



Relationships between the Dark Triad and humor styles: A replication and extension

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ABSTRACT

Two hundred undergraduate students completed paper-and-pencil measures of the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and the Humor Styles Questionnaire, which taps two adaptive (affiliative and self-enhancing) and two maladaptive (aggressive and self-defeating) styles of humor. The first purpose of the study was to replicate relationships between these variables reported by Veselka et al. (2010). The second purpose was to expand on their results by investigating relationships between several sub-factors of the Dark Triad (in addition to global scores) and the humor styles. Results provided substantial replication of Veselka et al. at the global level and, at the sub-factor level, provided additional insights into the potential role of adaptive and maladaptive humor styles in the personality dynamics of individuals characterized by the various facets of the Dark Triad.

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1. Introduction

Among the many aversive personality traits that have been investigated, three make up the Dark Triad: Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Machiavellianism is defined by self-interest and tendencies toward deceptiveness and manipulativeness (Christie & Geis, 1970); psychopathy is exhibited through high thrill-seeking paired with low empathy (Hare, 1985); and narcissism is characterized by self-absorption and feelings of superiority and entitlement (Emmons, 1984). This antisocial trinity has received considerable attention in recent years, both because of its prominence in subclinical populations and because of its impact on psychological well-being (e.g., Hicks, Vaidyanathan, & Patrick, 2010; McHoskey et al., 1999; Zuckerman & O'Loughlin, 2009).

Associations between aversive traits and well-being inspire interest in the potential relations between humor styles and the Dark Triad traits, given the link between positive humor and improved mental health (e.g., Erickson & Feldstein, 2007; Kuiper & McHale, 2009). In particular, the four humor styles identified by Martin (2007) represent both adaptive (affiliative and self-enhancing) and maladaptive (aggressive and self-defeating) expressions of humor (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, & Weir, 2003). Affiliative humor involves the use of humor to facilitate social relationships; self-enhancing humor is characterized by the ability to maintain a humorous perspective in the face of stressful situations; aggressive humor is exhibited by the ridicule

of others; and self-defeating humor is expressed by excessively self-denigrating humor as a potential form of ingratiation.

To date, Veselka, Schermer, Martin, and Vernon (2010) have been the only researchers to investigate relations between the Dark Triad variables and humor styles. They reported that psychopathy and Machiavellianism correlated positively with both aggressive and self-defeating humor, while narcissism correlated positively with affiliative humor. The association between narcissism and self-enhancing humor was inconsistent, with one sample showing a weak positive correlation and the other showing no significant relation. Given this inconsistent result, a replication of their findings is appropriate. Moreover, an extension of their findings is also possible through an assessment of potential relations between the humor styles and subscales in addition to global scores of the Dark Triad traits.

1.1. Factors and correlates of the Dark Triad traits

In addition to being defined as unitary constructs, each of the Dark Triad traits comprises a number of lower-order dimensions. Psychopathy, as measured by the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP-III-R12; Hare, 1985), is made up of four factors: Callous Affect, characterized by antisocial behavior and emotional detachment from others; Criminal Tendencies, as exhibited by stealing and other illegal acts; Erratic Lifestyle, as defined by irresponsibility and impulsivity; and Interpersonal Manipulation, as classified by lying and deception (Williams, Paulhus, & Hare, 2007). In relation to the Big Five factors of personality, all four factors have been found to correlate negatively with Agreeableness; Callous Affect

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was negatively associated with Extraversion; Criminal Tendencies showed negative relations with Conscientiousness; and Erratic Lifestyle correlated positively with Extraversion and Openness and negatively with Conscientiousness. Interpersonal Manipulation was the only factor with significant ties to Neuroticism (negative), and was also positively correlated with Openness (Williams et al., 2007). With regard to psychological well-being, psychopathy, not surprisingly, is primarily associated with externalizing behaviors such as hostility and aggression (Seibert, Miller, Few, Zeichner, & Lynam, 2011). For example, three of the four factors (with the exception of Criminal Tendencies) are positively correlated with bullying (Williams et al., 2007). In addition, the Callous Affect and Interpersonal Manipulation subscales have been found to be negatively correlated with empathy (Mahmut, Home-wood, & Stevenson, 2008).

Narcissism, as measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979) can also be divided into distinct sub-scales. To date, the most comprehensive factor structure, derived from a sub-clinical population, comes from Emmons (1984), who reported four factors: Exploitativeness/Entitlement, as exhibited by interpersonal manipulation and a tendency toward envy; Leadership/Authority, as characterized by an enjoyment of being in positions of power; Superiority/Arrogance, as defined by an exaggerated sense of one's own abilities and talents; and Self-Absorption/Self-Admiration, as exemplified by exhibitionist tendencies. Corry, Merritt, Mrug, and Pamp, (2008) recently replicated this four-factor structure, and further examined the relations between these NPI factors and the Big Five dimensions of personality. All four factors of narcissism correlated significantly and positively with Extraversion and negatively with Agreeableness. Furthermore, the Leadership/Authority factor and the Superiority/Arrogance factor (renamed "Power") both exhibited negative correlations with Neuroticism and positive correlations with Conscientiousness.

Associations between narcissism and well-being are quite complex (for an overview, see Morf and Rhodewalt (2011)). Although narcissism is generally positively associated with self-esteem, optimism, and emotional well-being (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004), the self-esteem of highly narcissistic individuals tends to be quite unstable, and is particularly dependent on maintaining social approval and positive interactions with others (Zuckerman & O'Loughlin, 2009). With regard to relationship-related variables, narcissism tends to be negatively associated with empathy, agreeableness, and need for intimacy, and positively correlated with hostility (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Morf and Rhodewalt (2011) presented a dynamic self-regulatory model of narcissism in which a grandiose yet vulnerable self-concept is thought to underlie a chronic need to obtain self-affirmation from others. Although less research has examined associations between the individual sub-scales and well-being, findings generally indicate that, of the four subscales, Exploitativeness/Entitlement is most strongly linked with maladjustment, particularly in the form of aggressive and hostile behaviors (Reidy, Zeichner, Foster, & Martinez, 2008).

Lastly, Machiavellianism, as measured by the MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), is also a multidimensional construct, comprising three factors: Interpersonal Tactics, as defined by interpersonal manipulation; Cynical View of Human Nature, as characterized by a mistrust of others and the view that all humans are self-interested; and Disregard for Conventional Morality, as exhibited by a lack of adherence to society's morals (Christie & Geis, 1970). Although many researchers agree that an examination of the factors of Machiavellianism is important, few studies have actually investigated their relations to other traits, and none have assessed the scales in conjunction with the Big Five factors. One reason for this may be that previous factor analyses of the MACH-IV have yielded incongruent findings as to the number and types of factors

that can be extracted (e.g., Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992; Williams et al., 2007). With regard to psychological adjustment, Machiavellianism is generally unrelated to internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety and depression), but is more consistently correlated with externalizing behaviors such as dishonesty, cheating, and unethical actions. It is also moderately correlated with hostility and aggression, and high-Machiavellianism individuals tend to be perceived by others as unfavorable friends, confidants, or business partners (Jones & Paulhus, 2009).

1.2. Well-being and personality correlates of the Humor Styles

A considerable amount of research has examined relations between Martin et al.'s (2003) humor styles and various personality and well-being related traits. In relation to the Big Five, positive correlations have been noted between the two positive humor styles and both Extraversion and Openness, while the two negative humor styles have exhibited negative relations with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, and positive associations with Neuroticism (Martin et al., 2003).

With regard to psychological well-being, research has demonstrated quite different patterns of correlations for each of the four humor styles (for a review, see Martin (2007)). In particular, affiliative humor correlates positively with indicators of healthy relationships (e.g., intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and social support) and inversely with negative relationship variables (e.g., loneliness). Self-enhancing humor is positively associated with emotional well-being (e.g., self-esteem, optimism, and positive affect) and negatively with emotional distress (e.g., depression and anxiety). Aggressive humor correlates negatively with relationship satisfaction and interpersonal competence, and positively with hostility. Finally, self-defeating humor is positively associated with emotional distress and hostility, and negatively correlated with self-esteem and optimism. As such, greater use of self-enhancing humor and lower levels of self-defeating humor appear to be particularly relevant to emotional well-being, whereas higher levels of affiliative humor and lower aggressive humor are especially predictive of more satisfactory interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, of the two negative styles of humor, self-defeating humor tends to be more associated with internalizing types of problems (e.g., depression and anxiety), whereas aggressive humor is particularly associated with externalizing problems (e.g., anger, hostility, and bullying) (Dozois, Martin, & Faulkner, *in press*). In sum, the humor styles may be viewed as different adaptive and maladaptive strategies for coping with various emotional and interpersonal situations which in turn may have beneficial or detrimental impacts on emotional well-being and social relationships.

1.3. Present study

The aim of this study was to replicate and build upon the findings of Veselka et al. (2010). In replicating their findings, we hoped to strengthen the evidence regarding associations between the Dark Triad variables and humor styles. Moreover, by extending these findings to sub-factors, in addition to global levels, we hoped to gain a deeper understanding of relations between them.

Consistent with the findings of Veselka et al. (2010), we expected to find significant positive correlations between the negative humor styles and the Dark Triad traits of Machiavellianism and psychopathy, and a positive association between affiliative humor and narcissism. These predictions were based not only on previous findings, but also on the observation that both psychopathy and Machiavellianism share personality and well-being correlates with aggressive and self-defeating humor (particularly high disagreeableness, hostility, and externalizing behaviors); and that narcissism shares correlates with affiliative humor (Jakobwitz &

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