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Facets of the Dark Triad: Utilizing the Five-Factor Model to describe Machiavellianism

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have investigated how the three Dark Triad constructs (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) relate to the Five-Factor Model (FFM) in order to understand the underlying traits and relationships of these constructs. The current study investigated the relationships between Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy with the FFM facets. The three Dark Triad (DT) constructs were strongly correlated with all facets of low agreeableness and with the neuroticism facet angry hostility. There was significant overlap in the relationships of psychopathy and Machiavellianism with the FFM facets overall. Additionally, the DT constructs were investigated in relation to three types of workplace behaviors (i.e., counterproductive, citizenship, and unethical), with results indicating strong relationships for all three DT constructs with counterproductive and unethical workplace behaviors. Overall, the findings suggest that the Machiavellianism measures used strongly correlate with psychopathy and therefore may not assess a unique construct. Future studies should continue to investigate how these constructs may be overlapping and/or how measures of Machiavellianism may not be adequately assessing the full construct.

1. Introduction

Machiavellianism is composed of three sets of interrelated values: an avowed belief in the effectiveness of manipulative tactics in dealing with others, a cynical view of human nature, and an amoral outlook that puts expediency above principle (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2011). These values generate a specific set of characteristics that fit under the umbrella of Machiavellianism: (a) cynical, pragmatic, misanthropic, and immoral beliefs, (b) emotional detachedness, (c) agentic and self-beneficial motives, (d) strategic long-term planning, (e) manipulation and exploitation, and (f) deception and duplicity (Rauthmann & Will, 2011). Machiavellian individuals are often suspicious of others and have a cold and calculated approach to life, including aspects of the workplace and home (Christie & Geis, 1970). Additionally, individuals high in Machiavellianism often forgo short-term goals for long-term ones (Jones & Paulhus, 2009), are less likely than individuals high in narcissism and psychopathy to become aggressive when provoked (Jones & Paulhus, 2010a) and may commit theft when there is little to no chance of being caught (Cooper & Peterson, 1980).

Machiavellianism is related to several negative behaviors and outcomes, including elevated personality dysfunction (McHoskey, 2001), psychopathic traits (e.g., experiencing positive affect when exposed to sad stimuli and negative affect when exposed to a neutral stimulus; Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009), lower trait emotional intelligence (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007), lower empathy (Wastell & Booth, 2003), and elevated alexithymia (Wastell & Booth, 2003). Further, Machiavellianism is related to occupational problems and negative workplace behaviors (e.g., lower job satisfaction and theft; Fehr, Samson, & Paulhus, 1992), unsupportive leadership (Drory & Gluskinos, 1980), and counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBs; DeShong, Grant, & Mullins-Sweatt, 2015).

1.1. Machiavellianism, the Dark Triad, and the Five-Factor Model

Machiavellianism, along with psychopathy and narcissism, is a component of the "Dark Triad" (DT; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These constructs share features of egocentricity, callousness, and manipulativeness (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006) and tend to be moderately inter-correlated. However, some evidence suggests that they are three distinct traits (Jones & Paulhus, 2010b). Individuals may engage in different CWBs depending on their DT traits, such that those elevated on Machiavellianism engage in interpersonal CWBs (e.g., maltreatment of coworkers). Those elevated in narcissism

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may engage in both organizational (e.g., embezzlement) and interpersonal CWBs. Lastly, individuals high in psychopathy may engage in more violent, dangerous, and aggressive workplace behaviors (O'Boyle et al., 2011).

Underlying personality traits of the DT constructs may differentiate them from one another. The Five-Factor Model (FFM; Digman, 1990) is an empirically-supported general personality model that may elucidate these relationships. For example, a recent meta-analysis found that all three DT constructs were negatively correlated with agreeableness (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2015). Machiavellianism and psychopathy were negatively correlated with conscientiousness and positively correlated to neuroticism, and psychopathy was also positively correlated with extraversion and openness (though psychopathy's relationships with neuroticism, extraversion, and openness were comparatively smaller). Narcissism was positively correlated with extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness and was negatively correlated with neuroticism. O'Boyle et al. (2015) noted that psychopathy and Machiavellianism highly overlapped, and encouraged researchers to determine if these are unique traits.

Recently, Miller, Hyatt, Maples-Keller, Carter, and Lynam (in press) investigated the interrelations of DT measures across several studies. Machiavellianism researchers described the construct as moderate levels of Conscientiousness facets (e.g., perseverance and deliberation), while psychopathy typically correlates with low levels of Conscientiousness facets. Given these differences, the researchers concluded that measures of Machiavellianism might assess psychopathy because these measures assess conscientiousness facets, and score them such that lower facet scores equate to higher levels of Machiavellianism. Given Machiavellianism's operational definition, higher levels of Machiavellianism should relate with moderate-to-high levels of conscientiousness. Therefore, it is important to further assess the relationships between the DT and FFM facets utilizing additional measures of DT constructs. As "personality psychology has been long beset by a chaotic plethora of personality constructs that sometimes differ in label while measuring nearly the same thing" (Funder, 2001, p. 2000), it is essential to understand how psychopathy and Machiavellianism relate, determine if they are distinct, and examine problems with existing measures of these constructs.

1.2. Current study

The current study investigated the relationships between three Machiavellianism measures with the FFM. We predicted that Machiavellianism (across three measures) would negatively correlate with agreeableness and conscientiousness and positively correlate with neuroticism. Based on results of previous research, we predicted that the measures would negatively correlate with all six facets of agreeableness and conscientiousness and positively correlate with the angry hostility, depressiveness, and impulsiveness facets of neuroticism.

We also examined the relationships of the FFM facets with the DT constructs to clarify how Machiavellianism relates to these overlapping constructs. For example, a DT measure may only be correlated with one facet within a domain, and therefore would likely not be related to the domain score. Alternatively, certain facets might be elevated while others may be low for a construct within the same domain (e.g., high impulsivity and low anxiousness). Facet-level assessment allows for a more precise comparison of how Machiavellianism differs from psychopathy and narcissism. We predicted that the agreeableness domain and six facets would correlate negatively with the three DT constructs. However, we also predicted that other facet-level differences within the other four domains would differentiate these constructs. For example, previous research has established that narcissism, but not psychopathy, is associated with the extraversion facet gregariousness (Glover, Miller, Lynam, Crego, & Widiger, 2012).

Another important avenue to understand how constructs relate to one another is to assess convergent/discriminant validity. Given that previous research has found distinct relationships between workplace behavior measures with other measures of the DT (e.g., O'Boyle et al., 2011), we assessed the DT in relation to three workplace behavior scales. These analyses provide additional indicators of convergence between workplace behaviors and DT components and Machiavellianism more specifically and may clarify how these measures may relate distinctly to various types of behaviors.

The current study assessed three categories of workplace behaviors. First, counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBs) are undesired behaviors that occur in the workplace and may impact a company in a negative way. Unethical workplace behaviors are those that society may consider unethical, though may or may not decrease the productivity of a company (e.g., lying to customers to make a sale may be unethical but actually increases productivity) and therefore may not be 'counterproductive'. Last, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) are considered positive workplace behaviors that "support the organizational, social, and psychological environment of an organization" (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007, p. 414). The DT constructs were investigated for differential relationships with these three types of workplace behaviors.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Undergraduate psychology students at a Midwestern university working ≥20 h per week ($N = 191$) completed the study for course credit compensation. Twenty-eight participants were dropped due to invalid responding, which was determined using the Elemental Psychopathy Assessment virtue and infrequency scales (EPA; Lynam et al., 2011). The final sample ($N = 163$) had an age-range of 18–54 ($M = 20.89$, $SD = 4.01$), were 71.80% female, 74.80% Caucasian, 8.60% Native American/Alaskan Native, 6.10% Black/African American, 2.50% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.50% Hispanic. Eligible participants were solicited by email and were provided a hyperlink to participate remotely.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. The Dirty Dozen (DD; Jonason & Webster, 2010)

The DD is a 12-item self-report measure that assesses the three DT constructs. Items are rated on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Internal consistency was acceptable for the subscales, ranging from 0.80 (Narcissism) to 0.84 (Machiavellianism and Psychopathy), and acceptable for the total score ($\alpha = 0.86$).

2.2.2. Elemental Psychopathy Assessment (EPA; Lynam et al., 2011)

The EPA is a 178-item self-report measure of psychopathy from the perspective of the FFM. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). In the current study, the EPA total score had excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.95$).

2.2.3. Five Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI; Glover et al., 2012)

The FFNI is a 130-item self-report measure of narcissism from the perspective of the FFM. Participants rated items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The FFNI has a total score with excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90$).

2.2.4. Mach-IV Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970)

The Mach-IV is a 20-item self-report measure of Machiavellianism. Participants rated items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). For the current study, internal consistency was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.71$).