



Self-construals and the Dark Triad traits in six countries[☆]



Peter K. Jonason^{a,*}, Joshua Foster^b, Atsushi Oshio^c, Maria Sitnikova^d, Bela Birkas^e, Valdiney Gouveia^f

^a Western Sydney University, Australia

^b University of South Alabama, United States

^c Waseda University, Japan

^d Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, Russia

^e University of Pecs, Hungary

^f Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

In a sample ($N = 1969$) drawn from six countries, we examined the relationships between individual differences in independent and interdependent self-construals and the Dark Triad traits (i.e., psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism). Overall, the Dark Triad traits were largely unrelated to interdependence whereas Machiavellianism and narcissism, in particular, were associated with stronger independent self-construals. Men scored higher than women did on the Dark Triad traits in all countries with some cross-cultural variance. Women were used both more independent and interdependent self-construals than men were but these were weak and driven by country-specific effects. Sex differences in the Dark Triad traits were partially accounted for by individual differences in self-construals, but these mediation effects were quite small and speculative given limited evidence for sex differences in self-construals in the six countries we sampled. Results are discussed in terms of differentiating the Dark Triad traits.

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The Dark Triad traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) capture individual differences in grandiosity, exhibitionism, superiority (i.e., narcissism), manipulateness, cynicism (i.e., Machiavellianism), interpersonal antagonism, and callousness (i.e., psychopathy). The traits have theoretical and practical implications for various fields of research, including organizational, clinical, and social psychology. In the present study, we attempt to provide new details on how one can differentiate and understand these traits in relation to individual differences in independent (i.e., defining the self in terms of unique qualities) and interdependent (i.e., defining the self in terms of relationships with others) self-construals using a cross-cultural sample of participants representing six different countries given the potential cross-cultural differences in self-construals (Kashima et al., 1995).

Independence and interdependence are part of a larger body of evidence suggesting that personality traits can be organized in a superordinate fashion along two dimensions. These “Big Two” dimensions (Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, & Neberich, 2013; Triandis, 1989) have slightly different labels but all center on the distinction between “self-

interested” or self-profitable traits (i.e., independence/agency; e.g., ambition, competitive, masculine) and “other-interested” or other profitable traits (i.e., interdependence/communion; e.g., caring, generous, feminine). These basic units of personality are genetically influenced (Neiss et al., 2005) and situationally stable (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). There is considerable evidence suggesting the Dark Triad traits should be correlated with independent and interdependent self-construals. For example, the Dark Triad traits (Jonason & Webster, 2010) and independence are correlated with anger (Akutsu, Yamaguchi, Kim, & Oshio, 2016). The Dark Triad traits, especially narcissism, have a self-interested and, at times, an anti-group dispositional core (Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, 2015). And third, agency is characterized by a desire to be independent and autonomous as the Dark Triad traits are correlated with similar motivations like need for power, prestige, and dominance (Jonason & Ferrell, 2016); with limited associations for motivations that resemble communion like the need for affiliation. Taken together, we expect individual differences in self-construals to relate to the Dark Triad traits in predictable ways. Primarily, we expect it to strongly differentiate the Dark Triad traits such that narcissism is the primary hub of the correlation between independent self-construals and the Dark Triad traits which should be rather cross-culturally invariant. Second, we expect the traits to collectively be rather orthogonal with interdependent self-construals with even a slightly negative association for psychopathy given its “antisocial” nature.

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* Corresponding author at: School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Western Sydney University, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia.

E-mail address: pjonason@westernsydney.edu.au (P.K. Jonason).

In addition, there is cause to expect sex differences in both the Dark Triad traits and self-construals. Men score higher than women do on the Dark Triad traits in most countries sampled (Jonason, Li, & Czarna, 2013), which may be a function of differences in the costs and benefits ancestral men and women have experienced for engaging in fast and slow life history strategies. In contrast, sex differences in self-construals (Cross & Madson, 1997; Kashima et al., 1995) may be a function of different cultural influences on what is male and female stereotyped behavior (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). Regardless of which “origin” story is correct, there is, therefore, cause to predict that (1) men should score higher on the Dark Triad traits and independent self-construals than women do, (2) women should score higher on the interdependent self-construals, and (3) the sex differences in the Dark Triad traits might be mediated by individual differences in self-construals such that high scores on independent and low scores on interdependent self-construals should facilitate the presence of the Dark Triad traits in men.

In this study, we investigate how individual differences in self-construals allow us to better understand and differentiate the Dark Triad traits. We also examine how those self-construals might act as mediators for sex differences in the Dark Triad traits. Importantly, we test these predictions in an ethnically diverse sample drawn from six countries to get some sense of the robustness/variance in these effects around the world.

1. Method

1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants ($N_{Grand} = 1969$; $M_{Age} = 21.33$, $SD_{Age} = 3.99$, Range = 16 to 47) were 310 Australian (97 men; $M_{Age} = 19.17$, $SD_{Age} = 3.70$), 351 Japanese (135 men; $M_{Age} = 21.42$, $SD_{Age} = 1.41$), 371 Russian (94 men; $M_{Age} = 19.17$, $SD_{Age} = 2.35$), 300 Hungarians (129 men; $M_{Age} = 25.00$, $SD_{Age} = 4.26$), 306 Brazilian (91 men; $M_{Age} = 22.47$, $SD_{Age} = 5.56$), and 331 American (90 men; $M_{Age} = 20.73$, $SD_{Age} = 2.86$) undergraduate college students who participated in a larger online (translated and back-translated in the non-English speaking samples) study about “personality and views of the future” in exchange for course credit in their psychology classes. Participants were informed of the nature of the study, asked to consent and, if provided, completed a series of self-report measures where the items were randomized within each measure. Upon completion participants were thanked and debriefed.

1.2. Measures

The 27-item Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) was used to measure Machiavellianism (e.g., “I like to use clever manipulation to get my way.”), narcissism (e.g., “I insist on getting the respect I deserve.”), and psychopathy (e.g., “people who mess with me always regret it.”). Participants indicated their agreement to the above (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Items for each scale were averaged together to create indexes of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.^{1,2}

We assessed individual differences in self-construals using a 20-item measure taken from Singelis (1994) and Takata (1999) as used previously by Park and Kitayama (2012) and validated in Japanese (Uchida, 2008) and Brazilian samples (Gouveia, Singelis, & Coelho, 2002)

¹ In the full sample Machiavellianism was correlated with narcissism ($r = .09$, $p < .01$) but it was correlated with psychopathy ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) and psychopathy was correlated with narcissism ($r = .15$, $p < .01$). The weak correlation between narcissism and Machiavellianism was created by a slightly negative one in the Japanese sample ($r_s = -.05$). Country-specific correlations are available upon request.

² As this measure has already been validated in English and Japanese (Shimotsukasa & Oshio, in press), we were confident in its utility there, but because this is a relatively new measure, we checked it in our other samples and found fair fit elsewhere (e.g., $\chi^2/df \approx 2.35$, RMSEAs ≈ 0.06).

where 10 items measured independence (e.g., “I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects.”) and 10 items measured interdependence (e.g., “I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor or my boss.”). Participants indicated their level of agreement (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) with the items. The independence and interdependence scales had adequate internal consistency (see Table 2) and were orthogonal in the full sample ($r = .02$), but positively correlated in the Japanese sample ($r = .29$, $p < .01$).³

2. Results

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics and sex differences tests for scores on the Dark Triad traits and self-construals. Men scored higher than women did on the Dark Triad traits around the world with negligible differences for narcissism in America and Japan. In contrast, women were more likely to use independent and interdependent self-construals than men were in the full sample, but these sex differences were markedly smaller than those for the Dark Triad traits and were driven by isolated effects in America for independence and Japan and Russia for interdependence. While there were no interactions of location and participant's sex (2×6 ANOVA) for narcissism, independence, and interdependence, there were interactions for Machiavellianism ($F(5, 1962) = 3.41$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$) and psychopathy ($F(5, 1962) = 2.60$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$), such that sex differences for psychopathy were moderate in size for all countries except Japan whereas sex differences in Machiavellianism were particularly pronounced in Hungary and Japan. There were country effects for narcissism ($F(5, 1962) = 56.53$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$), Machiavellianism ($F(5, 1962) = 36.66$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$), psychopathy ($F(5, 1962) = 30.30$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$), independent ($F(5, 1946) = 34.32$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$), and interdependent ($F(5, 1946) = 11.39$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$), self-construals. Briefly, it appears that Japan was particularly high on psychopathy whereas Russia was much lower; America was the most narcissistic and independent whereas Japan was the least; Japan was the most Machiavellian whereas Australia was the least; and Japan was the most interdependent and Hungary was the least. When we compared relative Dark Triad scores overall we found that participants were the most Machiavellian, then narcissistic, and then psychopathic ($F(2, 3932) = 1495.65$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.43$). This same pattern was observed in Hungary ($F = 182.31$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.37$), Brazil ($F = 412.55$, $\eta_p^2 = .58$), Australia ($F = 475.20$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.61$), and Japan ($F = 400.93$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.53$). In the American ($F = 414.80$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.56$) and Russian ($F = 486.98$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.57$) samples, the differences between Machiavellianism and narcissism were not significant.

Next, we examined the correlations between the Dark Triad traits and individual differences in independence and interdependence for all samples combined and in each country specifically (Table 2). For all samples combined, Machiavellianism and narcissism were moderately associated with higher independence. All three traits had particularly weak ($r_s < 0.13$) associations with interdependence. Across samples, correlations with Dark Triad traits were the most consistent for narcissism and independence ($r_s = 0.23$ to 0.36), whereas the correlations varied more substantially across samples for all other combinations of Dark Triad traits and self-construals. This was not entirely surprising given that stronger correlations tend to be more stable than weaker correlations, and we have mostly smallish correlations. Strangely, in Japan, where independence and individualism were correlated, Machiavellianism was similarly correlated with independence and interdependence. However, when we corrected for Type 1 error inflation, the cross-cultural variability mostly disappeared. The correlations between Machiavellianism and individual differences in interdependence were negatively correlated mean country-level independence ($r = -0.84$). The correlations between psychopathy and individual differences in

³ Country-specific correlations are available upon request.

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