



“I could see, in the depth of his eyes, my own beauty reflected”: Women's assortative preference for narcissistic, but not for Machiavellian or psychopathic male faces



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ABSTRACT

Few studies have looked at assortative mating for the Dark Triad (i.e., Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism), or assortative mating for facial characteristics related to personality. In two studies (n 's = 302 and 262), we investigated whether women scoring high in the Dark Triad exhibited a preference for high and low Dark Triad male composite faces. In Study 1, using a two alternative forced-choice task and a short Dark Triad scale, there was little evidence for assortative mating. In Study 2, utilising a rating scale, longer personality measures, and controlling for perceptions of aggression, masculinity and dominance, we found positive assortative mating for narcissism in long-term relationships. Findings are discussed from evolutionary psychological perspective.

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1. Introduction

The term “assortative mating” refers to the tendency to seek out for mates who are similar on different characteristics, such as education (Krzyżanowska & Mascie-Taylor, 2014), altruism (Tognetti, Berticat, Raymond, & Faurie, 2014), and political orientation (Watson et al., 2004). Although the ultimate reasons for assortative mating in humans are not clear, there are a few possibilities for why it does exist. For instance, similarity could be beneficial in promoting relationship stability (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), crucial in bi-parental care of offspring. Another possibility is that assortative mating increases genetic similarity amongst family members, facilitating inclusive fitness via altruism (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Indeed, phenotypic assortment seems to have an underlying genotypic assortment (Guo, Wang, Liu, & Randall, 2014), which could even explain existence of variation in different characteristics (for narcissism, see Holtzman & Donnellan, 2015). In the present study, we investigated assortative mating with regard to an aversive personality constellation, the Dark Triad. The Dark Triad traits share the core of selfish and exploitive inter-personal orientation, with some unique aspects specific to each trait, such as grandiosity (i.e., narcissism), cynicism (i.e., Machiavellianism), and callousness (i.e., psychopathy).

The Dark Triad has received significant interest since its conception over a decade ago (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Some of this research has focussed on mate choice for the Dark Triad characteristics, suggesting that the traits may either be aversive or desirable, depending on the mating context, methodology of the studies, and characteristics of the rater (e.g., Aitken, Lyons, & Jonason, 2013; Carter, Campbell, & Muncer, 2014; Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013; Lyons, Marcinkowska, Helle, & McGrath, 2015; Marcinkowska, Helle, & Lyons, 2015; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). However, less is known about the Dark Triad in the context of assortative mating, especially during initial mate attraction. Studies investigating each trait separately have found positive assortative mating for narcissism in initial attraction, as well as in established relationships (Grosz, Dufner, Back, & Denissen, 2015; Keller et al., 2014; Lamkin, Campbell, & Miller, 2015). Others have found similarity in psychopathy and anti-social behaviour in initial attraction (Blanchard, Lyons, & Centifanti, 2016) and in couples (Boutwell, Beaver, & Barnes, 2012; Krueger, Moffitt, Caspi, Bleske, & Silva, 1998; Savard, Brassard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2015). To our knowledge, only two studies to date have looked at all three Dark Triad traits together. Using a vignette design (Jonason, Lyons, & Blanchard, 2015) and dating couples (Smith et al., 2014), these studies found positive assortment for psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Jonason et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2014), and negative assortative mating for narcissism (Smith et al., 2014). Thus, whether assortative mating preferences for especially narcissism exist is still unclear.

As well as being attracted to likeness in dating vignettes, it is possible that preference for similar levels of the Dark Triad

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is reflected in the choice for facial characteristics. Individual differences in extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Little & Perrett, 2007; Penton-Voak, Pound, Little, & Perrett, 2006), aggressiveness (Carré, Morrissey, Mondloch, & McCormick, 2010), socio-sexuality (Boothroyd, Jones, Burt, DeBruine, & Perrett, 2008), as well as the Dark Triad (Holtzman, 2011) are reflected in the composite, static image of the face. Not only is the Dark Triad detectable in the face, but women also have a significant dislike for faces that have been computer-manipulated to reflect high and low levels of these traits (Lyons et al., 2015; Lyons & Simeonov, 2016). This dislike appears to be influenced by individual differences in socio-sexuality and contraceptive use (Marcinkowska et al., 2015). Research has not yet looked at how an individual's Dark Triad traits relate to their choice of high or low Dark Triad facial morphs. In the present studies, we investigated whether women who are high on these traits show positive assortative mating for high Dark Triad men's faces.

Another important point of consideration is the impact of mating context on mating decisions. In evolutionary terms, women can enhance reproductive success in three ways; by obtaining good genes, support, and fathering from the male (Lu, Zhu, & Chang, in press). It is thought that in short-term relationships, women seek, amongst other things, genetic benefits for their offspring, whereas in long-term relationships, provisioning and fathering ability may play a more important role (Lu et al., 2015). Evidence suggests that assortative mating for the Dark Triad is costly to relationship stability (Keller et al., 2014; Lamkin et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2014) and hence, have an adverse impact on bi-parental care. Thus, assortative mating for these traits in long-term relationships may not be a good strategy.

However, high Dark Triad males may be more profitable in short-term relationships, perhaps by benefitting females in terms of gene capturing for their offspring. This could be especially important for high Dark Triad women who may be geared towards short-term relationships (Jonason & Buss, 2012), which is also associated with preference for good gene indicators (Quist et al., 2012). Scant evidence points at narcissism as a potentially beneficial trait for women. A recent study found that preference for narcissistic male facial composites had an association with a higher number of offspring in women (Marcinkowska, Lyons, & Helle, 2016), and other studies have demonstrated that narcissism has a link to attractiveness (Holtzman & Strube, 2010), as well as to better physical and psychological health (Jonason, Baughman, Carter, & Parker, 2015). Therefore, we would expect that out of the three Dark Triad traits, narcissistic women would prefer high narcissistic faces, especially in short-term relationships.

In summary, in two studies, we provide a unique contribution towards understanding how personality in women affects an initial attraction to male faces that are computer-manipulated to reflect the same personality traits. Because assortative mating for adverse personality traits has a negative influence on relationship stability, we do not necessarily expect to find assortative mating for the Dark Triad in the long-term mating context. However, high narcissistic women, with a short-term mating interest, may prefer high narcissistic men as casual partners, possibly due to genetic benefits associated with short-term mating.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

A total of 302 women ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.63$, $SD = 8.19$; age range 16–61) were recruited for a study on “Personality and Mate Choice” through advertising on social media, to a student population at a University in the UK, and on on-line participation websites. The first page of the

survey contained a participant information sheet and an online consent form, and the last page had a full debrief.

2.1.2. Materials

2.1.2.1. Dark Triad facial morphs. Composite faces of high and low Dark Triad men were created using the Psychomorph software program (Tiddeman, Burt, & Perrett, 2001), where prototype faces from Holtzman (2011) were imposed on five men's faces (Rantala et al., 2012) to create high and low narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic composites (see Lyons et al., 2015, for more detail and example faces). Preference for Machiavellian faces was correlated with preference for the psychopathic ($r(302) = .22$, $p < .001$) but not the narcissistic ($r(302) = .09$, $p > .05$) faces. Preference for psychopathic faces negatively correlated with preference for narcissistic faces ($r(302) = -.12$, $p = .05$).

2.1.2.2. Short Dark Triad (SD3). The SD3 (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a 27-item questionnaire that measures narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (nine items each) on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree strongly, 5 = agree strongly). Participants indicated how much they agreed with statements such as “It's not wise to tell your secrets” (i.e., Machiavellianism; Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$), “People see me as a natural leader” (i.e., narcissism; $\alpha = .71$) and “I like to get revenge on authorities” (i.e., psychopathy; $\alpha = .73$). The items were summed to form an index for each of the Dark Triad traits. Machiavellianism was positively correlated with narcissism ($r(302) = .31$, $p < .001$) and psychopathy ($r(302) = .44$, $p < .001$), and narcissism was correlated with psychopathy ($r(302) = .29$, $p < .001$).

2.1.3. Procedure

Participants were randomly allocated to evaluate the Dark Triad facial morphs for desirability as either a short-term ($n = 138$) or a long-term ($n = 164$) partner (see Little, Cohen, Jones, & Belsky, 2007 for a description of the mating context). Fifteen paired facial morphs were presented in a randomised order, each one consisting of high and low versions of Machiavellian, psychopathic and narcissistic faces (five pairs for each trait). Participants scored a point each time they chose a high face, resulting in continuous score between 0 (no choice for high face) and 1 (all choices for high face). Participants then completed the SD3.

2.2. Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics, and one-sample t-test values (against a chance, 0.5) for the facial morph preference in both mating contexts. The results indicate that in any mating scenario women consider male faces high in the Dark Triad as undesirable. We calculated zero order correlation coefficients to test for assortative mating between the Dark Triad facial morphs and SD3 scores separately for short-term and long-term mating contexts. To account for multiple testing, we adjusted the alpha level to .01, which produced no significant correlations. The only near-significant correlation was between narcissism and short-term mating preference, indicating that

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test values for facial morph preference.

	Mean (SD)			
	Short-term mating	t-Value	Long-term mating	t-Value
Facial morphs				
Machiavellianism	.40(.21)	−6.46**	.41(.20)	−7.41**
Psychopathy	.44(.24)	−3.83**	.45(.24)	−3.83*
Narcissism	.37(.25)	−6.05**	.32(.25)	−9.47**

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

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