



The Dark Triad and the seven deadly sins

Livia Veselka*, Erica A. Giammarco, Philip A. Vernon

Department of Psychology, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada



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ABSTRACT

The present study reports on the development and validation of the Vices and Virtues Scales (VAVS), which assesses individual differences in the propensity to engage in the seven deadly sins. Item-level analyses, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted on two independent samples of adults. Results indicated that all items composing the scale are psychometrically sound, and some evidence was found in support of the measure's seven-factor structure. Further analyses of the VAVS subscales and the Dark Triad traits revealed significant positive correlations between nearly all traits assessed. Implications of these findings for the Dark Triad cluster and the overall comprehensiveness of contemporary personality frameworks are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been growing interest in subclinical forms of socially aversive behavior. A frontrunner in this research has been the Dark Triad, composing Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). In addition to offering a novel avenue of research, the Dark Triad has played a role in challenging the comprehensiveness of the Five Factor model (FFM)—the conventional framework of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Although the Dark Triad traits exhibit some significant correlations with the FFM (e.g., Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008), they demonstrate stronger and ultimately more compelling associations with personality variables not currently incorporated within the model. These variables include the Honesty-Humility factor of the HEXACO model (Ashton et al., 2004), as well as most of the ten traits assessed by the Supernumerary Personality Inventory (SPI; Paunonen & Jackson, 2000), many of which are, themselves, in line with contemporary definitions of socially malevolent behavior (e.g., Veselka, Schermer, & Vernon, 2011). These results support the suggestion that the FFM may not be able to account for the full range of individual differences that exist, particularly those that are antisocial in nature, and encourages further identification of sub-clinical antisocial traits that may be untapped by existing frameworks.

A promising candidate to consider in these future investigations is the collection of the capital vices, also known as the seven deadly

or cardinal sins. This group of constructs represents a list of self-destructive and other-destructive behaviours, as originally defined by the Catholic Church, and subsequently echoed in philosophical, scientific, and sociopolitical texts (e.g., Kristjánsson, 2013; Medina, 2000; Schimmel, 1997). Specifically, the capital vices (with their contrarian virtues) include: anger (patience), envy (kindness), gluttony (temperance), greed (charity), lust (chastity), pride (humility), and sloth (diligence). The inclusion of the virtues in considerations of the vices reflects both the Catholic notion that a lack of vice implies the presence of virtue (Bejczy, 2011), as well as the psychometric idea that personality traits are bipolar—defined by a positive pole, a negative pole, and a neutral point (Paunonen & Hong, *in press*). Given the relevance of the notion of sin to the sub-clinical realm of human functioning, studying these constructs in conjunction with the Dark Triad may be fruitful in assessments of personality models.

2. Deadly sins: defining features and correlates

Given that no valid measure of the sins has yet been developed, despite previous efforts to study the constructs (Backus, 1969; Capps, 1989; Nauta & Derckx, 2007), direct empirical assessments of these traits in conjunction with existing personality variables have not been conducted. However, a preliminary understanding of these constructs and their potential relations with other measures is possible if one examines research pertaining to each vice separately.

2.1. Anger

Anger is characterized by uncontrollable feelings of frustration, expressed internally in the form of vengeful thoughts, or outwardly

* Corresponding author. Address: Department of Psychology, Social Science Centre, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario N6A 5C2, Canada. Tel.: +1 519 661 2111x84050; fax: +1 519 661 3961.

E-mail address: lveselka@uwo.ca (L. Veselka).

as physical assault or verbal aggression (Lyman, 1989). In empirical investigations of related constructs, relevant traits have been linked to low Agreeableness in the FFM (Tremblay & Ewart, 2005), and to numerous traits characteristic of the SPI (e.g., Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008; Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000). These patterns of correlations reflect those exhibited by Dark Triad traits (Veselka et al., 2011). Some anger-related traits have also shown relations with Machiavellianism (Russell, 1974), narcissism (Vazire & Funder, 2006), and psychopathy (Falkenbach, Poythress, & Creevy, 2008).

2.2. Envy

Envy is defined by an overwhelming sense of resentment, where individuals wish for others to be deprived of the things that they themselves lack (Lyman, 1989). The few empirical investigations of envy that have been conducted have noted that the trait appears to be unrelated to the FFM (Wade & Walsch, 2008), suggesting that it exists beyond the traditional personality framework. In support of this suggestion, an inverse relation has been reported between jealousy and humility (Richards, 1992)—a variable characteristic of the Honesty-Humility HEXACO dimension that is not presently captured by the FFM. Relations have also been noted between envy and the traits of Machiavellianism (Vecchio, 2000) and narcissism (Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005).

2.3. Gluttony

Gluttony is characterized by overconsumption and overindulgence in the realms of food, alcohol, and drugs, as well as by extravagant spending (Miller, 1997). Traits relevant to this definition of gluttony have shown weak to non-existent associations with the FFM dimensions, but they have been linked to the negative pole of HEXACO's Honesty-Humility factor (Weller & Tikir, 2011). In previous work, the Dark Triad traits have also exhibited associations with overconsumption and materialism (Lee et al., 2012).

2.4. Greed

Greed comprises a tendency to manipulate and betray others for personal gain (Capps, 1989). Consequently, this vice strongly reflects the Machiavellianism factor of the Dark Triad (Christie & Geis, 1970). As previously noted, Machiavellianism has exhibited correlations with traits existing outside of the FFM (Veselka et al., 2011), as well as with the remaining two Dark Triad constructs of narcissism and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

2.5. Lust

Lust is characterized by overwhelming thoughts of a sexual nature and is often linked to promiscuity (e.g., Dodge, Reece, Cole, & Sandfort, 2004). Sexual promiscuity has been shown to exhibit low but significant correlations with nearly all dimensions of the FFM (Schmitt, 2004), but also with the SPI traits of risk-taking and low-religiosity (e.g., Ahrold, Farmer, Trapnell, & Meston, 2011). Seductiveness, reflecting charming and flirtatious behaviours intended to attract the sexual interests of others, has correlated significantly with all Dark Triad traits (Veselka et al., 2011).

2.6. Pride

Pride entails excessive self-love, paired with a disregard for the efforts of others (Kaplan & Schwartz, 2008). As such, this construct closely resembles the Dark Triad's narcissistic trait (Raskin & Hall, 1979). As previously noted, narcissism has exhibited significant associations with variables that fall beyond the FFM (Veselka

et al., 2011), as well as with the other traits of the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

2.7. Sloth

Sloth is characterized by lack of motivation and unwillingness to utilize fully one's skills (Lyman, 1989). Studies of diligence and ambition—tendencies defining the negative pole of the sloth construct—have found that these traits are incorporated readily into both the FFM and HEXACO models (e.g., Barrick & Mount, 1991; Lee, Ogunfowora, & Ashton, 2005). Investigations of the Dark Triad, however, have reported both positive and negative associations between ambitious or motivated behaviour and the Dark Triad traits, with associations varying on the basis of culture and context (e.g., O'Boyle Jr., Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012; Zettler & Solga, *in press*).

3. Present study

Given the growing body of research on socially malevolent variables, and the mounting evidence in support of the proposition that the FFM cannot account for the intricacies of these variables, it appears fruitful to explore traits that have been overlooked in previous assessments of antisocial constructs. Specifically, in this study, we aim to develop and validate a measure of the vices, known as the Vices and Virtues Scale (VAVS). To ensure that, in developing the measure, we are tapping into a sampling space presently occupied by the Dark Triad, we also aim to examine the relations between each of the Dark Triad variables and the sins. In light of the numerous common correlates shared by the Dark Triad and sin constructs, and the evidence suggesting that the sins may not be captured fully by the FFM, it is predicted that significant, positive associations will be observed between all variables measured.

4. Study 1

The purpose of the first study was to develop a measure of the vices and their opposing virtues. To ensure that all subsequent research pertaining to these constructs would stem from sound measurement, the employed validation process was modeled after existing psychometric literature on questionnaire development (e.g., Holden & Fekken, 1985).

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

Participants in the study were 1,507 adults from North America (493 males, 1,011 females). They ranged in age from 18 to 79 years ($M = 22.87$; $SD = 7.02$). Participants were recruited from an undergraduate participant pool, as well as through posters and recruitment messages on social media websites. Participants completed the study individually online.

4.1.2. Measures and procedure

The VAVS was created for the purpose of the present study to assess individual differences in the sins. Based on existing literature relevant to the sins, the authors wrote detailed descriptions of each vice and virtue, and developed behavioural exemplars to illustrate the positive and negative pole of the constructs (Paunonen & Hong, *in press*). In accordance with these specifications, the authors generated an initial set of 175 items. This set was reduced to 132 items after omitting items that were deemed ambiguous, poorly worded, or descriptive of multiple vices by the authors as well as by experts in test construction who were provided with

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