



The dark triad and relationship preferences: A replication and extension



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ABSTRACT

In a replication and extension of previous research demonstrating a connection between the dark triad (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) and relationship preferences, this study investigated the relationship using normative scales in an attempt to yield more accurate results. Two hundred and eighty nine undergraduate students completed a number of online questionnaires measuring the dark triad and relationship preferences. The dark triad was positively correlated with a preference for short-term relationships and negatively correlated with a preference for serious romantic relationships. Narcissism was positively correlated with a preference for “one-night-stands”, “booty-calls”, and “friends-with-benefits”, and not significantly correlated with a preference for serious romantic relationships. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism were both positively correlated with a preference for “one-night-stands”, “booty-calls”, and “friends-with-benefits”, and negatively correlated with a preference for serious romantic relationships. The results of this study suggest that the normative scales were useful in supporting the conclusion that the dark triad is related to a preference for short-term relationships, and that the traits can be used to predict people's relationship choices.

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1. Introduction

The “Dark Triad” – a cluster of three personality traits: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism – is something that everyone possesses to some degree. Narcissism is characterized by egotism, pride, and grandiosity (Kohut, 1977); psychopathy is distinguished by impulsivity and antisocial behavior (Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011); and Machiavellianism is identified by a manipulative, deceptive, and exploitative nature toward others (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006).

Research on the dark triad has become considerably more prominent in the last decade (Jonason & Webster, 2010). In the research that also focuses on relationships, the dark triad has consistently been found to be related to short-term relationship preferences (Baughman, Jonason, Veselka, & Vernon, 2014; Jonason & Buss, 2012; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). In these studies, however, researchers tend simply to compare long-term relationships and short-term relationships. This does not provide great insight into specific relationship patterns, strategies, and preferences that individuals may choose. The current study aims to investigate the connection between the dark triad traits and preferences for a number of relationship subtypes.

A number of researchers have made a connection between the dark triad and mating or relationship styles. For example, Jonason and Kavanagh (2010) correlated the dark triad with specific love styles in an international online study. They found that individuals who scored

higher on the dark triad had *ludus* and *pragma* love styles. A *ludus* love style describes a game-playing mating strategy, where the individual seeks to play “the game of love” with multiple partners. In contrast, a *pragma* love style describes a cerebral mating strategy, where the individual uses mates for their own gains, and “thinks with their head rather than their heart”. Jonason and Kavanagh's (2010) study sets a foundation in understanding that individuals who have higher levels of the dark triad traits maintain short-term mating styles by avoiding becoming emotionally connected. It also reinforces the idea that the dark triad is associated with a preference for short-term mating.

In related research, Jonason and Buss (2012) conducted two studies on the dark triad and short-term mating strategies. The first study examined how individuals avoid entangling commitments (unwanted, encumbering relationships) in the context of short-term mating, and the second study reported positive correlations between these tactics and the dark triad traits and sociosexuality. This finding is particularly important for the current study as it reaffirms the basis on which the study develops its main focus – that the dark triad is associated with a preference for short-term relationships.

In another study, Jonason et al. (2011) examined the relationship between the dark triad and mating standards and preferences, using a budget-allocation task to correlate the dark triad traits with long-term and short-term mate preferences. This study revealed that individuals who scored higher on the dark triad had lower standards for short-term mates, which likely widens their selection of prospective mates. As well, individuals who scored higher on the dark triad selected mates based on self-interest, assortative mating, or a preference for volatile environments. Again, this research gives insight into the mating

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preferences, strategies, and rationale of individuals who score higher on the dark triad, and confirms that these individuals prefer to seek short-term relationships.

Jonason, Luevano, and Adams (2012) sought to relate the dark triad and mating preferences in a more thorough manner, using relationship subtypes and a budget-allocation task. Their results showed that the dark triad traits were positively correlated with a preference for short-term relationships and negatively correlated with a preference for long-term relationships. Specifically, narcissism was positively correlated with a preference for one-night stands and friends-with-benefits, psychopathy was positively correlated with booty-calls, and Machiavellianism did not predict any type of relationship preference. Narcissism and psychopathy were also both negatively correlated with a preference for serious romantic relationships.

The current study is a replication and an extension of Jonason et al. (2012). Similar to their study, the current study examines the connection between the dark triad and relationship preferences, using four relationship subtypes: one-night stands, booty-calls, friends-with-benefits, and serious romantic relationships. Our study, however, extends previous research by using normative scales rather than a budget-allocation task, which can produce ipsative results in correlational studies (Jonason et al., 2012); our normative scales are expected to yield more accurate results.

The four relationship subtypes used in the present study are defined in the same manner that they were in Jonason et al., 2012. Serious romantic relationships – defined as those that are committed and monogamous – were contrasted with three short-term relationship subtypes: one-night-stands – sexual relationships that occur one time only; friends-with-benefits – relationships between friends in which the two people engage in sexual activities but do not define their relationship as romantic; and booty-calls – relationships in which there is solicitation from a non-long-term partner for the explicit or implicit intent of engaging in sexual activity (Jonason et al., 2012).

Since narcissism is characterized by egotism, pride, and grandiosity, it was expected that participants who score higher on narcissism would seek a greater range of relationships and would therefore be positively correlated with one night stands, friends-with-benefits, and booty-calls and not correlated with long-term serious romantic relationships. Because psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity and antisocial behavior we predict that it will be positively correlated with booty-calls and one-night stands. Psychopathy is not expected to be significantly correlated with friends-with-benefits, since social behavior would be required, and we also expect psychopathy to be negatively correlated with serious romantic relationships, because these would go against the impulsive and antisocial nature of the individual. Finally, we predict that Machiavellianism will be positively correlated with booty-calls, since these would be consistent with the manipulative, deceptive, and exploitative nature of Machiavellians. We do not expect Machiavellianism to have a significant correlation with friends-with-benefits, because Machiavellians are unlikely to engage in long-term friendships, and to be negatively correlated with a preference for serious romantic relationships for the same reason.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 289 university students (150 female, 120 male, 3 “other”, and 2 unspecified) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. They ranged in age from 18 to 26 years ($M = 18.49$, $SD = .98$). Participants were eligible for the study if they were over 18 and spoke English fluently. Participants were recruited using an online platform where they could sign up for different studies as part of a course requirement. Participants completed the study online and received course credit for their participation.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Demographics

Participants completed a demographic survey asking them to indicate their gender and their age.

2.2.2. Sociosexuality

Sociosexuality was assessed using a modified version of the revised Sociosexual Inventory (SOI-R; Penke & Asendorp, 2008). The SOI-R has nine items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. For the first three items, participants were asked to indicate the number of different sexual partners they had been with (e.g., “With how many different partners have you had sex within the past 12 months?”). For the second three items, participants were asked to rate how they feel about different sexual relations (e.g., “Sex without love is OK.”). For the last three items, participants were asked to rate the frequency that they think about sexual relations (e.g., “How often do you have fantasies about having sex with someone you are not in a committed romantic relationship with?”). Four items were added to the SOI-R that were created for the current study, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. For these items, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they are currently seeking certain types of relationships (e.g., “I am currently seeking sexual relationships that occur one time only.”). These items were specific to either a serious romantic relationship or a short-term relationship subtype (i.e., one-night stand, booty-call, or friends-with-benefits), and were created to allow relationship preferences to be measured more accurately than in previous research.

2.2.3. Narcissism

Participants completed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-40; Raskin & Terry, 1988) which includes 40 items consisting of pairs of statements that the participant was asked to choose from, (e.g., “A. I have a natural talent for influencing people. B. I am not good at influencing people.”). One point was assigned to each response that matched the key provided and the points were added together to determine a final total score: higher scores indicate a higher level of narcissism.

2.2.4. Psychopathy

Participants completed the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (SRP; Paulhus, Neumann, & Hare, in press), which comprises 64 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Disagree Strongly*) to 5 (*Agree Strongly*). The sum of participants' scores on each item was used as a measure of their overall psychopathy score (after reverse coding where needed). Thus, a higher score indicates a higher level of psychopathy.

2.2.5. Machiavellianism

Participants completed the MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), which includes 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). Participants were asked to rate the items (e.g., “Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.”) based on how they feel about people. Participants were given a total score by adding together their scores on all of the items (after reverse coding as needed). Thus, a higher score indicates a higher level of Machiavellianism.

2.3. Procedure

Participants signed up for the study through an online platform. They first received a letter of information and provided informed consent by clicking on the link to the surveys. Participants were then linked to the questionnaires, which they filled out online, individually.

Participants first completed the demographic questionnaire. They were then asked to complete the SOI-R, the NPI-40 the SRP-III, and the MACH-IV in that order. After completing these questionnaires

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