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The Dark Triad: Beyond a 'male' mating strategy

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ABSTRACT

The Dark Triad (DT; sub-clinical narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) is argued to facilitate a male short-term mating strategy. The trait constellation in women and its potential adaptive benefits has received less attention. We examined the prevalence and correlates of DT in a large community sample ($N = 899$). Despite finding expected sex differences in Sensation-seeking, Competitiveness, strength of sexual motivation, recreational sex behaviors and neuroticism, we found no sex difference in DT scores. Furthermore, within-sex multiple regressions identified the same predictors of DT score with similar weightings. Moderation analysis confirmed regression equations did not differ by sex. We propose that focus on DT as a male adaptation to short-term mating has been overstated and that men's greater preference for casual sexual encounters is not explained by DT traits.

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1. Introduction

Evolutionary psychologists have suggested that short-term mating strategies may be more adaptive for males than females. This view is based on the higher parental investment of females which constrains their reproductive output and that of monogamous partners. Polygynous males can attain high reproductive success by inseminating and abandoning multiple females. Polygynous male inclinations have been widely-documented (e.g. Schmitt et al., 2012). Women report a less promiscuous socio-sexual orientation, concordant with their lower fitness variance, obligate parental investment and short-term mating costs (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Not all men can successfully pursue polygyny, however. It is high-risk and competitive, requiring individuals to seize sexual opportunities while avoiding emotional engagement. It has been suggested that the Dark Triad (DT) personality (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) is well-suited to this challenge (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010; Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). DT is associated with promiscuity and desire for extra-pair sex. DT men report more lifetime sex partners and hold less restrictive socio-sexual attitudes (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). DT personality is also attractive to women, independent of a man's physical appearance (Carter, Campbell, & Muncer, 2013). DT is associated with deceptive sexual tactics, including love-feigning (Jonason et al., 2009). It is

correlated with mate-poaching (Schmitt & Buss, 2001) and mate-abandonment (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010; Schmitt & Buss, 2001).

Recently, however, the view that short-term mating confers few benefits on women has been challenged. Short term mating can secure fertilization by men of high genetic quality (Smith, 1984). Extra-pair mating can provide an assessment of alternative mates' quality (Greiling & Buss, 2000) and increase the genetic diversity of offspring (Fossoy, Johnsen, & Lifjeld, 2008). Nevertheless, the alignment of DT with short-term strategies often considered more typical of men has resulted in less attention on the prevalence and correlates of DT in women. We address this in the present article. Research on DT has reported higher male scores for DT (e.g. Jonason & Webster, 2010). However, most studies use undergraduate samples (e.g. Jonason et al., 2009). The first aim of the present study is to examine the sex difference in a national sample.

Our second aim concerns correlates of DT in both sexes. In male and female undergraduates, correlations of similar magnitude have been reported between DT and measures assessing standards for long-term mates (Jonason et al., 2011), altruism (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010) and specific social influence tactics (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Sex differences have been found in correlations with sexual tactics or game-playing love styles (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010), empathy (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013), forms of impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011) and friendship choices (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012). However, in many studies, correlations are not disaggregated by sex so we have an incomplete understanding of whether DT correlates constitute different 'profiles' in men and women.

In the present study, we compare DT profiles of women and men across three major domains: mating style (Importance of

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Romance, Attachment, and Sex in relationships; Recreational Sexual Behaviors), lifestyle orientation (Sensation-seeking; Impulsivity; Competitiveness) and broader personality (Big Five). We have briefly reviewed evidence that, in men, DT is associated with short-term mating strategy markers. This strategy is thought to be mediated by lifestyle and personality characteristics that equip DT men with the psychological tools necessary for its execution. Below, we consider what is known about these correlates in relation to short-term mating and DT.

1.1. Lifestyle orientation

It is relatively well-documented that DT is associated with higher levels of Sensation-seeking (Emmons, 1991; McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). High sensation-seekers (attracted to thrill in the face of possible risk) rate potential partners as more attractive and express a stronger desire to date them. They are more inclined to discount the likelihood that a short-term partner may have sexually-transmitted diseases and are more likely to engage in unprotected sex (Henderson et al., 2005). Furthermore, impulsivity (a tendency to act without consideration of long-term consequences) has been associated with short-term and risky sexual behaviors (e.g. Khurana et al., 2012). DT also shows association with self-control levels, future discounting, and dysfunctional impulsivity (Jonason & Tost, 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2011).

The pursuit of short-term mating involves within-sex competition for mate access (Daly & Wilson, 1988). A recent study confirmed DT is correlated with the adoption of competitive, assertive, and dominating tactics (Jonason et al., 2011). Forms of social influence can be dichotomized into 'hard' (threatening, manipulating) and 'soft' (charming, ingratiating) tactics. DT is associated with both, but more closely with the former. In a money-allocation task, DT participants were characterized by competitiveness, rather than prosociality or individualism (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010).

1.2. Personality

Relationships between DT and Big Five personality constructs have been well-documented. The most robust finding is the negative correlation between DT and agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008; Veselka, Schermer, & Vernon, 2012). DT (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010), psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and narcissism (Lee & Ashton, 2005; Vernon et al., 2008; Veselka et al., 2012) correlate positively with extraversion. This combination of high extraversion and low agreeableness has been proposed to facilitate a short-term mating style (Jonason et al., 2009). Openness correlates positively with DT (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010), narcissism and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), whilst conscientiousness correlates negatively with DT (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010) Machiavellianism (Lee & Ashton, 2005), psychopathy (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Vernon et al., 2008; Veselka et al., 2012) and narcissism (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). Finally, neuroticism correlates negatively with DT composite (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010) and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), but positively with Machiavellianism (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Vernon et al., 2008; Veselka et al., 2012).

Although the constellation of attitudes, behaviors and traits associated with DT individuals seems characteristic of men and 'male' mating strategies, women scoring highly for DT do exist. The aims of the current study are (1) to examine sex differences in DT in a large national sample, and (2) determine whether correlates of DT personality (mating style, lifestyle orientation, and Big 5 traits) differ by sex.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

One thousand and three participants were recruited via a marketing company to participate in an online questionnaire. After dropping non-heterosexual participants (this study being focused on heterosexual mating attitudes and behaviors), 899 heterosexual respondents remained. The final sample consisted of 440 females and 459 males, aged 25–55 (mean = 39.5 years).

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. The Dirty Dozen

The Dirty Dozen (DD) is a twelve-item questionnaire that creates an overall DT score (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Participants indicate agreement with statements including 'I have used deceit or lied to get my way'. The inventory contains three four-item sub-scales pertaining to each of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The DD has proven reliable, considering its brevity, and had good internal consistency in the present study ($\alpha = .75$).

2.2.2. BFI-10 personality inventory (BFI-10)

The BFI-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007) is a concise measure used to assess the Big 5 with two items pertaining to each of Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism. Following the authors' recommendation, we used a third item to assess Agreeableness given its relevance to DT. Participants rate how accurately each descriptor captures their personality. It has been found valid and reliable (Thalmayer, Saucier, & Eigenhuis, 2011).

2.2.3. Impulsivity and Sensation-Seeking (ImpSS)

The 19-item ImpSS scale from the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire (Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 1993) was used. Participants answered 'false' or 'true' to statements such as "I usually think about what I am going to do before I do it" (Impulsivity) and "I'll try anything once" (Sensation-seeking). Two separate scales were constructed since Impulsivity and Sensation-seeking have been found to be independent dimensions (Cross, Copping, & Campbell, 2011). (Alpha values: $\alpha = .72$ (Impulsivity) and $\alpha = .82$ (Sensation-seeking)).

2.2.4. Competitiveness

Six items were taken from the Hyper-Competitive Attitude Scale (Ryckman, Hammer, Kaczor, & Gold, 1990). This scale ($\alpha = .66$) included items such as "Winning in competitions makes me feel more powerful as a person".

2.2.5. Attitudes towards Romance, Attachment and Sex

Fifteen questions assessing Romance, Attachment, and Sex attitudes were put to participants, who were asked to answer with reference to their current intimate relationship (or a previous one if single). For Romance, five items pertained to thoughts about their partner and desire for union with them ($\alpha = .71$). For Attachment, six items pertained to giving and receiving emotional support ($\alpha = .85$). Sexual attitudes were dichotomized into two items assessing frequency and strength of their sexual desire for their partner (Sexual Desire (Partner), $\alpha = .60$), and two assessing frequency and strength of sexual desire for members of the opposite sex other than their partner (Sexual Desire (Others), $\alpha = .70$).

2.2.6. Recreational Sexual Behavior

The Laddish Behavior Inventory (Muncer & Campbell, 2012) is designed to assess exhibitionistic and boisterous behavior typically

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