



## The relation between antisocial personality and the perceived ability to deceive

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### ABSTRACT

The current study investigated relations between the perceived ability to deceive and the Dark Triad personality traits in two samples. In study 1, the sample consisted of 1074 participants (329 male, 745 female) aged 17–71 years ( $M = 22.96$ ,  $SD = 6.92$ ). Participants completed the perceived ability to deceive scale, in which they were asked to estimate the percentage of people who are worse at lying than they are in a number of situations. Participants also completed the Short-D3 – a measure of the Dark Triad personality traits. As expected, correlational analyses demonstrated that Machiavellianism was most highly correlated with the perceived ability to deceive ( $r = .41$ ), followed by psychopathy ( $r = .35$ ), and narcissism ( $r = .33$ ). These findings were replicated in study 2, which consisted of 1448 undergraduate students (498 males, 947 females, 3 other), aged 18–43 ( $M = 18.35$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ). Study 2 also investigated the association of the Dark Triad and perceived ability to deceive with dimensions of the Big Five model of personality. Implications are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Antisocial behaviours are defined as socially aversive tendencies that challenge established cultural and ethical norms (Hott, 1979). They were first researched in clinical samples (Raskin & Hare, 1978); however, researchers have begun looking at subclinical levels of such traits in community samples (Takahashi, 2007). In particular, researchers have primarily focused on three traits in the investigation of such behaviours: Machiavellianism, which is characterized by manipulative and deceitful tendencies (Christie & Geis, 1970); narcissism, defined by feelings of grandiosity and excessive self-love (Raskin & Hall, 1981); and psychopathy, which reflects an impulsive and non-empathetic personality style (Hare, 1985).

#### 1.1. The Dark Triad of personality

Paulhus and Williams (2002) developed the Dark Triad personality trait cluster, which comprises Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, creating the Dark Triad. They found significant positive correlations between each of the traits, confirming the relatedness of the constructs. Numerous researchers have since replicated these findings to support the validity of this cluster of antisocial variables (Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Lee & Ashton, 2005). However, researchers have had difficulty incorporating the Dark Triad into traditional normative personality models.

Unexpectedly, the Dark Triad has shown inconsistent associations with each of the dimensions of the Big Five model. For example, Jakobwitz and Egan (2006) found that Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism were moderately negatively correlated with Agreeableness, while Machiavellianism and psychopathy were positively correlated with Neuroticism. Although Lee and Ashton (2005) did find that Agreeableness was negatively associated with Machiavellianism and psychopathy, they failed to find a significant relation between narcissism and Agreeableness. Rather, it was noted that narcissism exhibited a high positive correlation with Extraversion. Furthermore, a third investigation found that Machiavellianism and psychopathy were negatively correlated with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, while narcissism showed weak positive associations with Extraversion and Openness and weak negative relations with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Jonason & Webster, 2010).

These contradictory findings led Veselka, Schermer, and Vernon (2011) to investigate the relations between the Dark Triad and more specific facets of normal personality, as assessed by the Supernumerary Personality Inventory (SPI; Paunonen, 2002). The SPI measures 10 traits not captured by the traditional Big Five model: egotism, risk-taking, religiosity, femininity, integrity, humorousness, thriftiness, manipulativenness, seductiveness, and conventionality. Veselka et al. (2011) found moderate to high correlations in the expected direction between the Dark Triad traits and all of the SPI variables, with the exception of conventionality. These findings provided support for the validity of the Dark Triad by demonstrating that its three components do share common correlates when variables beyond the potentially limited Big Five model are considered. Such findings support the use of the Dark Triad in future studies of antisocial behaviour.

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## 1.2. Deception and the Dark Triad

Given that the Dark Triad captures a rather manipulative, deceitful, and self-confident personality style, it is not surprising that researchers have been interested in how these traits are associated with deception. In fact, researchers have found the Dark Triad traits to be significant predictors of scholastic cheating and plagiarism (Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2010).

Historically, researchers have focused on the association between deception and Machiavellianism, given that it is defined by manipulative and deceitful tendencies. Indeed, researchers have found positive associations between Machiavellianism and successful deception in laboratory tasks with university students (Geis & Moon, 1981). However, more recently, researchers have speculated that Machiavellianism is associated with some, but not all forms of lying.

Although lying is generally considered an undesirable and maladaptive behaviour, arguably there are situations in which lying could be beneficial (e.g., to avoid offending a friend or to prevent a fight). Interestingly, McLeod and Genereux (2008) found that Machiavellianism was a significant predictor of telling a lie for self-gain, but not for telling an altruistic lie, a lie to avoid conflict, or a lie for social acceptance. The fact that Machiavellianism was not associated with these 'positive' forms of lying further confirms that it may, in fact, represent a 'darker', aspect of personality.

Although it might seem intuitive to predict that psychopathic individuals would be better at deceiving others than their non-psychopathic counterparts, research actually indicates that the opposite is true. Klaver, Lee, Spidel, and Hart (2009) asked undergraduates to listen to true or false stories told by criminal offenders, and to rate which stories they believed to be true, as well as the credibility of the offender telling the story. It was found that psychopathic offenders were actually worse at successfully deceiving the students than non-psychopathic offenders, and that they were perceived as less credible. Therefore, although the stereotype exists that psychopathic individuals are charismatic and 'smooth-talkers' (Hare, 1985), they may actually be worse liars than non-psychopathic individuals. However, it is important to note that participants in the Klaver et al. (2009) study were told that some of the individuals were lying. As such, the participants may have been more cautious and skeptical about the offenders' stories. Arguably, this is much different than being lied to in an everyday conversation when a lie might not be expected.

Very little research has investigated the association between narcissism and the deception of others, with the exception of clinical-level research where narcissism has exhibited positive correlations with pathological lying, primarily for the purpose of self-enhancement (e.g., Ford, King, & Hollender, 1988). Given the overall minimal research on this subject, the present study sought to expand this literature by investigating the association between each of the Dark Triad traits, and a measure of individuals' perceived ability to deceive. The perceived ability to deceive scale (PATD) used here was originally created to predict faking and job performance in the workplace (Schneider & Goffin, 2012). It was selected for the present study because it allows participants to provide a subjective rating of their deception abilities. We felt this was an important construct to assess in relation to the Dark Triad, given the grandiose and inflated self-views that are associated with these traits. It was predicted that Machiavellianism would be most highly associated with the PATD, given that it captures such a cold, manipulative personality style. To investigate these relations we conducted a study of the Dark Triad, as measured by the Short-D3, and PATD in a large community sample. We then replicated these findings with a large sample of undergraduate students. In this second study we also assessed the domains of the Big Five

model in the hopes that we could clarify the relation between these constructs and the Dark Triad.

Additionally, previous researchers such as Lee and Ashton (2005) have attempted to identify what it is that the Dark Triad traits have in common. The present study will compute partial correlations to determine if perceived ability to deceive can account for the associations among the Dark Triad variables.

## 2. Study 1: method

### 2.1. Participants

The sample for study 1 consisted of 1074 participants from the London, Ontario community and surrounding area (329 males, 745 females), aged 17 to 71 years ( $M = 22.96$ ,  $SD = 6.92$ ). Participants were recruited via posters on the University of Western Ontario campus, emails sent to students randomly selected from the UWO Student Email Directory, Facebook, local newspapers, and as partial credit for a course requirement for first year psychology students. Upon completion of the study participants were either entered into a draw for the chance to win one of 15 \$100 prizes, or they were granted partial credit for their course requirement. Fluency in English was required for participation.

### 2.2. Materials and procedure

#### 2.2.1. Short-D3

The Short-D3 (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) is a concise measure of the Dark Triad traits. It consists of 27-items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Disagree Strongly*, 5 = *Agree Strongly*). The Short-D3 contains three subscales, assessing Machiavellianism ("It's not wise to tell your secrets."), narcissism ("People see me as a leader."), and psychopathy ("I like to get revenge on authorities."). Paulhus and Williams (2002) reported Cronbach's reliability alphas ranging from .73 to .80. As reported below, alphas in our sample were comparable to these values.

#### 2.2.2. Perceived ability to deceive (PATD)

The PATD (Schneider & Goffin, 2012) consists of two item formats: agree-disagree and relative judgments. Since the agree-disagree items were specific to lying in the workplace only relative-judgement items were used in the present study since they assessed deception in a broader range of situations. These items assess individuals' perception of their success at lying, relative to the average person. Participants give their relative judgment to eight statements on a scale from 0 to 100, in 10-point increments (e.g. "Please rate how good you would be at lying on a resume without getting caught."). Participants are provided with the anchors 0–30 = *Worse than Average Person*, 40–60 = *Average*, and 70–100 = *Better than Average Person*. Schneider and Goffin (2012) reported Cronbach's reliability alpha of .83. As reported below, alpha in our sample was even higher than this value.

### 2.3. Procedure

The present study was accessed by participants online via SurveyMonkey. Participants read the letter of information and were given the opportunity to contact the researchers with any questions. They then indicated their consent by clicking 'yes' to the statement: *I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, all questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate*. Participants then completed the Short-D3, PATD, and three additional questionnaires not relevant to the present study. Participants then read the debriefing

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