



## Short Communication

## On love and darkness: The Dark Triad and mate retention behaviors in a non-Western culture



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## ABSTRACT

Researchers have been showing growing interest in the relationship between personality and mate retention behaviors. There is evidence that the Dark Triad of personality (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) may be associated with mate retention behavior in romantic relationships. Yet, most of the mentioned studies have been conducted in Western samples. The present study aimed to examine the relationship between the Dark Triad and mate retention behaviors in Iranian married individuals. Descriptive statistics and evaluation of sex differences suggested that Iranian men scored significantly higher on domains of mate retention. Women scored higher on narcissism. Correlational analyses indicated that Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy are positively correlated with Benefit-Provisioning, Cost-Inflicting, and overall mate retention. Therefore, individuals who score higher on the Dark Triad traits employ mate retention strategies to prevent dissolution of their marital relationships. The findings are clearly consistent with previous findings in Western cultures.

## 1. Introduction

Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy are collectively known as the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Since introduction of these personality traits, a large body of work has been developed. A large number of studies have investigated the utility of these traits in predicting human behavior in many contexts (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). The Dark Triad traits have been found to be associated with many personal and social behaviors. These personality traits have been found to be linked to negative intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes and have been traditionally considered as socially aversive (e.g., Jonason, Baughman, Carter, & Parker, 2015). The similarities between Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy are attributable to a common interpersonal callousness.

The persistence of these traits over time and across various cultures, as well as links to several positive traits such as increased sexual success in mating contexts (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009) suggest that the Dark Triad can serve as potentially advantageous personality traits for individuals. These benefits are more important in mating contexts (Atari & Chegeni, 2017). In evolutionary psychological approach, traits that aid an individual to survive and reproduce successfully possess more benefits than costs. Both the benefits and the costs associated with the Dark Triad traits have been researched (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010).

The links between the Dark Triad traits and mate retention strategies—behaviors that individuals employ to retain their romantic

partner, and thwart infidelity or defection from a romantic sexual relationship (Buss, 1988)—have also been examined (Jonason et al., 2010). The common characteristics of this dark collection of traits are associated with entitlement, manipulation, and exploitativeness. Previous work has shown that these traits are associated with specific mate retention tactics, including jealousy inducement, emotional manipulation, and verbal possession signals (Jonason et al., 2010). Additionally, overall mate retention scores have been found to be positively associated with Machiavellianism ( $r = 0.20$ ), narcissism ( $r = 0.25$ ), psychopathy ( $r = 0.25$ ), and the Dark Triad composite score ( $r = 0.32$ ). The findings of Jonason et al. (2010) suggest that personality features are associated with the mate retention strategies that individuals employ to maintain their romantic relationships. The present research may be considered a replication of Jonason et al. (2010). Accordingly, we expected that Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and composite Dark Triad be positively associated with mate retention behaviors.

Generally, mate retention behaviors can range from socially acceptable behaviors to socially aversive behaviors. In order to measure humans' mate retention behaviors, Buss (1988) developed the Mate Retention Inventory (MRI) documenting 19 tactics of mate retention. Miner, Starratt, and Shackelford (2009) suggested a higher-order domain structure of mate retention behaviors: Benefit-Provisioning and Cost-Inflicting. The former domain includes strategies that increase relationship satisfaction. The latter, on the other hand, consists of strategies that inflict costs on the partner. This two-factor domain

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structure has been cross-culturally replicated in factor-analytic studies (e.g., Lopes, Shackelford, Santos, Farias, & Segundo, 2016).

While the associations between the Dark Triad and mate retention have been investigated in Western samples, no study has examined this relationship in non-Western cultures. Research suggests that the personality correlates of mate retention in Western samples (e.g., Sela, Shackelford, Pham, & Zeigler-Hill, 2015) may not necessarily be replicated in non-Western cultures (e.g., Atari, Barbaro, Sela, Shackelford, & Chegeni, (2017)). Therefore, it is important to investigate the relationships between personality features and mate retention behaviors across cultures. The present study aimed to investigate the association between the Dark Triad traits (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and mate retention domains in Iran. Broadly, Iran is a Middle Eastern country whose major population speak Persian and are Shiite Muslims. Iranian culture provides a unique opportunity for researchers to examine personality and individual differences in a non-WEIRD (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) culture.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

A community sample of 205 participants (54.1% women) was selected from Tehran, Iran. Tehran may be considered the political and economic center of Iran with residents from a variety of ethnicities and subcultures. Potential participants were approached by the corresponding author in public places in Tehran and were invited to complete a set of questionnaires (see Procedure). All participants were married. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 61 ( $M = 31.9$ ,  $SD = 7.9$ ). In terms of employment status, 134 participants (65.4%) were employed. The marital relationship length ranged from 2 months to 40 years ( $M = 77.8$  months,  $SD = 78.2$  months).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Mate Retention Inventory-Short Form (MRI-SF)

The Mate Retention Inventory-Short Form (MRI-SF; Buss, Shackelford, & McKibbin, 2008) consists of 38 items assessing 19 mate retention tactics. All participants reported on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*often*) how often they performed each behavior within the past year. Those participants whose marriage duration was less than a year were instructed to answer the items based on their relationship length. Atari, Barbaro, Shackelford, and Chegeni (2017) reported satisfactory psychometric properties of the Persian translation of the MRI-SF in Iranian context. Composite scores of Benefit-Provisioning (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.86$ ) and Cost-Inflicting (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) components were calculated by averaging the appropriate items. Examples of Benefit-Provisioning and Cost-Inflicting items are "Took me out to a nice restaurant" and "Slapped a woman [man] who made a pass at me," respectively. Overall mate retention scores were calculated by averaging all 38 items of the MRI-SF (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

#### 2.2.2. Dirty Dozen

The Dirty Dozen (DD; Jonason & Webster, 2010) was used in this study as a measure of the Dark Triad. All participants provided their answers on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Farsi translation of the DD has shown adequate validity and reliability in previous work (Atari & Chegeni, 2016). In the present study, alpha coefficients for Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism were 0.74, 0.55, and 0.87, respectively. We also computed a Dark Triad composite score by averaging all 12 items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.76$ ).

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics and sex differences.

	Men		Women		t-Test statistic	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Machiavellianism	1.69	0.93	1.49	0.74	1.70	0.24
Narcissism	3.95	1.49	4.50	1.58	-2.54*	-0.35
Psychopathy	2.34	1.14	2.22	0.92	0.90	0.12
Dark Triad	2.67	0.84	2.74	0.80	-0.64	-0.09
BP	1.73	0.47	1.52	0.50	3.13**	0.43
CI	0.57	0.36	0.45	0.34	2.59**	0.34
Overall MR	1.15	0.33	0.98	0.37	3.46**	0.47

Note. BP = Benefit-Provisioning; CI = Cost-Inflicting; MR = Mate Retention.

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

### 2.3. Procedure

The relevant university's committee approved this study. All measures were presented in a questionnaire package in a randomized order. All packages started with demographic questions (age, sex, marital status, and educational background). Potential participants were approached and invited to take part in a psychological study about marriage and personality. Participants completed paper-and-pencil versions of the DD and MRI-SF along with demographic details and other measures whose results are presented elsewhere. Participation was on a voluntary basis.

## 3. Results

We examined descriptive statistics of the study variables and sex differences. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics (i.e.,  $M$  and  $SD$ ) of all study variables for men and women. Moreover, sex differences were examined using independent samples  $t$ -test and effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ). As displayed in Table 1, women in the present sample scored higher on narcissism. Sex differences in Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and composite Dark Triad score were non-significant ( $ps > 0.09$ ). Moreover, men performed Benefit-Provisioning and Cost-Inflicting mate retention more frequently than women ( $ps < 0.01$ ).

Table 2 contains correlations between the Dark Triad traits and mate retention domains as well as overall mate retention. As presented in Table 2, Machiavellianism was positively associated with Benefit-Provisioning and Cost-Inflicting mate retention as well as the global score of mate retention. Narcissism was positively associated with Benefit-Provisioning and Cost-Inflicting mate retention as well as the global score of mate retention. The correlation between psychopathy and Benefit-Provisioning was positive, yet did not reach statistical significance ( $p = 0.24$ ). Psychopathy was positively associated with Cost-Inflicting mate retention and global mate retention. Finally, the Dark Triad composite score was positively correlated with Benefit-Provisioning ( $r = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), Cost-Inflicting ( $r = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and overall mate retention ( $r = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). We also conducted two independent linear regression analyses, with Benefit-Provisioning

**Table 2**  
Correlation coefficients between study variables.

Variable	Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy	Dark Triad
BP	0.16* (0.20**)	0.16* (0.09)	0.08 (0.09)	0.19** (0.17*)
CI	0.37** (0.37**)	0.18** (0.16*)	0.21** (0.22**)	0.33** (0.32**)
Global MR	0.29** (0.32**)	0.20** (0.14)	0.16* (0.17*)	0.30** (0.28**)

Note. BP = Benefit-Provisioning; CI = Cost-Inflicting; MR = Mate Retention.

Figures in parentheses represent correlations statistically controlling for age and relationship length.

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

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