



Do we need “dark” traits to explain materialism? The incremental validity of the Dark Triad over the HEXACO domains in predicting materialistic orientation



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ABSTRACT

The relationships between the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) and materialism were investigated in a sample from the general population ($N = 378$). The triarchic psychopathy model (comprising meanness, boldness and disinhibition) was used in this study. The Dark Triad predicted 21–36% of materialism and its facets and the most powerful positive predictors were narcissism and Machiavellianism. The associations of the psychopathy constructs with materialism were weaker and inconsistent – positive for meanness and disinhibition and non-existent or negative (when controlling for narcissism) for boldness. The HEXACO traits significantly predicted 29–51% of materialism variance and the strongest negative predictor was Honesty-Humility. Narcissism and Machiavellianism added incrementally to the prediction of materialism, beyond the variance accounted for by the HEXACO domains.

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1. Introduction

Materialism is the tendency to place material possession very high within an individual hierarchy of values and treat it as an indicator of personal success and a source of happiness. It results in a wide array of decisions and activities, which are not necessarily connected with consumption per se. With respect to consumption materialism affects the quality and quantity of goods, beyond consumption it has an impact on the allocation of different resources, for example more time dedicated to work than to leisure (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialistic orientation is founded on the assumption that material possessions can be utilized to satisfy various human needs – from basic (food, shelter, physical survival) to psychological and social, associated with projecting a desired self-image, building self-identity and conferring social status. Consequently materialists strive for products that give them feelings of security and express socially desired images of a perfect life and a perfect person (Dittmar, 2007; Kasser, 2002). They tend to emphasize image, status and prestige as well as utilitarian concerns in relation to material possessions. People low in materialism highlight more their interpersonal and hedonic potential (Richins, 1994).

The pursuit of status and prestige through material goods incorporates desire for luxury goods. People are prepared to pay a high price

for such goods, even if they can buy different ones functionally equivalent and cheaper. If materialists believe that desirable features, especially personal success, can be visibly demonstrated through possessions, it stands to reason that expensive luxury goods would be a natural way to doing so. Such preferences, known – since Veblen's seminal essay on the leisure class – as conspicuous consumption, were proved to be an essential feature of materialistic orientation (Wong, 1997).

Striving for money, status and prestige is an important motivational force for people with a personality configuration labeled as the Dark Triad (DT). This term was introduced by Paulhus and Williams (2002) to describe the three distinct, albeit interrelated, socially aversive traits: Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. The DT traits share a similar agentic orientation associated with a preference for external goals (sex, power and money; Lee et al., 2013), accompanied by duplicity, coldness, selfishness, manipulateness, and exploitative interpersonal style (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Persons high in the DT manipulate others and use various influence tactics in pursuit of selfish gains (Jonason & Webster, 2012). Using material possessions, especially luxurious, in a conspicuous way may be one of them. In this article we ask to what extent materialism is a strategy, which is connected particularly with “dark” personalities.

Previous research shows that materialism is related to personality. Among the Five-Factor Model dimensions the most powerful predictors of materialism were Neuroticism (positive), Agreeableness and Openness (negative; Hong, Koh, & Paunonen, 2012; Otero-López & Villardefrancos, 2013). For the HEXACO model materialism was

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associated with Honesty-Humility, Agreeableness and Openness (all negative; Ashton & Lee, 2008). Low Honesty-Humility with low Agreeableness are considered to be personality characteristics which are also a common core of the DT. As far as the DT traits are concerned, the associations between materialism and narcissism have been studied extensively and moderate correlations between these variables were consistently revealed (e.g. Rose, 2007). The relationships of Machiavellianism with preference for materialistic goals (McHoskey, 1999) and love of money (Tang & Chen, 2008) have been also established. Lee et al. (2013) found strong relationships of the collective factor named “money”, containing scores on materialism and conspicuous consumption, with the DT composite scores. Given that some of the basic personality traits can predict materialism and they are the same that are connected with the DT, we asked if the DT traits themselves have any incremental value over and above the basic personality traits and can be directly linked to materialism.

1.1. Theoretical background

Materialism as a psychological issue has been present in literature for the last three decades. It was analyzed mainly within a social constructionism framework as a cultural phenomenon, a product of consumer societies enabling social communication within these societies and building and maintaining self-identity (Kasser, 2002). The connection between materialism and the DT, which is our concern in this article, may be easily explained in cultural terms. Material goods, which fulfil a wide range of functions – from basic sustenance to social communication, are one of the main objects of desire in the modern world (Dittmar, 2007). These types of resources seem to be especially attractive for agentic, disagreeable and low-empathy persons, because they can be obtained without establishing and maintaining close relationships with people (Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012). As providers of superiority, domination and prestige, these resources may be rewarding per se for “dark” personalities, but they may also be utilized for other personal gains.

Possession and spending though may have different functions for Machiavellians, narcissists and psychopaths and material goods can be utilized by them in different ways. Manipulative and strategic Machiavellians can more effectively protect their interests in the world, which they perceive as hostile and based on unfair competition (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Self-aggrandizing and self-centered narcissists can confirm their grandiose self by possessing luxurious things and consuming conspicuously in order to create the desired image in the eyes of others (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007). Finally, people high in psychopathy characterize unmitigated agency (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013), they are also impulsive, thrill-seeking and short-term oriented (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), hence, they seek immediate gratification of their needs. The preference for short-term gratification, often associated with hedonic motives, is visible in strong associations of psychopathy with such “deadly sins” as gluttony and lust (Veselka, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2014). Thus, things psychopaths tend to acquire probably have to deliver immediate pleasure and be a source of stimulation and excitement.

The relationship between materialism and the DT may also be analyzed from the evolutionary perspective. Relevant research in the evolutionary framework is usually concentrated on conspicuous consumption, which is described as an adaptive strategy, associated with a universal tendency for signaling features that might boost status. Wealth is one of them. It indicates having control over limited resources, that would enhance general fitness, as well as possessing abilities to acquire them (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Conspicuous display of material resources can be seen then as a costly signal of his/her access to resources and desirable, but unobservable, traits that could be passed on to offspring. Therefore it can be used to build social position, induce submission (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011), attract potential partners (in men) or repel rivals (in women; Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013). Such signals

are easy to observe, relatively easy to fake (e.g. fake branded clothes), and the risk of punishment for a cheater seems rather low, so they can be easily used to manipulate others for personal gain. Conspicuous consumption may therefore be one of the “shortcuts” used by “dark” personalities, to facilitate the attainment of goals.

The function of conspicuous consumption is also evident in the context of life history theory (see Figueredo et al., 2005). Fast life history involves obtaining quick reproductive rewards in multiple short-term sexual relationships (Sundie et al., 2011). Typical for this strategy is engagement in early reproduction and high mating effort, but low parental investment (Del Giudice, 2014). Such a strategy requires to exhibit competitive dispositions through costly and showy behavioural displays. Luxurious material goods and flamboyant consumption may easily serve this function.

Individual life history can be identified also through various psychosocial factors, including personality traits. Research suggests that fast life history corresponds with the DT (Figueredo et al., 2005; Jonason, Koenig, & Tost, 2010). If conspicuous consumption is used by “dark” personalities (especially men) as a signal of being interested in short-term mating, we should expect a positive relationship between the DT and materialism.

Research in the framework of life history theory showed also that some personality traits (conscientiousness and agreeableness from the FFM, and Honesty-Humility from the HEXACO spectrum) positively correlate with slow life history indicators. None of the basic traits appeared to be univocally linked to the fast spectrum of life history strategies (Del Giudice, 2014), whereas such a link was revealed with the DT traits (Figueredo et al., 2005; Jonason et al., 2010). Thus we suspect that the DT may have some direct impact on materialism as an adaptive solution in the fast life trade-offs.

1.2. The current study

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationships between the DT traits and materialism, conceptualized as value orientation which combine a set of beliefs related to the importance assigned to possessing material goods (centrality), judging one's own and other people's success by the possessions accumulated (success), and considering possessions as essential to well-being (happiness; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Taking into consideration arguments related to possible associations between materialism and the DT emerging from both cultural and evolutionary perspectives, as well as results of previous empirical studies, we hypothesized that all the DT traits would show positive relationships with materialism and its dimensions. In predicting materialism the DT traits would have an incremental predictive validity over and above the HEXACO personality dimensions. Considering the evolutionary background of the study we controlled for sex. As materialism decreases with age (Kasser, 2002), it was also included in the analyses.

In the current study, the triarchic metaconceptualization of psychopathy was used proposing the three distinct phenotypic constructs: disinhibition, meanness and boldness (Patrick & Drislane, 2015). These constructs are treated as “configural building blocks for alternative conceptualizations of psychopathy described by historical and contemporary writers and tapped by measurement tools like the PCL-R and PPI” (Skeem, Polaschek, Patrick, & Lilienfeld, 2011, p. 105). It is important to assess them separately in order to capture unique relationships (Drislane, Patrick, & Arsal, 2014, p. 360). Disinhibition is associated with impulsiveness, negative emotionality, impaired affect regulation and manifests itself as irresponsibility, hostility and reactive aggression. Meanness is associated with empathy deficits, rebelliousness, excitement seeking, exploitativeness, destructiveness and expresses itself as arrogance, cruelty and lack of close relationships. Boldness – fearless dominance, reflecting the “brighter” side of psychopathy, is described as emotional resiliency and social assertiveness, accompanied by venturesomeness.

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