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Personality and Individual Differences 38 (2005) 1571–1582

PERSONALITY AND
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

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Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and Narcissism in the Five-Factor Model and the HEXACO model of personality structure ☆

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Received 19 March 2004; accepted 23 September 2004

Available online 2 December 2004

Abstract

We investigated the relations of the “Dark Triad” personality traits—Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and Narcissism—with the variables of the Five-Factor Model and the HEXACO model of personality structure. Results ($N = 164$) indicated that all three Dark Triad traits were strongly negatively correlated ($r_s = -0.72, -0.57, \text{ and } -0.53$, respectively) with the HEXACO Honesty–Humility factor. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism showed moderate negative correlations with Big Five Agreeableness ($r_s = -0.39$ and -0.44 , respectively), but Narcissism did not ($r = -0.04$). However, Narcissism correlated positively with Big Five Extraversion ($r = 0.46$) and HEXACO Extraversion ($r = 0.49$). Correlations among the Dark Triad variables were explained satisfactorily by the HEXACO variables, but not by the Five-Factor Model variables.

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Keywords: Psychopathy; Narcissism; Machiavellianism; Big five; HEXACO

☆ This research was supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Grants 410-2003-0946 and 410-2003-1835.

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1. Introduction

Socially aversive personality traits such as Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and Narcissism have been studied intensively in clinical and social psychology. Psychopathy refers to a pattern of callous, remorseless manipulation and exploitation of others, and has been investigated as a psychological cause of antisocial and criminal behaviours (Hare, 1991). Narcissism, which has been widely studied as a personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), has been conceptualized as a “normal” personality variable characterized by dominance, exhibitionism, and exploitation as well as feelings of superiority and entitlement (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Machiavellianism refers to individual differences in manipulativeness, insincerity, and callousness (Christie & Geis, 1970), and has been widely studied in social psychological investigations involving persuasion, leadership, and ethical behaviours. Although each of these three constructs may have some unique features not shared by the other two, they do appear to share some common elements such as exploitation, manipulativeness, and a grandiose sense of self-importance. Accordingly, Paulhus and Williams (2002) have called these three constructs the “Dark Triad” of personality, and we will use the same term here to refer collectively to the three traits.

Despite the voluminous literature on each of the Dark Triad constructs, they have not yet been fully understood in terms of a general framework of personality structure such as the Big Five or Five-Factor Model (e.g., Goldberg, 1993; McCrae, 1989; despite some minor differences between the Big Five and the Five-Factor Model, we will use the two names interchangeably). Thus far, global factor-level measures of the Big Five factors—known as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism (versus Emotional Stability), and Openness to Experience (or Intellect/Imagination)—have typically shown only moderate correlations with the Dark Triad traits (see Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The purpose of the present study is to delineate the Dark Triad constructs within two competing structural models of personality variation: the Five-Factor Model and a newly proposed framework known as the HEXACO model (Ashton et al., 2004; Lee & Ashton, 2004).

1.1. *The Dark Triad of personality and the Big Five Model*

Paulhus and Williams (2002) recently conducted a study to investigate the similarities and differences among the Dark Triad traits. In this study, self-report measures of the three variables were moderately intercorrelated ($r = 0.50$ for Psychopathy/Narcissism, $r = 0.31$ for Psychopathy/Machiavellianism, and $r = 0.25$ for Narcissism/Machiavellianism). The three constructs were further delineated in terms of their relations with the Big Five personality traits, intelligence, and some indices of self-enhancement. With respect to personality variables, results showed that only one Big Five factor—Agreeableness—was consistently correlated with all three of the Dark Triad personality traits. The sizes of the correlations, however, were modest ($r = -0.25$ for Psychopathy, $r = -0.47$ for Machiavellianism, and $r = -0.36$ for Narcissism).

The sizes of the correlations of the Dark Triad traits found with Agreeableness in Paulhus and Williams (2002) are too small to account for the observed correlations among the three variables. In other words, the pattern of covariation among the Dark Triad traits cannot be explained in terms of their correlations with the Big Five variables, and this fact might be considered a shortcoming of the Five-Factor Model. However, a new model of personality structure has recently

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