The dark side of negotiation: Examining the outcomes of face-to-face and computer-mediated negotiations among dark personalities

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of the Dark Triad (DT; psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism) and communication condition (face-to-face [FtF] versus computer-mediated communication [CMC]) on success in negotiations. This is relevant considering the increased use of CMC and the potentially differing nature of how individuals communicate online compared to FtF. For example, while individuals with dark personalities are known to exploit others in person, relatively little is known about their propensity to manipulate in online environments. Participant dyads ($N = 206$) negotiated the details of a pair of concert tickets either FtF or online in real time for 20 min before having to come to a decision. The results (based on overall success in the negotiation) indicate that individuals scoring higher on self-report measures of the DT perform best when they are able to negotiate FtF with their counterpart, whereas those with lower DT scores appear better suited to succeed in negotiations online.

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1. Introduction

People with traits characteristic of the Dark Triad (DT) of personality (psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism), hereafter referred to as dark personalities, are callous and interpersonally exploitative (Paulhus, 2014). These constructs share a common dark core, characterized by the Interpersonal and Affective factors of the *Psychopathy Checklist—Revised* (PCL-R; Hare, 2003; Jones & Figueredo, 2013); however, each construct in the triad possesses unique traits. Specifically, psychopathy is uniquely related to an antisocial lifestyle, Machiavellianism to calculated manipulation and being goal-oriented, and narcissism to grandiosity and self-adoration (Paulhus, 2014). It is important to note that while each of the subcomponents of the Dark Triad has unique features, individuals may present with varying combinations of these traits. The DT, as a construct, has been associated with exploitative behavior in a number of face-to-face (FtF) settings, such as in the workplace, where their penchant for manipulation may be advantageous (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). However, their manipulative behavior has yet to be explored in a computer-mediated environment. The present study seeks to further explore whether dark personalities will be skilled at negotiating face-to-face (i.e., ten Brinke, Black, Porter,

& Carney, 2015), and for the first time, will examine the impact of DT traits on negotiations within a computer-mediated communication (CMC) context.

Negotiations provide a meaningful way of examining an individual's ability to persuade or manipulate. While common to the business realm, negotiations also have become more prevalent online, due in part to the use of websites such as Craigslist. Distributive negotiations are particularly relevant to the study of manipulation because they involve 'win–lose' outcomes in which one party's success comes at the expense of their opponent's (Pruitt, 1981). There is a substantial amount of literature examining the role of individual differences in negotiations with a recent review concluding that personality characteristics are some of the strongest predictors of performance in a negotiation (Elfenbein, 2015). For example, Dimotakis, Conlon, and Ilies (2012) found that individuals scoring high on a measure of agreeableness (related to cooperation; Costa & McCrae, 1992) are best suited to negotiations in which making compromises and problem solving are the main goals whereas those who score low in agreeableness (related to competitiveness) seem best suited to negotiations where the goal is to 'beat' one's opponent by earning more. Interestingly, low levels of agreeableness have been linked to all three components of the DT (Black, Woodworth, & Porter, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). One study examining the influence of DT traits on negotiation outcomes found that individuals scoring higher on psychopathy were more successful in negotiations that required competitiveness and they performed poorly in negotiations

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that required cooperation (ten Brinke et al., 2015). The same did not hold true for Machiavellianism or narcissism. Further, the honesty–humility component of the HEXACO model of personality has been theorized as a possible 'opposite' to the Dark Triad, and low levels of honesty–humility have been linked with risk taking to achieve gains (Weller & Thulin, 2012). Examining the person–situation fit in negotiations could be an important aspect that might help explain how or why some individuals succeed in certain contexts but not in others (Elfenbein, 2015).

1.1. Computer-mediated communication

The proliferation and popularity of technology is changing the way people communicate (Berger, 2013). Online communication differs from FtF communication in a number of distinct ways. For example, on-line communication allows for greater control of self-presentation because it often is anonymous and affords greater time lapses between responses compared to FtF communication wherein one must respond verbally and quickly to an identifiable recipient (Berger, 2013). Indeed, one study demonstrated that over 70% of Facebook users report that they edit their messages before sending them (Das & Kramer, 2013). There also can be less ambiguity in the content of the online communication, as once it is written it can be returned to and reviewed at a later time; however, there is potentially more uncertainty in online communication because the tone and intent in written messages can be harder to interpret (Berger, 2013).

One important difference between online and FtF contexts that influences perception of others is the absence of nonverbal cues, such as body language. The lack of nonverbal behavior in CMC has been proposed by some to contribute to an inability identify the social and emotional aspects of an interaction leading to impersonal and/or hostile communication in this setting (Walther, 2012). While the lack of nonverbal cues and the characteristics of online communication may impact the nature of this type of correspondence, it is unclear whether particular personality characteristics might alter an individual's success depending on the communication context.

Negotiations that take place in a CMC context differ in several ways from those conducted FtF. One notable difference is the lack of contextual cues (e.g., verbal cues such as sarcasm or nonverbal cues to indicate aggressiveness), which are arguably lost when relying on written language alone (Giordano, Stoner, Brouer, & George, 2007). For example, in FtF negotiations, people tend to prefer negotiating with more feminine-looking faces as they are perceived to be more cooperative (Gladstone & O'Connor, 2014). The lack of these contextual cues related to the appearance of one's opponent, coupled with the addition of the unique factors associated with CMC, may produce differing outcomes during online negotiations.

There has been relatively little research examining factors that contribute to success in FtF versus CMC negotiations. One study by Giordano et al. (2007) found that participants who negotiated online (using real time instant messaging) used more forceful communication, which is related to behaviors such as the use of persuasion and threats, compared to those who negotiated FtF. The researchers attributed the increase in forcing communication styles to the potential depersonalization that has often been attributed to CMC in general (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984). That is, individuals communicating online may be more likely to act aggressively because they are not able to immediately observe the consequences of their actions. Interestingly, a forceful communication style was related to the individual's outcome in the negotiation, indicating that these types of tactics may result in people being more successful when negotiating competitively online. This pattern of communication in which individuals take on a more aggressive approach when online is what has been previously theorized as resulting from a lack of socio-emotional cues in CMC settings (Walther, 2012).

1.2. Dark communication

If the lack of social and emotional cues in CMC does lead to a hostile interpersonal style, dark personalities may possess an advantage due to their already hostile interpersonal nature. Individuals scoring highly on psychopathy, in particular, have been singled out for their use of aggression in online contexts (Hancock, Woodworth, & Boochever, 2015). Specifically, they have been found to use hostile language (e.g., curse words), make fewer references to their communication counterpart, and take less time to edit messages. However, the study by Giordano et al. (2007) did not assess for individual differences and found that all of their participants became more aggressive in online settings. If most people act in a more hostile manner online (in line with Walther, 2012), dark personalities would not be at an advantage and would have more difficulty exploiting the vulnerabilities of others.

While the ability of dark personalities to negotiate online has not yet been explored, a study by Fry (1985) considered the potential influence of visual restrictions on high and low Machiavellian's ability to negotiate. This study constitutes one of the first attempts to examine a dark trait in relation to success in a negotiation, and focused on negotiations lacking FtF contact at a time when CMC negotiations were not prevalent. Results indicated that when visual contact was not available during the bargaining, participants scoring low on Machiavellianism performed better than when they were FtF with participants scoring high on Machiavellianism. It was speculated that in the FtF scenarios, those scoring low experienced higher levels of emotional arousal, which rendered them ineffective in the negotiation. This finding could apply to online communications, where Machiavellians might be less successful because they are not able to use their nonverbal cues to manipulate. An important difference to note is that verbal cues (e.g., tone, pitch) were still present in this study, and may also have influenced the outcome of the negotiations.

There also is evidence to suggest that those scoring high in psychopathy might perform better at manipulation (and thus, negotiations) within a FtF context. One study found that individuals with elevated psychopathic traits are skilled at mimicking the emotional facial expressions of others, making them appear more credible (Book, Methot, et al., 2015; Book, Visser & Volk, 2015). Further, research has found that psychopaths display unique patterns of nonverbal behavior when communicating (e.g., Klaver, Lee, & Hart, 2007), such as fewer smiles, and faster speech. It has been suggested that these behaviors serve as a method for psychopaths to distract the listener or to appear confident and commanding (Klaver et al., 2007), but this theory has not yet been tested. However, as it is clear that dark personalities are associated with manipulation in other FtF contexts (Jonason et al., 2012), it is likely that their nonverbal behavior plays some part in their success. Examining the differences in the negotiation outcomes of dark personalities in both FtF and CMC settings may provide further insights into how these individuals might succeed or fail at manipulating others.

1.3. The present study

Remarkably little is known about how some of the characteristics of dark personalities, such as their ability to manipulate and persuade, might translate to an online context. It is possible that due to the lack of nonverbal behavior in a CMC context, any potential advantage that they have previously demonstrated in other FtF contexts may no longer exist. Previous research has suggested that individuals take on a more hostile or forceful approach during CMC (Giordano et al., 2007). At first glance, this could indicate that online settings would be more conducive to the already hostile nature of dark personalities. However, when they are no longer able to rely on their nonverbal presence, hostile language may only serve to render them unlikeable to their opponent, who is no longer deterred by their nonverbal behavior, as they might have been FtF. This research sought to uncover whether dark personalities show different negotiation outcomes in FTF compared to CMC