



The Dark Triad of personality and infidelity intentions: The moderating role of relationship experience



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ABSTRACT

Romantic relationship infidelity jeopardizes the romantic partner's mental health and the relationship. Personality differences may predispose individuals to infidelity. According to life history strategy, people with higher Dark Triad of personality are more likely to commit infidelity. In this study, 52 men and 88 women aged from 18 to 40 completed a questionnaire in Malaysia. Partial least square path modeling revealed that intentions towards infidelity have significant relationships with Machiavellianism and psychopathy, but non-significant relationship with narcissism. In addition, partial least square multi-group analysis revealed that relationship experiences moderate the association between narcissism and intentions towards infidelity, as well as the relationship between psychopathy and intentions towards infidelity, but did not moderate the relationship between Machiavellianism and infidelity intentions. This study raises opportunities for future research to refine and elaborate the links between dark personalities and adverse relationship outcomes. Findings and future directions are outlined taking an evolutionary psychological approach.

1. Introduction

Different individuals have different likelihoods of committing romantic infidelity. The infidelity rate is rapidly increasing in different societies. For instance, Durex, a condom manufacturer, conducted a survey among 29,000 people in 36 countries and the results revealed that 33% of Malaysian respondents admitted their engagement in infidelity behaviors (The Nation, 2012). Infidelity could lead to irretrievable impacts on romantic relationships, as well as marital dissolution (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Ravhudzulo, 2012), increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Jones, Olderbak, & Figueredo, 2011), emotional impacts or disturbances (Jones et al., 2011), and even death (Hall & Fincham, 2005). Therefore, it is important to understand the likelihood of people with different personalities and relationship experiences.

The Dark Triad of personality is a key element in understanding infidelity in romantic relationships (Jones et al., 2011). The Dark Triad of personality, namely Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy are socially aversive and destructive personalities (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These personality traits are associated with a set of immoral behaviors and influence communication and romantic relationship behaviors (Atari & Chegeni, 2017; Horan, 2014). Infidelity, as one of the immoral behaviors in a romantic relationship, is associated with

personality. For example, Jones and Weiser (2014) and Weiser and Weigel (2015) have gathered evidences that there is a positive relationship between personality and infidelity. Specifically, the Dark Triad of personality is more connected to infidelity, as people with higher scores on Dark Triad of personality divulge more infidelity in current or recent relationships and appear to involve in romantic cheating deliberately (Jones & Weiser, 2014).

Moreover, individual differences in the Dark Triad of personality can be expounded by life history strategy in terms of reproductive strategies (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). These strategies are categorized into fast and slow life strategies. While mating is prioritized by people who adopt fast life strategy as they value the present, parenting is prioritized by people who adopt slow life strategy as they value the future (Griskevicius, Tybur, Robertson, & Delton, 2011). People who score higher on the Dark Triad of personality have fast life strategy with low self-control, high impulsivity, short-term mating orientation, unrestricted sociosexuality, exploitativeness, and antisocial behaviors (Furnham et al., 2013; Jones & Paulhus, 2011; McDonald, Donnellan, & Navarrete, 2011). Personality traits of fast life strategy are socially undesirable because individuals with these traits attempt to acquire immediate rewards by investing reproductive effort preponderantly (Baughman, 2015).

However, fast life strategies are inherent to individuals and they

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manipulate personality traits (Griskevicius et al., 2011). Dark Triad of personality, therefore, increases one's intentions towards infidelity as their reproductive strategies. In a large scale study by Jones and Weiser (2014), on Caucasians, East Asian, South Asian, and mixed ethnicities aged from 18 to 74, findings demonstrated that Machiavellianism is positively linked with infidelity in a present or recent relationship. Interestingly, Brewer, Abell, and Lyons (2016) focused on heterosexual women in the age range of 17 to 57 and found that women with higher Machiavellianism inclined to infidelity because of alternative mates. The association between Machiavellianism and infidelity can also be explained in terms of characteristics. This is because Machiavellianism is a personality trait that represents promiscuity demonstrating low commitment in relationships (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Brewer & Abell, 2015). In the Dark Triad of personality, Machiavellianism explains the largest amount of variance in mate retention behaviors (Chegeni, Pirkalani, & Dehshiri, 2018).

In addition to machiavellianism, narcissism has some associations with infidelity. Narcissism is reported as a personality trait that predicts emotional infidelity online (Browne, 2015). In a longitudinal study among 123 married couples, sexual narcissism was positively associated with infidelity (McNulty & Widman, 2014). Furthermore, a study on 102 heterosexual women aged between 18 and 42 indicated that women with higher level of narcissism had greater committed infidelity and intentions towards infidelity in the future (Brewer, Hunt, James, & Abell, 2015). Researchers like Jones and Weiser (2014) reported that narcissism was not associated with committed infidelity in women, but was fairly associated with committed infidelity in men.

Psychopathy is another Dark Triad of personality that links with infidelity. Visser, Pozzebon, Bogaert, and Ashton (2010) studied 100 men and 100 women aged from 18 to 32 and found that people with higher scores on psychopathy tend to commit infidelity, and have early sexual activity, and more sexual partners. This is aligned with the findings of another study by Jones and Weiser (2014) on 884 participants aged from 18 to 74, with the conclusion that psychopathy is a strong predictor of infidelity in recent or current romantic relationship. Likewise, a research on 102 heterosexual women aged from 18 to 42 suggested that the level of psychopathy was positively related to the intentions towards infidelity and susceptibility to partner's infidelity (Brewer et al., 2015). It was also found that psychopathic individuals have greater promiscuity, which represents low commitment in a relationship (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Brewer & Abell, 2015).

Apart from the association between Dark Triad of personality and infidelity, the Dark Triad of personality is also associated with relationship preferences or experiences (Adams, Luevano, & Jonason, 2014; Atari & Chegeni, 2017; Atkinson, Koladich, & Vernon, 2016; Chegeni et al., 2018; Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012).

The relationship experiences in the present study are one-night-stand relationships, booty-call relationships, friends-with-benefits relationships, and serious romantic relationships. One-night stands, booty-call relationships, and friends-with-benefits relationships (i.e., short-term mating orientation) are casual relationships. Casual relationships are low-commitment and short-term relationships, whereas serious romantic relationships are high-commitment and long-term relationships.

Although the relationship between Dark Triad of personality and infidelity is explored extensively (Brewer et al., 2015; Brewer et al., 2016; Browne, 2015; Jones & Weiser, 2014; McNulty & Widman, 2014; Visser et al., 2010; Weiser & Weigel, 2015), the finding were inconsistent and less focused on men. In investigating the relationship between Dark Triad of personality and infidelity the literature is almost silent in considering the possibility that experience could affect one's behavior. Consequently, we have an incomplete picture of the relationship between Dark Triad of personality and infidelity. There is a need for further research on infidelity in Malaysia, bearing in mind that the country has an alarming rate of infidelity (The Nation, 2012).

This study further aims to add to the knowledgebase of the previous

studies (Brewer et al., 2015; Jones & Weiser, 2014; Weiser & Weigel, 2015) by investigating the moderating role of relationship experiences in the relationship between Dark Triad of personality and intentions towards infidelity among young adults in Malaysia. The infidelity likelihood of individual for sustaining a relationship or marriage longevity, fidelity, and physical health, such as avoiding sexually transmitted diseases are explored in this research.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants were young Malaysian adults who experienced a romantic relationship. With purposive sampling, 140 respondents, whose age ranged from 18 to 40 ($M = 22.57$, $SD = 3.45$) from pre-defined population were collected. The number of respondents (sample size) was representative enough for the use of Partial Least Square. Hair et al. (2017) suggests rule of thumb which requires a sample size of 10 times the most complex relationship within the research model. The most complex relationship is the larger value between the dependent variable with the largest number of independent variables influencing it. The responses were collected through social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn by online questionnaire. Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic details.

2.2. Measures

Relationship experiences were categorized into casual relationships (short-term mateships) and serious romantic relationships (long-term mateships). Since casual relationship refers to one-night-stands, booty-call relationships, and friends-with-benefits relationships, participants were asked about their experiences in one-night-stands, booty-call relationships, friends-with-benefits, and serious romantic relationships. Definitions for each type of relationship adapted from Adams et al. (2014) were provided in the questionnaire, followed by a dichotomous type of question asking if they had ever participated in each type of the mateships. Reliability for relationship experiences using the Cronbach's Alpha was acceptable in this study ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Short Dark Triad (SD3) is a scale that measures three personalities, namely Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). It consists of 27 items with 9 items for each subscale. It is a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The SD3 has an acceptable reliability (Atari & Chegeni, 2016). Using Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability rates of the SD3 subscales were obtained as $\alpha = 0.79$ for Machiavellianism, $\alpha = 0.75$ for narcissism and $\alpha = 0.73$ for psychopathy, which represents an appropriate indication of internal consistency (Hair, Joseph, Ringle, Christian, & Sarstedt,

Table 1
Demographic profile of respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	52	37.1
Female	88	62.9
Ethnicity		
Malay	8	5.7
Chinese	116	82.9
Indian	10	7.1
Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	3	2.1
Other	3	2.1
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	132	94.3
Homosexual	4	2.9
Bisexual	4	2.9
Total	140	100.0

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