



The Dark Triad, happiness and subjective well-being



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ABSTRACT

Narcissism can be expressed in grandiose or vulnerable forms. We examined whether positive psychological states (defined by the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) and the Diener Satisfaction With Life (SWL) scales) assisted differentiation relative to general personality traits and the “the Dark Triad” (psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, measured by the D12 and Short Dark Triad (SD3) indices) for 840 persons primarily from the UK, USA and Canada. The best fitting structural equation model comprised two latent variables, one of positive mood (comprising total scores on the OHI and SWL scales), and another forming a “dark dyad” of Machiavellianism and psychopathy (predicted by low agreeableness and lower positive mood), with narcissism regarded as a separate construct correlated with the dark dyad. Latent positive mood was primarily predicted by higher emotional stability and extraversion. Narcissism was predicted by lower emotional stability, lower agreeableness, and higher extraversion. Latent profile analysis identified four groups in the data: “unhappy but not narcissistic”, “vulnerable narcissism”, “happy non-narcissism” and “grandiose narcissism”. Our results suggest more problematic narcissism can be identified by reference to measures indexing positive mood states and general personality traits.

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1. The Dark Triad, happiness and subjective well-being

Narcissism differentiates into grandiose and vulnerable forms (Pincus & Lukowitski, 2010). Grandiose narcissists classically present as confident, self-centred, and other-oblivious, but can be wilful and exhibitionistic. Vulnerable narcissists are similar, but also hyper-sensitive and hostile. Vulnerable narcissists are interpersonally problematic, whereas grandiose narcissists can be highly effective leaders (Furnham, 2007). General non-antagonistic personality traits (for example, Agreeableness or low Neuroticism) and positive mood are moderating mechanisms that help differentiate narcissism (Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011). The current study further tests this notion, examining the degree to which personality traits and positive emotions such as happiness and subjective well-being differentiate narcissism, relative to Machiavellianism and psychopathy (collectively known as the Dark Triad), and how these general personality traits underlie the Dark Triad as measured by a new omnibus test of the construct.

Meta-analyses using the Five Factor Model of personality (FFM; McCrae & Costa, 1997) found Neuroticism (N) strongly predicts lower life satisfaction, less happiness, and more negative emotions,

whereas Agreeableness (A) and Extraversion (E) predict positive emotions (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). Antagonistic interpersonal behaviour is also predicted by personality; persons high in narcissism and Machiavellianism are more likely to disrupt the well-being of colleagues (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011; Kessler et al., 2010); and narcissistic aggression is underpinned by low A and E (Egan & Lewis, 2011). Vidal, Skeem, and Camp (2010) found persons in the community with higher secondary psychopathy (i.e., neurotic emotions concurrent with callous and grandiose traits) better at understanding subtle differences in the meanings of complex negative emotions (e.g., grief, depression, remorse, misery) than those with high primary psychopathy (characterised by callousness and fearless dominance). Similarly, Ali, Amorim, and Chamorro-Premuzic (2009) found persons with high primary psychopathy reported more positive emotions after viewing sad stimuli, whereas those with high secondary psychopathy experienced negative emotions even after viewing neutral stimuli. Del Gaizo and Falkenbach (2008) found persons with high primary psychopathy accurately recognised fearful facial expressions in others, experienced more positive emotions, and reported fewer negative emotions. Persons with greater secondary psychopathy were poor at recognising emotions in others, and experienced more negative emotions, perhaps because they were more absorbed in their own feelings.

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Emotions are often studied using negative constructs. However, positive emotional constructs such as subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) and happiness – the state of having enjoyable feelings and making positive judgements (Ryan & Deci, 2001) – are straightforward to measure, and help assess persons in a more rounded way. SWB and happiness are associated with greater physical and mental health, and with better relationships at work and in private lives (Argyle, 1987). The two constructs are not synonymous; while SWB is fundamental to happiness (Diener et al., 1999), happiness also involves social factors (Kashdan, 2004); for example, happiness is correlated with higher E (Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989).

Seeking to elaborate generic constructs associated with unpleasant dispositions, Paulhus and Williams (2002) examined the relationships between the Dark Triad and the FFM. They found that all components of the Dark Triad were negatively correlated with A; that narcissism correlated positively with E and Openness (O); that Machiavellianism and psychopathy correlated negatively with Conscientiousness (C); and that psychopathy was negatively correlated with N but positively correlated with E and O. Jakobwitz and Egan (2006) examined the Dark Triad, differentiating primary and secondary psychopathy. Their results confirmed the perennial correlation between the Dark Triad and A (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). Principal components analysis of Jakobwitz et al's data revealed that secondary psychopathy was distinct, in that narcissism, Machiavellianism, and primary psychopathy were negatively correlated with A, whereas secondary psychopathy was also associated with high N and low C. Similar results followed when Ross, Lutz, and Bailley (2004) mapped primary and secondary psychopathy onto the FFM. Narcissism differs from more obviously “dark” personality traits as it has “brighter” elements, and can be attractive interpersonally (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). We propose attractive aspects of potentially difficult personalities are identifiable using positive traits.

This study predicts that general personality traits and positive mood differentiate narcissism more than they do Machiavellianism and psychopathy, which are largely driven by low A. We test this proposition using a large sample and recruit beyond student cohorts, using multivariate statistics to strongly test the hypothesis.

2. Method and procedure

2.1. Participants

The study opportunistically recruited 861 persons via Facebook and a variety of online Internet-based research sites. All included participants were fluent English speakers, and aged 18 years or over. To optimise integrity of information, we asked participants to respond to an attentional probe question with an “agree” response part way through the survey, and elsewhere to respond likewise with “disagree”. This method identified 21 individuals who had not responded as requested, perhaps because they had not read the question correctly, responded randomly, or because they had a response set. When these 21 persons were excluded, the sample comprised 594 females and 246 males, mean participant age = 30.1 years ($SD = 12.7$). The mean years of education for the cohort was 15.0 ($SD = 3.8$), although 216 (25.7%) had 12 or fewer years of education, and so were unlikely to have a degree. Persons were recruited from the UK (375), the USA (306), Europe (70), Asia (42), Canada (30), Australasia (9), and Africa (8). Of the cohort, 441 (52.5%) were currently in a relationship, while 399 (28.5%) were single. As only 27 participants had prior criminal convictions, testing for forensic effects was unrealistic.

2.2. Materials

1. The International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), The IPIP (Goldberg, 1999) is a public domain measure of the Big Five personality dimensions; the version used in this study contained fifty statements (IPIP-50), requiring participants to indicate on a five-point scale how accurately each statement applied to their own personality. Responding ranges from 1 (“nothing like me”) to 5 (“very much like me”). Ten statements corresponded to each personality trait with some statements being reverse-keyed to avoid response set bias. Goldberg (1999) reports the mean reliability for each of the 5 scales to be 0.84. Gow, Whiteman, Pattie, and Deary (2005) found the factor structure of the IPIP dimensions were very much equivalent to those assessed by the NEO-family of instruments, although the N dimension is inverted and called Emotional Stability (ES), and the O dimension is re-named Intellect (I). Egan and Taylor (2010) found the internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for a UK sample satisfactory; $E = 0.84$; $A = 0.76$; $C = 0.77$, $ES = 0.87$, and $I = 0.73$.
2. The Short Dark Triad questionnaire (SD3). Jones and Paulhus (2013) describe a brief 27-item measure of Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism, all of which have 9-item scales. Responding is made to a proposition on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (“disagree strongly”) to 5 (“agree strongly”). The factor structure was clear, and the scales reliable; Machiavellianism $\alpha = 0.75$; psychopathy $\alpha = 0.72$; and narcissism $\alpha = 0.73$ (Jones & Paulhus, 2013).
3. The Dirty Dozen Scale (D12). The “dirty dozen” test (Jonason & Webster, 2010) comprises 12 items to briefly measure the Dark Triad. Each item comprises a proposition which is rated on a 5-point scale from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Internal (test–retest) reliabilities for the two Machiavellian items are $\alpha = 0.79$ (0.89), six psychopathy items $\alpha = 0.77$ (0.74), and four narcissism items are $\alpha = 0.88$ (0.84).
4. Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). The OHI (Argyle et al., 1989) is a 29-item scale used to measure happiness in non-clinical populations. Responses are scored on a 6-point scale, with responses ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 6 (“strongly agree”). The scale has an overall internal reliability of 0.91, with subscales being also reliable; mastery (0.80), satisfaction (0.81), social cheerfulness (0.74), vigour (0.67), and social interest (0.65) (Meleddu, Guicciardi, Scalas, & Fadda, 2012).
5. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a brief (5-item), highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.87$, test–retest reliability = 0.82) and well-validated measure of positive emotions. Persons respond to a proposition on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”).

In all cases, a higher scores on the measured construct indicated greater endorsement of the given trait.

2.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited online via a variety of social networking web sites, accruing responses via a variety of initiating Facebook pages, University bulletin boards, and the Hanover online Psychological research page. Participants were informed of the nature of the study and those who wished to take part consented online. Subjects then completed a brief series of questions describing their age, gender, education, nationality, marital status, and whether they had prior convictions. The full survey comprised 124 questions.

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