



The dark side of love and life satisfaction: Associations with intimate relationships, psychopathy and Machiavellianism

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ABSTRACT

This study examines, for the first time, the psychopathy subtypes and Machiavellianism in relation to life satisfaction and intimate relationships. Using structural equation modelling (SEM) in a male and female non-clinical sample, we investigated the degree to which primary psychopathy, secondary psychopathy, Machiavellianism, gender, sociosexual orientation and the relationship components of intimacy, commitment and passion, accounted for variance in life satisfaction. Results indicated that Machiavellianism was negatively associated with the relationship components. Unexpectedly, primary psychopathy was positively associated with the relationship components. Secondary psychopathy was negatively associated with life satisfaction and intimacy. Implications for the conceptualisation of “dark side” traits and their effects on inter- and intra-personal relations are considered.

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1. Introduction

Non-clinical psychopathy and Machiavellianism are personality traits with a particularly nefarious reputation; they are associated with callousness, manipulation, deception, egocentricity, emotional coldness, superficial charm and exploitation (e.g., Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007; Hare, 1991; McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). Research into aversive or “dark side” personality traits is burgeoning, with particular interest directed towards the emotional deficits endemic in non-clinical psychopathy and Machiavellianism, such as anxiety, emotion modulated startle response, emotion perception, empathy, aggression and emotional intelligence (e.g., Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009; Austin et al., 2007; Del Gaizo & Falkenbach, 2008).

Theoretically, psychopathy is dyadic as it consists of primary psychopathy and secondary psychopathy (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) and research has confirmed the heterogeneity of psychopathy (e.g., Blackburn, Logan, Donnelly, & Renwick, 2008), with primary psychopathy and secondary psychopathy thought to be distinguishable by negative affectivity (e.g., Brinkley, Newman, Widiger, & Lynam, 2004; Newman, MacCoon, Vaughn, & Sadeh, 2005). The Anti-social Personality Questionnaire (APQ; Blackburn & Fawcett, 1999) indicates that primary psychopathy is characterised by impulsivity, aggression, hostility, extraversion, self-confidence and low to average anxiety. Secondary psychopathy, like

primary psychopathy, is characterised by hostility, impulsivity and aggression, but unlike primary psychopathy, it is associated with social anxiety, introversion, moodiness and low self-esteem.

Psychopathy and Machiavellianism do not fare well in the interpersonal domain, as exemplified in the interpersonal circle structural model (see Leary, 1957; Wiggins, 1982), which consists of two dimensions, namely power/control (dominance vs. submission) and affiliation (hostility vs. nurturance). Psychopathy is represented by a hostile interpersonal style involving subtle forms of humiliating, retaliatory and critical interactions designed to inspire fear in others (Leary, 1957). Empirical research provides support for the associations between psychopathy and a hostile dominance interpersonal style (e.g., Blackburn, 1998; Kosson, Steuerwald, Forth, & Kirkhart, 1997). In relation to Machiavellianism, several studies indicate that high Machiavellianism scorers are high on dominance and low on affiliation (e.g., Gurtman, 1992; Locke & Christensen, 2007).

Life satisfaction has been positively associated with happy intimate relationships (e.g., Arrindell, van Nieuwenhuizen, & Luteijn, 2001) and successful intimate relationships tend to be characterised by high intimacy, passion and commitment (Sternberg, 1998). Considering the deficiency in affect and antagonistic behavioural style manifested in both psychopathy and Machiavellianism, it is unsurprising that these personality styles are associated with poor intimate relationship quality. Psychopathic traits (in clinical and non-clinical samples) are associated with relationship distress and breakdown (Han, Weed, & Butcher, 2003; Savard, Sabourin, & Lussier, 2006), infidelity (Egan & Angus, 2004), domestic violence (Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2003)

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and acts of sexual aggression (Hersh & Gray-Little, 1998). As stated by Ullrich, Farrington, and Coid (2008) 'lack of remorse, lack of empathy, and callousness are counterproductive for status and wealth and successful intimate relationships' (p. 1169).

Although much less research has examined Machiavellianism and intimate relationships, research indicates that Machiavellianism is associated with promiscuity, hostile sexual attitudes and various selfish and deceptive sexual tactics such as cheating, divulging intimate sexual secrets to others, feigning love, inducing intoxication to secure sex and an endorsement of using sexual force (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; McHoskey, 2001), though these effects seem to be attenuated or absent in females (McHoskey, 2001).

The current study examined life satisfaction in psychopathy and Machiavellianism; an area which so far has been neglected in the research literature. Potential differences between primary and secondary psychopathy in relation to life satisfaction have never been investigated, even though research has demonstrated that the two subtypes can be differentiated on the basis of affective experience (e.g., Blackburn, 2009). Because the quality of a relationship contributes to life satisfaction, the current study also expands research investigating maladaptive traits and intimate relationships by examining psychopathy and Machiavellianism alongside sexual strategy (sociosexual orientation) and the relationship components of intimacy, commitment and passion, in a non-clinical sample.

Research with non-clinical samples has found that despite lower base-rates, there is evidence for diverse expressions of psychopathic traits across the population (Skeem, Poythress, Edens, Lilienfeld, & Cale, 2003) and investigators (e.g., Lilienfeld, 1998; Williams & Paulhus, 2004) argue that research on non-clinical samples is necessary for findings to generalise to more individuals.

Most studies using self-report based measures of psychopathy and Machiavellianism suggest that males tend to score higher on these measures than females (e.g., Wilson, Frick, & Clements, 1999; Zágon & Jackson, 1994), although a few studies have shown no significant gender differences in self-reported psychopathy scores (e.g., Hamburger, Lilienfeld, & Hogben, 1996). Psychopathy and intimate relationship research tends to focus on males (e.g., Savard et al., 2006) yet assessing non-clinical psychopathy and Machiavellianism in females could enhance knowledge on the potential theoretical relevance of these traits in both genders. With regards to intimate relationships, past research has sometimes relied on one-dimensional global measures of psychopathy (e.g., Han et al., 2003; Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2003), which ignore potential differences between primary and secondary psychopathy.

The current study employed a mixed-gender, non-clinical and adult (non-student) sample to investigate life satisfaction and intimate relationships in primary psychopathy, secondary psychopathy and Machiavellianism. It was hypothesised that these dark traits would be negatively associated with the relationship components and satisfaction with life, but positively associated with a promiscuous sociosexual orientation. It was also hypothesised that the relationship components would be positively associated with greater life satisfaction. Finally, it was hypothesised that males would be positively associated with higher levels of these dark traits and a promiscuous sociosexual orientation.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The sample initially consisted of 297 individuals; however, 6 participants above 65 were removed from the data set as outliers. Therefore, in total 291 participants took part in this study; 58.1% were female (169) and 41.9% were male (122). The mean age of

the sample was 31 (range: 18–60 years). Participants were invited to participate in a web-based study investigating 'personality and relationships' open to individuals from all nations. The study was advertised on a popular psychology website through a blog written by the second author (apply to author for details). Before starting the survey participants were given information in an introductory web page that informed them of the aim of the study and all the relevant ethical issues. Participants completed the questionnaires without any time limit and were given the option of receiving feedback on their scores by email. The web-link remained active for 5 weeks. IP addresses were recorded to prevent multiple submissions and the data was loaded and stored automatically onto a spreadsheet, which was then transferred into SPSS v.16 for analyses. Evidence suggests that results obtained using internet methods are often consistent with the effects from studies using traditional methods (Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, & John, 2004).

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Mach-IV

Machiavellianism was assessed with the Mach-IV inventory (Christie & Geis, 1970), which has 20 items covering the use of deceit in interpersonal relationships, a cynical attitude to human nature and a lack of concern for conventional morality. Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of Machiavellianism. The reliability and the validity of the Mach-IV are well documented (e.g., Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992). In the present study the Cronbach's α was .86, showing good internal consistency.

2.2.2. Levenson self-report psychopathy scale (LSRP)

The LSRP scale (Levenson et al., 1995) is a 26-item self-report measure designed to assess psychopathic attributes in non-institutionalised samples and to evaluate both the behavioural and personality traits commonly associated with psychopathy in the literature. Levenson et al.'s (1995) analyses revealed a two-factor structure equivalent to the two factors of the "gold standard" of clinical psychopathy research, the Revised Psychopathy Checklist (PCL-R; Hare et al., 1990). The primary psychopathy scale consists of 16 items designed to assess the core personality features described by Cleckley (1988), such as being selfish, uncaring, and manipulative. It is related to Factor 1 of the PCL-R, while the secondary psychopathy scale is conceptually related more to PCL-R Factor 2 and consists of 10 items assessing anti-social behaviour, a self-defeating lifestyle, and impulsivity. Cronbach's α in the current study were .84 for the primary psychopathy scale and .72 for the secondary psychopathy scale. The LSRP has demonstrated reliability (Brinkley, Schmitt, Smith, & Newman, 2001) and divergent validity (McHoskey et al., 1998) and was used in this study because it is specifically designed to assess primary and secondary psychopathy. For the present sample Cronbach's α was .88 for the primary psychopathy scale and .74 for the secondary psychopathy scale.

2.2.3. Sociosexual orientation inventory (SOI)

The SOI (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) is a 7-item self-report measure of individual differences in human mating strategies. Higher scores reflect a more unrestricted sociosexual orientation (individuals are more likely to engage in sexual relations in the absence of love and commitment) and lower scores reflect a more restricted orientation (individuals are less likely to engage in sexual relations in the absence of love and commitment). The SOI has demonstrated both discriminant and convergent validity (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). Cronbach's α in the current study was .62.

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