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Differential infidelity patterns among the Dark Triad

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ABSTRACT

The Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) are overlapping but distinctive. Although all three traits have been independently linked to relationship infidelity, differences among the traits may exist when examined simultaneously. Moreover, consequences resulting from infidelity have not been explored. A large retrospective survey found that all three traits correlated with reporting an infidelity at some point in a current (or most recent) relationship. Among women, however, only psychopathy and Machiavellianism were unique predictors of infidelity, whereas only psychopathy uniquely predicted infidelity among men. However, infidelity committed by psychopathic individuals led to relationship dissolution, whereas infidelity committed by Machiavellian individuals did not. These findings suggest mindset and long-term goals impact situations to create differences in Dark Triad destructive relationship behaviors.

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1. Introduction

The Dark Triad consists of three overlapping but empirically and conceptually distinguishable personality traits (psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism), which are prone to engage in malevolent behavior (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Note that all three variables are investigated presently in their subclinical form, as found in non-institutionalized samples (LeBreton, Binning, & Adorno, 2005). In such samples, the Dark Triad variables are normally distributed (Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007). Conceptually, the Dark Triad traits share the same location in interpersonal space, which is high agency and low communion (Jones & Paulhus, 2011a). In addition, all Dark Triad traits are callous and manipulative (Jones & Figueredo, *in press*). Importantly, Jones and Figueredo (*in press*) also found that once callous-manipulation was extracted from the core of the Dark Triad traits, they were almost completely unrelated.

The common core of the Dark Triad has been linked to short-term sexual relationships (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). For example, callous personality traits (e.g., disagreeableness, psychoticism) are associated with high rates of sexual activity and infidelity (Eysenck, 1976; Schmitt, 2004a). Callousness is related to short-term sexual encounters because individuals are unconcerned with hurting others or forming long-term bonds (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013). In addition, manipulative behaviors and dishonesty also seem to facilitate

short-term sexual approaches through mechanisms such as insincere commitment, feigned mate value, and other forms of sexual deception (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Seto, Khattar, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 1997; Tooke & Camire, 1991). Many individuals (particularly women) tend to be attracted to individuals with high levels of dominance and traces of antisocial tendencies (Holtzman & Strube, 2013; Holtzman & Strube, 2010).

Despite their common manipulation and callousness, the Dark Triad traits are unique (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). For example, Machiavellians are long-term oriented (Jones & Paulhus, 2009), developmentally sensitive to contextual cues (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008), difficult to provoke into aggression (Jones & Paulhus, 2010), have intact executive functioning (Jones, *in press*) and are instrumental in misbehavior (Kerig & Stellwagen, 2010). Additionally, Machiavellians will only steal when there is little chance of getting caught (Cooper & Peterson, 1980), cheat in strategic ways (Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2010), and exert effort to resist cheating when short-term goals undermine long-term investments (Jones, *in press*). These distinguishing features of Machiavellianism should also be evident in how they approach relationships. Machiavellian individuals are prone to infidelity (McHoskey, 2001), but should use caution in how they execute affairs. In sum, Machiavellian individuals will manage partners and interlopers in a way that is maximally advantageous to their selfish goals.

By contrast, those high in psychopathy are highly aggressive (Reidy, Zeichner, & Martinez, 2008), steal even when the payoff is small and risk is large (Hare, 1999), and cheat in impulsive ways (Jones, 2013; Williams et al., 2010). As a result, psychopathic individuals will be indiscriminately unfaithful, undermining

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self-interests. Like psychopathy, those high in narcissism are easy to provoke into aggression, but only when the provocation constitutes an ego-threat (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Jones & Paulhus, 2010). Those high in narcissism are also irrational when it comes to their self-image (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), often engaging in self-destructive behavior (Vazire & Funder, 2006).

2. Infidelity

In spite of its destructive impact on both partners and the relationship between them, infidelity remains commonplace. Although often symptomatic of a larger relationship problem (Weeks, Gambescia, & Jenkins, 2003), the persistence of sexual infidelity also may implicate a deeper reproductive drive (Simpson & Belsky, 2008). Specifically, some individuals seem to be predisposed to infidelity regardless of their relationship satisfaction (Weeks et al., 2003). Schmitt (2004b) found that personality correlates of infidelity include callousness, antisocial dispositions, and a lack of empathy. Given their callous-manipulative tendencies, it is not surprising that the Dark Triad traits have each been correlated with committing infidelity, or at least the intention to do so (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Harris, Rice, Hilton, Lalumiere, & Quinsey, 2007; McHoskey, 2001).

In addition to the common core, psychopathic impulsivity (Newman, 1987) most likely contributes to infidelity, as would narcissistic entitlement (Emmons, 1987). In addition, narcissism is associated with relationship dissatisfaction (Campbell & Foster, 2002) which is predictive of infidelity as well (Weeks et al., 2003). Partners of narcissistic individuals never live up to expectations (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006), leading narcissistic individuals to seek alternatives (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Furthermore, individuals high in narcissism tend to be impulsive in an overconfident way (Jones & Paulhus, 2011b) and self-destructive (Vazire & Funder, 2006), just like those high in psychopathy (Cleckley, 1976; Hare, 1999). As a result, both traits are likely correlated with extradyadic behavior.

Many individuals engaging in infidelity fully intend to maintain their primary relationships simultaneously. Evolutionary psychologists argue that this form of infidelity is often linked to a hedge-betting strategy, the goal of which is to provide a diversified genetic profile of one's offspring (Belsky, Steinberg, & Draper, 1991). Individuals trying to maintain a primary relationship yet also have sexual or romantic affairs must be strategic. If maintaining the primary relationship is important to the unfaithful partner, then indiscriminate pursuits of risky affairs is an unlikely strategy. Instead, such individuals would opt for a strategy of secrecy and selectivity of a few calculated partners.

Secrecy and forethought are characteristics that are consistent with the Machiavellian disposition. Because of their strategic planning, individuals high in Machiavellianism have the impulse control (Jones & Paulhus, 2011b) and calculating nature (Williams et al., 2010) necessary to deceive while reducing the likelihood of consequences. In other words, Machiavellian individuals should be most likely to be able to commit infidelity yet do so in a manner without undermining a primary relationship.

In addition, Machiavellian individuals take situational issues into account when engaging in misbehavior (Cooper & Peterson, 1980). If Machiavellian individuals do commit infidelity, it is likely to be for strategic reasons not impulsive ones (Jones & Paulhus, 2011b). For example, among women, one reason may be the cultivation of good genes from an interloping man and good resources from the primary investing partner (i.e., "gene capturing," Blobel, 1985). However, Machiavellian individuals are not impulsive, and are unlikely to engage in infidelity when consequences are likely or when future consequences are salient.

3. Theoretical summary

Given that all three traits of the Dark Triad are high in callousness and manipulative tendencies, it is likely that each type of individual will engage in infidelity. From a theoretical perspective, if narcissistic individuals are controlled by egotistical needs, Machiavellian individuals by long-term agendas, and psychopathic individuals by impulsive thrill-seeking, then each should engage in infidelity for different reasons. Most importantly, Machiavellian individuals should be flexible in their pursuit of infidelity. Machiavellian individuals think in the long-term and are unlikely to do things that would undermine their long-term goals (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). As a result, Machiavellian strategies are likely to fluctuate with situational constraints.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

A sample of 884 individuals were recruited from MTurk's website (457 men; 427 women; 60% Caucasian, 19% East Asian, 10% South Asian, 11% mixed ethnicities) for a study on "sexual behavior". No restrictions were included and the study was open to all MTurk workers. MTurk is a reliable data source that allows for greater diversity compared to student samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). The sample ranged in age from 18 to 74 (M age = 30.53, SD = 9.38) and 72% reported currently being in a romantic relationship.

4.2. Measures

All questions were presented online in an anonymous format. All scales utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*) unless otherwise noted. All appropriate items were reverse scored prior to being averaged into a composite.

4.2.1. Psychopathy

Psychopathy was assessed using the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP; Paulhus, Neumann, & Hare, in press). The 64-item SRP measures the four main facets of psychopathy, which are interpersonal manipulation (Cronbach's α = .87), callous affect (α = .77), erratic lifestyle (α = .80), and antisocial behavior (α = .81). SRP was also internally consistent as a composite (α = .93), and positively correlated with Machiavellianism (r = .57, p < .001) and narcissism (r = .48, p < .001).

4.2.2. Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism was assessed through the Mach-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970). The Mach-IV is a 20-item Likert style questionnaire. The Mach-IV was internally consistent (α = .79), and positively correlated with narcissism (r = .32, p < .001).

4.2.3. Narcissism

Narcissism was assessed using the 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16; Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). The NPI-16 questionnaire uses a forced choice format (2 = narcissistic option, 1 = non-narcissistic option), which was internally consistent (α = .74).

4.2.4. Infidelity

Participants were asked two questions with respect to infidelity: "Have you ever been unfaithful to your current (or most recent) partner?" and "Did the infidelity cause the end of the relationship?" Responses were scored "2" if they reported having committed an

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