



Vocational interests and dark personality: Are there dark career choices?



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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how vocational interests are related to the Dark Triad – a cluster of three socially malevolent personality traits that include Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Participants completed self-report measures of vocational interests, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Narcissism correlated positively with the artistic, social, biology, and business interest factors and with many of their associated scales. Machiavellianism correlated negatively with the social, applied, and work style factors. Psychopathy correlated positively with the science, biology, and business interest factors, and was negatively correlated with the social and work style factors. The results expand the understanding of personality and vocational interests and support the perspective that the Dark Triad consists of three related yet different dimensions.

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1. Introduction

Personality has consistently been linked with vocational interests. For example, in a meta-analysis of 12 studies using Holland's (1997) six domain model of vocational interests (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, or RIASEC) and the Five Factor Model of personality, Larson, Rottinghaus, and Borgen (2002) found that: openness to experience was correlated with investigative and artistic career interests; extraversion was correlated with social and enterprising career interests; and conscientiousness was correlated with enterprising and conventional interests. A similar pattern was found in a separate meta-analysis of 18 studies by Barrick, Mount, and Gupta (2003). What is less understood is how vocational interests are correlated with negative, or "dark", personality traits. Jonason, Wee, Li, and Jackson (2014) examined how the Dark Triad (subclinical psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism) correlated with vocational interests in two samples. Across the two samples, subclinical psychopathy (a lack of empathy, thrill-seeking behaviour, and high impulsivity, see Hare, 1985) correlated positively with realistic, enterprising, and practical interests. Machiavellianism (interpersonal coldness and manipulativeness that arises from a lack of conventional morality, see Christie & Geis, 1970) correlated positively with cultured interests and negatively with artistic, social, and enterprising interests. Narcissism (sense of entitlement and superiority, see Raskin & Hall, 1979) was found to correlate positively with artistic, social, enterprising, and cultured interests and negatively with conventional interests.

The purpose of this study is to expand on the findings reported by Jonason et al. (2014) by examining how the Dark Triad correlates with

vocational interests using different measures of vocational interests and Dark Triad traits. The present study measures psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism using the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP; Hare, 1985), the MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979), while Jonason et al. (2014) employed the use of the Dirty Dozen measure (D12; Jonason & Webster, 2010) and the Short Dark Triad measure (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014). This distinction is important as previous research has noted that although the Dirty Dozen is a very useful composite measure of the Dark Triad, it is not the recommended choice of measure when measuring each Dark Triad factor individually (Lee et al., 2013). The SD3, on the other hand, has been found to be the more valid measure relative to the D12, however because of its brevity, the scale may not capture the measured constructs as well as longer measures of the Dark Triad.

Furthermore, unlike the study of Jonason et al. (2014), the present study used the Jackson Career Explorer (JCE; Schermer, 2012). The JCE is a modified version of the Jackson Vocational Interest Survey (JVIS; Jackson, 1977). Relative to the original measure, the JCE is composed of less items (170 compared to the original 289 pairs) and employs a Likert scale rating for items, rather than ipsative choices. These changes were made in order to avoid fatigue and boredom effects and to make the scale better suited for multivariate analysis, respectively (Schermer & Vernon, 2008). The JCE consists of 34 scales which have been consistently found to generate seven factors: business (dominant leadership, finance, business, sales, supervision, human resources management, law, and professional advising), work style (job security, stamina, accountability, academic achievement, independence, planfulness, and interpersonal confidence), science (mathematics, physical science, engineering, and life science), social (social science, personal services, teaching, social service, and elementary education), artistic (creative

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arts, performing arts, author-journalism, and technical writing), applied (skilled trades, family activity, and office work), and biology (adventure, nature-agriculture, and medical service; Schermer & Vernon, 2008). Both the JCE scales and factors have been found to correlate meaningfully with other vocational interest and personality measures (Schermer, 2012; Schermer & MacDougall, 2011; Schermer, Petrides, & Vernon, 2015).

1.1. Hypotheses

Based on the findings reported by Jonason et al. (2014) and on past reported correlations between the Dark Triad and the JCE scales and factors with personality dimensions, seven general hypotheses (grouped by JCE interest factors) were tested. First, it was predicted that the artistic interest factor and the corresponding interest scales would correlate negatively with psychopathy and Machiavellianism, and positively with narcissism (H1). Art is often described as an expression of emotion and because psychopaths and high Machiavellians are posited to be deficient in these abilities (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer, & Veselka, 2011; Veselka, Schermer, & Vernon, 2012), it is unlikely that they would pursue artistic careers. In contrast, narcissists may pursue artistic careers in order to be admired by others (Jonason et al., 2014). Also based on the findings of Jonason et al. (2014) regarding the relationship between investigative interests, we expected that the science factor would not be related to any of the Dark Triad personality dimensions (H2).

With respect to the JCE social factor, it was predicted that these interest scales would be negatively correlated with psychopathy and Machiavellianism, and positively correlated with narcissism (H3). Previous research has suggested that psychopaths and Machiavellians tend to lack the ability to express or understand emotional information (Petrides et al., 2011; Veselka et al., 2012); hence psychopaths and Machiavellians may stray away from careers that require social interactions. Narcissism, in contrast, is more social in nature as it correlates positively with extraversion (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008) therefore a narcissist may be more likely to pursue careers that allow them to network with others. Our predictions regarding the relationship between the social interest factor and Machiavellianism and narcissism are congruent with the findings of Jonason et al. (2014); however they found a non-significant relationship between social interests and psychopathy.

We also predicted that biological vocational interests would be differentially correlated with the Dark Triad. Specifically, given the common correlations with the Big Five (i.e. psychopathy and Machiavellianism – low conscientiousness; narcissism – high extraversion; Vernon et al., 2008), we expected that an interest in adventure would be positively correlated with all three of the Dark Triad traits. Moreover, we expected that natural-agricultural interests would be unrelated to the Dark Triad, and medical interests to be negatively correlated with psychopathy and Machiavellianism given the caring and social aspects of medical professions (H4).

No a priori hypotheses were made regarding the applied interest factor itself as the underlying interests are likely to be differentially correlated with the Dark Triad. More specifically, it was predicted that an interest in skilled trades would be positively correlated with psychopathy, and unrelated to Machiavellianism and narcissism. Previous research has found this pattern of correlations with realistic interests which are similar to skilled trades (Jonason et al., 2014). Furthermore, family activity interests were expected to be negatively correlated with psychopathy and Machiavellianism as psychopaths and Machiavellians likely lack the compassion required in such a vocation. Moreover, an interest in office work is expected to correlate negatively with Machiavellianism and narcissism as individuals high on these dimensions are likely to avoid careers where they are relatively unlikely to gain influence and be the centre of attention, respectively (H5).

It was also predicted that all three of the Dark Triad traits would be positively correlated with the business factor and the related vocational interest scales (H6). Past research has found that individuals who have

high scores on the Dark Triad measures tend to prefer social systems that emphasize social stratification and inequity and prefer to be at the top of the social hierarchy (Lee et al., 2013). This is consistent with the definition of narcissism which is characterized by a sense of superiority. Moreover, it has been found that people that score high on measures of Machiavellianism are concerned with gaining social influence (Jonason & Webster, 2012) and that business students tend to score higher on measures of Machiavellianism relative to their non-business student counterparts (Skinner, 1981). These results suggest high Machiavellians are interested in careers that are likely to lead to positions of influence. Furthermore, all three of the dark traits have been associated with an interest in dominant leadership – one of underlying interests of the JCE business factor (Semenya & Honey, 2015), suggesting that positive correlations should be found.

Last, it was predicted that the JCE work style factor, and associated scales, would be negatively correlated with psychopathy and Machiavellianism, and not significantly associated with narcissism (H7). Prior research using Holland's vocational interest model has suggested that conscientiousness is unrelated to vocational interests (Barrick et al., 2003) but all of the scales that comprise the JCE work style have been found to be correlated with conscientiousness (Schermer, 2012). Extant research has also found that individuals who are higher in psychopathy and Machiavellianism tend to be less conscientious (Vernon et al., 2008).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample was comprised of 858 volunteer participants (709 females and 149 males) from North America. The age of participants ranged from 15 to 92 years ($M = 40.11$, $SD = 17.01$). Participants were recruited to be part of an ongoing participant pool through magazine and newspaper ads, as well as social media.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Jackson Career Explorer (JCE)

The JCE assesses vocational interests (Schermer, 2012). This measure consists of 170 items (example item, "Working overtime to complete a project") rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*would not want to do this activity*) to 5 (*would very much like to do this activity*). The measure's 34 vocational interests (5 items per interest) have been found to consistently fit a seven-factor solution, including: business, work style, science, social, artistic, applied, and biology interests. Previous research has shown that the JCE has high internal consistency, with the average alpha for the scales being 0.76 (Schermer, 2012; Schermer & MacDougall, 2011; Schermer & Vernon, 2008). The JCE was also found to have convergent validity with other vocational interest scales (Schermer, 2012; Schermer & MacDougall, 2011).

2.2.2. Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP-III-R12)

The Self-Report Psychopathy Scale is used to measure subclinical psychopathy (Hare, 1985). The scale is composed of 62 self-reflective five point Likert scale items (example item, "I'm a rebellious person") ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The (SRP-III-R12) has demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.79$) and is the most widely validated measure of psychopathy in extant literature (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

2.2.3. MACH-IV

The MACH-IV measure is a self-report measure of Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970). This scale is composed of 20 self-reflective items (example item, "The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear") and is answered on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Previous research has shown that the MACH-IV has high internal consistency, ranging from 0.70 to

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