



Untangling the concurrent influences of the Dark Triad, personality and mating effort on violence



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ABSTRACT

The Dark Triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy; DT) and mating effort are associated with anti-social behaviour, but these associations may build on underlying personality traits not specific to violence. The DT (measured using the SD3), the HEXACO personality scale, and a measure of mating effort were regressed onto a measure of self-reported violence as defined by an adapted version of the MacArthur Community Violence Screening Instrument in 305 adults recruited via an online survey. While simple correlation analyses found violence and mating effort both systematically associated with most personality and DT measures, regression suggested overall violence was specifically associated with younger age, lower agreeableness, and greater psychopathy ($R^2 = 0.32$, 95% confidence interval = 0.24 to 0.40); unprovoked violence was associated with greater psychopathy. These results suggest that when personality, the DT, and mating effort are considered simultaneously, antisocial personality variance falls out of mating effort and narcissism constructs, leaving a more parsimonious set of associates for aggression and violence. This study reiterates the importance of concurrently measuring basic disposition when examining factors genuinely underlying violence and aggression, and the centrality of psychopathy and low agreeableness to such behaviour.

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Many personality constructs predict antisocial, aggressive, and violent behaviour (Egan, 2011). One difficulty conceptualising these associations is that many personality indices themselves correlate with each other, creating 'jingle-jangle' effects that confound the true patterns of association (Kelley, 1927). In search of a less confounded personality-violence model, the current study unravels these patterns of candidate associations by measuring them simultaneously, enabling their concurrent associations to be tested.

The Dark Triad (DT) comprises three dimensions: psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathic individuals lack guilt, remorse and empathy, so while they may perceive the distress of others, they are not actually affected by the person's suffering, whereas uncontrolled secondary psychopaths may display poor behavioural inhibition, giving rise to more generalised anti-social acts (Glenn, Kurzban, & Raine, 2011). Machiavellianism is the social expression of selfishness,

manipulation and amoral thinking (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012), so can be seen as psychopathy expressed in the social domain. Austin, Farrelly, Black, and Moore (2007) found Machiavellian individuals were willing to use emotional manipulation to extort and gain benefits from others, and, given the opportunity, did so. The last dimension of the DT is narcissism. Although narcissistic individuals tend to be grandiose, have affectations of superiority, a sense of entitlement, and a need for attention met through the admiration of others, narcissism is nevertheless as the least socially aversive dimension of the DT (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012), perhaps because some expressions of narcissism may accurately reflect self-perceived competency and resilience (Egan, Chan, & Shorter, 2014).

Using a Five-Factor Model/Big Five framework, Paulhus and Williams (2002) found all three DT constructs correlated with agreeableness. Narcissism was also associated with openness and extraversion, while Machiavellianism and psychopathy were negatively associated with conscientiousness. Jakobwitz and Egan (2006), Egan et al. (2014), Pailing, Boon, and Egan (2014) and Egan, Hughes, and Palmer (2015) likewise found the more antisocial aspects of the DT underpinned by low agreeableness. Using the HEXACO model of personality (the Big Five plus Honesty–Humility) Lee and Ashton (2005) found Honesty–Humility and agreeableness both negatively correlated with all three DT constructs. This finding was also upheld by Kajonius and Dãderman (2014), who argued that the Honesty–Humility dimension captures a

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more conniving and self-serving trait than (low) agreeableness alone. Hilbig, Zettler, Leist, and Heydasch (2013) suggest that Honesty–Humility is a more active trait reflecting exploitation, which, in absence, is a characteristic shared by Machiavellianism and psychopathy.

A few studies have investigated the role of the DT and normal personality in relation to violence and other explicitly hostile behaviours, e.g., bullying (Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2012; Pailing et al., 2014). Anderson and Bushman (2002) define violence as “aggression that has extreme harm as its goal (e.g., death)” (p. 29). Meta-analysis suggested different personalities respond to differing provocations (Bettencourt, Talley, Benjamin, & Valentine, 2006), and this has been upheld by evidence: persons higher on the DT are more likely to engage in aggressive responses, with the nature of the provocation differentiating DT-aggression mechanisms; ego threats provoke narcissistic violence, whereas physical threats are taken to justify an exaggerated psychopathic response (Jones & Paulhus, 2010). Narcissistic violence is driven by subtle or social responses or challenges incommensurate to the reaction elicited (Lau & Marsee, 2013), whereas psychopathy and sadism are implicated in unprovoked aggression (Reidy, Zeichner, & Seibert, 2011).

Another concept sometimes linked to aggression and violence is mating effort. Mating effort is defined as “psychological effort put forth to obtain and guard short-term mates” (Rowe, Vazsonyi, & Figueredo, 1997, p. 105), and refers to the energy spent finding a partner with whom to engage in sexual activity (Quinsey, 2002). Jonason, Li, Webster, and Schmitt (2009) observed that persons with characteristics of the DT often seek multiple new mates, and engage in short term relationships. Rates of losing mates for these individuals are also higher, again resulting in a succession of short-term mate seeking (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010). Each part of the DT has distinctive influences on mating strategies. For example, narcissists prefer sexual partners who reflect well upon themselves, whereas psychopaths favour opportunism and impersonal sex (Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012). Once shared variance with psychopathy and narcissism is taken into account, Machiavellianism shows few unique effects on sexual behaviour. Egan and Angus (2004) found, irrespective of gender, persons more likely to engage in extramarital affairs also scored higher on a mating effort scale and to be more psychopathic. Primate mating effort often involves a display of actual or potential resources (Langergraber, Mitani, Watts, & Vigilant, 2013), and has been proposed to underlie much violent crime (Barber, 2009; Walsh, 2006). This view is plausible, as mating effort is substantially associated with delinquency (Charles & Egan, 2005), impulsiveness, deceitfulness, sensation-seeking (Walsh, 2006) and more aggressive mating strategies such as fighting with a potential competitor (Sichel, 2012). One way to test this notion is to measure criminal activity, mating effort, and personality traits simultaneously, and test empirically whether this is the case.

Mating effort is not inherently antisocial; humanity would not reproduce without persons seeking a mate, and more outgoing and audacious individuals are likely to be advantaged in this task. Nettle (2005) found extraverted individuals had a higher number of life-time sexual partners. For males, attracting a sexual partner often involves competition, sometimes resulting in acts of symbolic dominance that overcome or inhibit other potential rivals. Miller (2001) observed that men compete for women in many ways; some by displaying their physical attractiveness when participating in sport, others by demonstrating their intelligence through witty conversation. Female intrasexual competition tends to be more indirect Vaillancourt (2013), but also involves physical display and investment in appearance (Egan & McCorkindale, 2007). Thus, while brash social boldness is a marker for narcissism and short-term sexual strategies (Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013), being disagreeable may be less fundamental to mating effort, and mating effort may not be a genuine basis for aggression and violence relative to other dispositions.

This study examines the possibility that one can differentiate the DT's influence on violence by taking into account concurrent personality

and sexual strategy (indexed by mating effort). General personality traits are broader and more universal than the more focussed nature of the DT or mating effort, so should be seen as a foundation to such secondary concepts. Based on the repeated finding of low agreeableness underlying the DT, it was likewise hypothesised that low agreeableness would underlie scores on the DT, in particular psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Given prior research, we expected that psychopathy would be better associated with self-reported violent behaviour than Machiavellianism, and that narcissism would be unrelated to violence. Mating effort and narcissism are display behaviours, so one would therefore expect these constructs to be positively associated, driven by extroversion, and once their disagreeable and psychopathic variance is concurrently measured, unrelated with violence. In light of the previous literature, we expected unprovoked violence to be uniquely associated with psychopathy.

1. Method

1.1. Design

The current study was quantitative and correlational. The key outcome was self-reported violence, with the other measures being putative associates. A cross sectional method was adopted in order to gather participant's responses to the test scales in an online survey.

1.2. Participants

All participants were 18 and over. A power analysis conducted seeking a medium effect size with a significance level of 0.05. Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner and Lang (2009) suggested that a minimum of 160 participants were needed. In fact 402 participants responded, of whom 305 (75.9%) participants completed the entire survey (F:M = 169:135), mean age = 27.58 (SD = 10.39 years); 12.2% reported prior criminal convictions. Given our over-sampling, we increased the size of the significant effects sought to a minimum of $P < .01$.

1.3. Materials

The web-based survey used in this study consisted of 4 psychometric measures plus demographic information (age, gender, sexual orientation, and whether they have previously received any criminal convictions). The on-line survey initially greeted participants with information about the study, before persons gave informed consent and participated, the survey ending with a thanking debrief screen.

1.4. Measures

1.4.1. The Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014)

The SD3 was used to assess the DT constructs. This scale comprised 27 items, with 9 items measuring each of the three components. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale indicating the extent to which they agreed with the statement. Scoring ranged from ‘Strongly Disagree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Agree’ (5), with five items being reverse-scored. Jones and Paulhus (2014) reported internal alpha reliability scores of 0.71 for narcissism, 0.77 for Machiavellianism and 0.80 for psychopathy, demonstrating that the SD3 has a high level of internal consistency and reliability. Sample items are presented in the section on the MCVSI, below.

1.4.2. The HEXACO-PI-P (Lee & Ashton, 2006)

The HEXACO measures 6 dimensions of personality; Honesty–Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience, and is highly reliable. The shorter 60-item version of the scale was used. Participants responded on a 5 point Likert-scale indicating their level of agreeability with each item; 1 =

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