present, those with negative urgency are prone to act irrationally. Sensation seeking behaviors involve any experience that results in an adrenalin rush. Impulsivity is not a diagnosable construct; it is merely a personality construct that can be assessed using general personality traits (Whiteside & Lynam, 2001).

Previous research on the relationship between Dark Triad constructs and impulsivity have come up with intriguing results. Malesza and Kalinowski (2021-A) used an Ecological Momentary Assessment approach to assess these variables. They first hypothesized that using the smartphone to collect data would hold the same validity as other collection methods. Second, they hypothesized that impulsivity would be related with narcissism and psychopathy. Third, they did not expect to find any relationship between impulsivity and the Dark Triad construct of Machiavellianism. Fourth, they hypothesized that males would be more impulsive than females (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-A). A smaller version of the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale was used to assess psychopathy. The thirty items assessed this construct using a five point likert scale. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory was also used. This forty item scale used two statements for every question and participants chose which one suited them best. For Machiavellianism, the twenty item MACH-IV was utilized. This measure assessed the construct using a six point likert scale. Impulsivity was assessed using the forty-eight item Discounting Inventory. This study used four point likert scales. A Traditional Delay Discounting Task and an Ecological Momentary Assessment of Impulsivity were also used (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-A).

Two hundred and eighty-three college students participated in this study. There was no history of mental illness in this sample. Upon receipt of informed consent, all of the participants

completed all of the measures. Confirming their hypothesis, they found that impulsivity was strongly related with psychopathy and narcissism. Machiavellianism had a small correlation with impulsivity. Self Report Impulsivity had the strongest correlation with Psychopathy. For the delayed Discounting task, those high in narcissism were more likely to choose the higher delayed reward than the smaller immediate reward. Psychopathy and narcissism were both associated with those high in impulsivity based on the Ecological Momentary Assessment measure. Men were higher in psychopathy and narcissism and higher in impulsivity according to the self report impulsivity measure. There were no gender differences in impulsivity based on the Ecological Momentary Assessment measure. Between the three constructs, Machiavellianism and narcissism correlated the least. Narcissism and Machiavellianism were both correlated with psychopathy (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-A).

Malesza and Kalinowski (2021-B) also conducted a study examining the potential relationship between the constructs of the Dark Triad with impulsivity. However, this study incorporated a measure for willingness to share. The researchers first hypothesized that those high in psychopathy will also have a high delay discounting score indicating impulsivity. They expected to find no correlation between Machiavellianism and willingness to share, but a high correlation between Machiavellianism and behavioral impulsivity. Third, the researchers hypothesized that those high in narcissism will have high behavioral impulsivity and low willingness to share (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-B). Two hundred and eighty-four participants were recruited from a population of German college students. The procedures of this study included the Short Dark Triad, and Delay and Social Discounting measures (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-B). The results of this study indicated that high social discounting was negatively correlated with both psychopathy and Machiavellianism. This indicates low

willingness to share and high selfishness. Those high in narcissism actually had an opposite effect. Willingness to share was positively correlated with this construct. Narcissism and psychopathy were both strongly related with behavioral impulsivity, Machiavellianism was not (Malesza & Kalinowski, 2021-B).

The current study used existing data from college students at Oklahoma State University. First, the researchers expected to find a statistically significant relationship between psychopathy and impulsivity. Second, they expected to find a less apparent, but still significant relationship between narcissism and impulsivity. Finally, we expect to find no relationship between impulsivity and Machiavellianism.

Method

Participants

This study is based on existing data collected from studies done in the lab of Personality and Psychopathology at Oklahoma State University. Of the studies, course credit was offered to a population of undergraduate students majoring in psychology at a university in the Midwest. Recruitment was done through email with a remote hyperlink. The final sample included 163 students working at least twenty hours a week. The average age of the sample was roughly 20 years old with a standard deviation of four years. Most of the sample was female at 71.80%. 74.80% of the sample was caucasian. 8.60% were of Native American or Alaskan Native descent. Black and/or African Americans accounted for 6.10% of the sample. 2.50% of the sample was made up of Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanica also accounted for 2.50% of the sample population (DeShong et al., 2017).

Measures

Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010). The Dirty Dozen is a self report questionnaire made up of twelve, nine point likert scale questions (Dirty Dozen, Jonason & Webster, 2010). This assesses the elements of the Dark Triad. The development of this scale involved a combination of four separate studies. The first three studies assessed different elements of the Dirty Dozen scale, and the fourth assessed the scale itself. These studies tested the validity of this measure through examination of its discriminant validity, convergent validity, and structural reliability (Jonason & Webster, 2010). The first study consisted of a sample of two hundred and seventy three people recruited from a university in the United States. Big five personality aspects were assessed on a five point likert scale. A forty item NPI was used to assess Narcissistic traits. Assessment of psychopathy involved a thirty-one item self report scale. The twenty item Mach-

IV scale was used to assess Machiavellianism. The first study also included a measure for Sociosexuality. The second study involved roughly the same sample size as the first, and came from the same demographic. This study involved measures of The Big Five, Sociosexuality, and Global Self Esteem. The third study consisted of a sample of ninety-six psychology students. The measures used in this study all involved collecting answers on a nine point likert scale. Self esteem and aggression were tested in this study. The fourth study involved four hundred and seventy undergraduate students majoring in psychology. This study assessed the final Dirty Dozen Scale. The results of these studies collectively validated the Dirty Dozen Measure for Dark Triad Traits (Jonason & Webster, 2010), finding internal consistency of .78.

Elemental Psychopathy Assessment (Lynam et al., 2011). The Elemental Psychopathy Assessment is a self report questionnaire made up of one hundred and seventy eight five point likert scale questions (Elemental Psychopathy Assessment, Lynam et al., 2011). The validity of this personality assessment was tested by conducting two studies. With a sample size of nine hundred and seven people, the first study assessed narcissism and psychopathy. The sample was collected from a population of students at three major universities. The measures included Levenson's Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson et al., 1995), Psychopathic Personality Inventory–Revised (Lilienfeld & Widows, 2005), Self-Report Psychopathy Scale: Version III (Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007), and the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The second study involved participants recruited from a state prison. The final sample included seventy inmates. Along with the Elemental Psychopathy Assessment, measures included The Crime and Analogous Behavior Scale (Lynam, Whiteside, & Jones, 1999) and the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale: Version III (Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007). The data on

disciplinary infractions was also collected. This new scale for assessing psychopathic traits on a smaller scale was validated by the aforementioned studies (Lynam et al., 2011).

Five Factor Narcissism Inventory (Glover et al., 2012). The Five Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI) is a self report questionnaire made up of one hundred and thirty, five point likert scale questions that assess narcissistic personality traits (Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory, Glover et al., 2012). Research was conducted to validate this assessment. The sample included four hundred and twelve students of an introduction to psychology course at a university in Kentucky. The FFNI originally consisted of three hundred and ninety Likert scale items. This assessment was modified and now includes fifteen different subscales. This study consisted of assessing this measure against other validated Narcissism measures. These measures included the NEO Personality Inventory–Revised (Costa & McCrae, 1992), the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory–III (Millon et al., 2009), the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988), the OMNI Personality Inventory–IV (Loranger, 2001), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory–2 (Morey et al., 1985), the Schedule for Nonadaptive and Adaptive Personality (Simms & Clark, 2006), the Hypersensitivity Narcissism Scale (Hendin & Cheek, 1997), the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (Pincus et al., 2009), the Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire (Bagby & Farvolden, 2004), and a validity scale. Convergent validity was found between the six narcissism scales and reactive anger, manipulativeness, lack of empathy, grandiosity, arrogance, exploitativeness and entitlement. However, consistent correlation was not found between acclaim-seeking, exhibitionism, and authoritativeness. Even so, the results of this study validated the FFNI personality measure.

Mach-IV Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970). The Mach-IV Scale assesses Machiavellianism through a twenty item measure of seven point likert scale questions (Christie & Geis, 1970).

Participants rated items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). DeShong et al. (2017) found internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.71$.

NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-PI-R is a 240-item measure that assesses five domains and 30 facets of the FFM. Participants rated items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). In DeShong et al., domain internal consistency ranged from 0.83 (openness to experience) to 0.93 (conscientiousness).

Machiavellianism Personality Scale (Dahling et al., 2009). The Machiavellianism Personality Scale is a 16 item scale made up of five point likert scale questions assessing Machiavellianism (Machiavellianism Personality Scale, Dahling, Whitaker, & Levy, 2009). Two separate studies were used to test the validity of this new personality measure. Previous research suggests internal consistency of .85 (DeShong et al., 2017).

Results

The results of this study indicate that facets of impulsivity related strongly with the constructs of the Dark Triad. Specifically, psychopathy as measured by the Dirty Dozen was strongly related with the impulsivity facets of low self discipline ($r=-0.273$, $p<.001$) and low deliberation ($r=-0.313$, $p<.001$). Similarly, EPA psychopathy was related with low self discipline ($r=-0.431$, $p<.001$) and low deliberation ($r=-0.557$, $p<.001$) as well as high excitement seeking ($r=0.326$, $p<.001$) and impulsiveness/negative urgency ($r=0.243$, $p<.01$). Dirty Dozen narcissism was only related with impulsiveness/negative urgency ($r=0.236$, $p<.01$), however FFNI was related with excitement seeking ($r=0.287$, $p<.01$). Dirty Dozen Machiavellianism was significantly related with excitement seeking ($r=0.206$, $p<.01$) and impulsiveness/negative urgency ($r=0.329$, $p<.001$) and was strongly negatively related with deliberation ($r=-0.303$, $p<.001$). Machiavellianism as measured by the Mach-IV was strongly related to impulsiveness/negative urgency ($r=0.211$, $p<.01$), and negatively related to self discipline ($r=-0.392$, $p<.001$) and deliberation ($r=-0.266$, $p<.001$).

Discussion

The Dark Triad is composed of three different personality constructs. These three constructs are Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. These constructs are commonly associated with risky, unwanted, and maladaptive behaviors. Impulsivity is also common among these personality constructs. Impulsivity is characterized by sudden action with little thought. Do the facets of the Dark Triad, combined with impulsivity, lead to risky or unwanted behaviors? This study aimed to explore this question.

Psychopathy is characterized by little to no remorse. Those who fit into this category tend to have no regard for others and are highly manipulative. These traits may prevent them from

forming human connections (DeShong et al., 2016). Narcissism is characterized by cold and self absorbed actions. This construct encompasses fifteen different traits including indifference, exhibitionism, a constant seeking of admiration, thrill seeking behaviors, grandiose fantasies, reactive anger, cynicism, entitlement, authoritativeness, seeking of acclaim, arrogance, lack of empathy, manipulative tendencies, exploitativeness, and a need to hide shame (Glover et al., 2012). Finally, Machiavellianism includes exploitative actions, influence tactics, and a lack of helping behaviors.

The first hypothesis was that psychopathy would have a significant relationship with impulsivity and the low self discipline and deliberation facets of impulsivity. The results indicated that psychopathy was strongly related with impulsiveness/negative urgency, excitement seeking, and the impulsivity facets of low deliberation and low self discipline. These results supported the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis was that narcissism would have a weaker, but still significant relationship with impulsivity and the low self discipline and deliberation facets of impulsivity. Narcissism was related with excitement seeking and impulsiveness/negative urgency. This hypothesis was supported.

Third, I hypothesized that Machiavellianism would have no relationship with impulsivity. Machiavellianism was strongly related with impulsiveness/negative urgency, and excitement seeking and was strongly negatively related with deliberation and self discipline. Thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

The results of this study are relatively consistent with previous research. Consistent with the results of Malesza and Kalinowski (2021-A), narcissism and psychopathy were both strongly related with impulsivity, however, inconsistent with their findings, our results indicated a

relationship between Machiavellianism and impulsivity. Also consistent with Malesza and Kalinowski (2021-B), impulsivity showed a strong correlation with psychopathy and narcissism. They also found no relationship between Machiavellianism and impulsivity. This was inconsistent with our findings.

A limitation of the current study was the use of the short measure of the Dark Triad. The Dirty Dozen was a primary measure used in this study. Recent research suggests that a twelve item scale may not adequately cover the entire personality construct (Miller et al., 2012). The Dirty Dozen measures each of the constructs with four questions. Miller et al. (2012) assessed the validity of this measure using a sample of eight hundred and sixty-four participants; seventy-five male inmates and seven hundred and eighty-nine college students. According to their findings, Dirty Dozen measures for psychopathy were consistent with longer counterparts, however, the correlations were not as large in the smaller scale. Researchers should be careful when testing psychopathy with the Dirty Dozen.

Three personality constructs were grouped together and given a novel name; The Dark Triad. This development sparked interest in this particular ensemble, which led to the development of short measures; The Short Dark Triad and The Dirty Dozen (Maples et al., 2014). Standard measures of personality constructs usually encompass anywhere around one hundred and twenty four items. These shorter measures only enlist twelve. This alone can damage the validity of an assessment. Maples et al. (2014) conducted a study to examine these measures. Two hundred and eighty-seven consenting participants completed the two measures in question. Criterion, discriminant, incremental and convergent validities were all being tested. The results indicated that the two shorter measures were indeed less valid than their longer counterparts. However, when a shorter measure is needed, The Short Dark Triad holds more

overall validity than The Dirty Dozen. Future research should use personality measures with higher validity.

A second limitation was the use of a relatively homogenous student sample. This sample limits the generalizability of the current results. Additionally, the diversity of the current sample was primarily female and white, further reducing the generalization of the current results. Future research should examine these relationships in a more diverse and relevant sample (e.g., community sample; incarcerated sample).

Conclusions

The current study set out to examine the relationship of the constructs of the Dark Triad with impulsivity personality traits. Across the board, each of these constructs was related to impulsivity traits, with psychopathy and Machiavellianism showing the strongest relationships. Future research should examine these questions with longer measures in more diverse samples outside of college students.

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Table 1.

Correlations of Facets of Impulsivity with constructs of the Dark Triad

	Ddnar	FFNI	Ddmach	MACHtot	Ddpsych	EPAtotal
neoe5	0.157	<u>0.287</u>	<u>0.206</u>	0.025	0.016	<u>0.326</u>
neon5	<u>0.236</u>	0.162	<u>0.329</u>	<u>0.211</u>	0.126	<u>0.243</u>
neoc5	-0.087	-0.07	-0.175	<u>-0.392</u>	<u>-0.273</u>	<u>-0.431</u>
neoc6	-0.091	-0.142	<u>-0.303</u>	<u>-0.266</u>	<u>-0.313</u>	<u>-0.557</u>
Ddnar		<u>0.447</u>	0.476	0.195	<u>0.26</u>	<u>0.251</u>
FFNI			<u>0.451</u>	<u>0.428</u>	<u>0.35</u>	<u>0.723</u>
Ddmach				0.324	<u>0.563</u>	<u>0.569</u>
MACHtot					<u>0.435</u>	<u>0.665</u>
Ddpsych						<u>0.625</u>

Note. Neoe 5 = excitement seeking; Neon 5 = impulsiveness; Neoc 5 = self discipline; Neoc 6 = deliberation;

Ddnar = Dirty Dozen Narcissism; FFNI = Five Factor Narcissism Inventory; DDMach = Dirty Dozen Machiavellianism; DDpsych = Dirty Dozen Psychopathy; EPAtotal = Elemental Psychopathy Assessment Total; MACHtot = MACH-IV.

underline p < 0.01

bold+underline p < 0.001