



Hedonism, Achievement, and Power: Universal values that characterize the Dark Triad



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ABSTRACT

Using a sample of Swedes and Americans ($N = 385$), we attempted to understand the Dark Triad traits (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in terms of universal social values. The Dark Triad traits correlated significantly with all 10 value types, forming a sinusoid pattern corresponding to the value model circumplex. In regression analyses, Machiavellianism and narcissism were positively associated with the values Achievement and Power, while psychopathy was positively associated with the values Hedonism, and Power. In addition, the Dark Triad traits explained significant variance over the Big Five traits in accounting for individual differences in social values. Differences between the Swedish and the US sample in the social value Achievement was mediated by the Dark Triad traits, as well as age. Given the unique complex of values accounted for by the Dark Triad traits compared to the Big Five traits, we argue that the former account for a system of self-enhancing “dark values”, often hidden but constantly contributing in evaluations of others.

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1. Introduction

The Dark Triad (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) is a popular grouping of individual differences representing antisocial personality traits in the general population (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits are characterized by entitlement, superiority, dominance (i.e., narcissism), glib social charm, manipulativeness (i.e., Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes, impulsivity, and interpersonal antagonism (i.e., psychopathy). These traits have proved valuable in terms of understanding interpersonal (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009) and intrapersonal aspects of personality (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody, & Scrutton, 2014; Jonason & Tost, 2010). They have proven valuable in various contexts including organizational psychology (Jonason, Wee, Li, & Jackson, 2014; O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012; Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014) and mate or friendship selection (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). In hopes of providing unique insights into what holds these traits together and distinguishes each from one another, and other conceptualizations of personality, such as the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1992), we examine how the Dark Triad traits relate to values.

Researching the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and values is important because the latter are considered an important source of moral development in society (Silfver, Helkama, Lönnqvist, & Verkasalo, 2008). Population rates of narcissism appear to be on the rise in both Generation X (i.e., born before 1981) and Millennials (i.e., born after 1981). There is an increased emphasis on money, fame, and self-image, while concern for others is decreasing (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). Given the long tradition of research on Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, it is noteworthy that few studies have attempted to document the social value systems associated with all or even one of the Dark Triad traits (see Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, *in press*). There might be some explanations for this. First, work on “darker” aspects of personality tends to be studied explicitly or implicitly as pathologies. For instance, work psychology mostly focuses on the toxicity and counterproductive workplace behaviors linked to the Dark Triad (O’Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014), while generally neglecting the less visible factors like vocational interests (Jonason et al., 2014). Second, the goal of much of this research is the detection, reduction, or avoidance of people characterized by these traits, instead of trying to understand the way these traits may operate in people’s lives, for instance, through values. Third, research biases may exclude certain sensitive questions such as the questions like the ones we address in the present study. Thus, we attempt to uncover what types of social values characterize the Dark Triad traits.

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1.1. Values and traits

For our purposes, values are defined as enduring goals under cognitive control (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002; Schwartz, 1992). There appears to be 10 universal social value types: Security (e.g., national security, social order), Tradition (e.g., devoutness, humility), Conformity (e.g., obedience, honoring parents), Benevolence (e.g., helpfulness, loyalty), Universalism (e.g., social justice, equality), Self-direction (e.g., creativity, independence), Stimulation (e.g., exciting life, varied life), Hedonism (e.g., pleasure, enjoying life), Achievement (e.g., success, ambition), and Power (e.g., authority, wealth). These 10 value types are commonly illustrated in a quasi-circumplex model (cf. Fig. 1), from which two orthogonal axes can be derived: Self-enhancement–Self-transcendence and Openness to change–Conservation.

While personality traits are under less cognitive control than values (Roccas et al., 2002), we would contend that value systems are stable and could be examined in relation to personality traits. For instance, Openness and Self-direction, Extraversion and Stimulation, Agreeableness and Benevolence, and Conscientiousness and Security are all correlated (Parks-Leduc, Feldman, & Bardi, 2014). However, the constructs are both theoretically and empirically distinct (Roccas et al., 2002). Traits account for how people behave, whereas values describe what people consider important. Traits are defined as consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions, whereas values mostly influence behavior when intentionally activated (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Values are of particular importance in predicting behaviors preceded by intent and salient cognition (Parks & Guay, 2009). Personality traits differ from values by the endogenous characteristics of being genetically heritable (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008), while values are more learned adaptations from a shared environment (Oliver & Mooradian, 2003), thus stressing an inherent nature–nurture interaction. As such, we contend that values are the proximal factors that allow personality traits to predict behaviors, thus making understanding such connections important.

Over the last 75 years, the vast majority of personality research has focused on the Big Five traits: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992). There is good psychometric and empirical evidence to substantiate the utility of this grouping of personality traits in general (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007), as well as in relation to malevolent and antisocial behaviors (Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). However, the Big Five may paint an unnecessarily “light” conceptualization of human nature (Lee &

Ashton, 2014; Lee et al., 2013) and overlaps considerably with the Dark Triad traits (O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2014). Therefore, it seems important to replicate associations with the Big Five and examine the values linked to the Dark Triad traits while controlling for this overlap. Doing so should afford us better insight into the way major dimensions of personality relate to social value systems.

1.2. The present study

The Dark Triad traits have previously not been studied in relation to values, with the exception for the recent study by Jonason, Duineveld, and Middleton (submitted for publication) on social values. Their results showed that the Dark Triad traits are linked to tendencies to exclude others and promote self, measured with the Moral Foundations questionnaire. Our present study measures social values by Schwartz’s renowned cross-cultural universal value model (Knafo, Roccas, & Sagiv, 2011), reporting on all 10 universal values, while also controlling for the explained variance from the Big Five traits. Furthermore we contrast Americans with young Swedish university students, known for their egalitarian value system, which contributes to much needed replications between the personality traits and social values from various geographical places and times (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014).

All three of the Dark Triad traits may seek power and self-serving achievements, albeit through varying social tactics (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012). In addition, all three of the traits are considered to embody a selfish and antisocial way of life (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010). This might imply the Dark Triad traits should be positively correlated with the value types on the Self-enhancing end of the circumplex in Fig. 1 (i.e., Achievement and Power) and negatively correlated with the Self-transcending value types (i.e., Universalism and Benevolence).

As we collected data from two different countries, we have the opportunity to do some comparisons between these groups, albeit in an *ad hoc* fashion. An exploratory hypothesis is that there are differences in social values across participants’ country of origin and that the Dark Triad traits could mediate some of the relationships between country and social values. In other words, country differences in value systems might be in part a function of individual-level personality traits.

The present study replicates and extends what we know about the relationship between dark traits and social values, by for the first time comparing the relative and independent associations of the Big Five and Dark Triad traits to 10 types of social values. We hope to document that what may be responsible for many of the socially undesirable outcomes linked to the Dark Triad traits is that they embrace a system of “dark values”. We contend that what makes the Dark Triad “dark” is not some latent evilness but a value system (i.e., focused on agentic/selfish outcomes) that is inconsistent with most people’s value systems (i.e., focused on pro-social outcomes).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants ($N = 385$) constituted two samples.¹ The first sample was from a university in the western part of Sweden and

¹ The aim was to gather a sample size beyond the point of stability ($N = 161$), after which the effect size only shows tolerable fluctuations around the true value (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Samples differed ($p < .01$) with Extraversion being higher in the Swedish sample, and Openness as well as Conscientiousness being higher in the online sample. Neuroticism was also higher with women than men. Otherwise, the samples were similar.

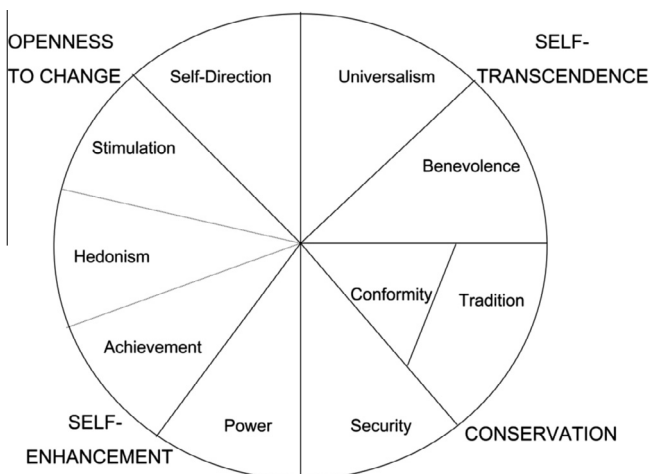


Fig. 1. Schwartz’s universal value types (Schwartz, 1992).

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