Unpacking more "evil": What is at the core of the dark tetrad?

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ABSTRACT

Several models have been proposed to explain the overlap in the Dark Triad traits. Research indicates that the HEXACO model best accounted for the core of these constructs. "Sadism", has recently been added to the Triad resulting in a Dark Tetrad. The purpose of the current study was to determine whether the HEXACO model best accounts for the core of dark-personality traits with the addition of sadism. Four-hundred-and-ninety undergraduate students completed the study online. Although all models were significant, the HEXACO accounted for significantly more variability. Loadings suggest that the core is represented by low Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, with Honesty-Humility having the largest impact. Individual regressions highlight potential conceptual differences between the dark personalities, though all were predicted by honesty-humility and agreeableness.

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Although many have tried to define/study evil, it is an amorphous concept (Baron-Cohen, 2011). Definitions include phrases such as "morally bad" and "causing injury" (Merriam-Webster's online, 2015). One attempt within psychological research is the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), which is comprised of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism (Paulhus & Williams), all of which are associated with many antisocial behaviors (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013), and the overlap has been labeled "evil" (Book, Visser, & Volk, 2015).

Several theories attempt to explain the "core" of these constructs, including Big Five Agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), callousness (Jones & Paulhus, 2010), Factor 1 of psychopathy (Jones & Figueredo, 2013), a fast/exploitive life history strategy (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012) and the HEXACO model of personality, with Honesty-Humility being the strongest predictor (Lee & Ashton, 2005).

Using canonical correlation analyses, Book et al. (2015) found that the HEXACO personality model, and, in particular, the Honesty-Humility factor, best accounted for the core of the Triad. Findings also supported the idea that the overlap in the Triad represents a fast-life-history strategy characterized by short term mating effort and an exploitive interpersonal style.

Recently, everyday sadism has been added to the Triad (Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus, 2013), characterized by the enjoyment of cruelty in everyday life. Its conceptual overlap with other dark personalities serves as an impetus for including it in the study of evil behaviors in the form of a Dark Tetrad (Buckels et al., 2013). In support, research conducted by

Reidy, Zeichner, and Seibert (2011) found that sadism was strongly related to psychopathy, and Chabrol, Van Leeuwen, Rodgers, and Séjourné (2009) found that antisociality was related to sadistic personality, even when the Dark Triad was held constant. These links, along with the potentially selfish nature of sadism, lead us to suspect that the HEXACO personality framework may help to also explain sadistic behavior.

The purpose of this study was to directly compare the models above with respect to the core of the Tetrad. We chose the same models previously employed as predictors of the Dark Triad (Book et al., 2015), predicting that the HEXACO personality model would outperform other theoretical explanations.

Another aim was to examine how sadism fit into the set of dark personalities. We expected that it would be correlated with other Tetrad members, and would correlate positively with the tendency to exploit others (including short-term mating).

Finally, we examined how the HEXACO model related to each of the individual Tetrad members in order to determine whether the same set of traits predict each of the Dark personalities. Given that Aghababaei and Blachnio (2015) found different patterns for the Triad, we expected to find differences in Tetrad members.

1. Methods

1.1. Participants

Four-hundred-and-ninety undergraduate students (60% women; age = 19.83, $SD = 3.29$) completed the measures on Qualtrics and received course credit.

1.2. Measures

All measures were on a five-point scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1.2.1. Dark Tetrad

The Short-Dark-Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) was used to measure Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Sadism was measured using the 16-item Variety of Sadistic Tendencies scale (Paulhus & Jones, 2015).

1.2.2. Big Five Personality Model

The Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) was used to measure Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.

1.2.3. Factor 1 and Zero-Empathy Models

The 64-item Self-Report Psychopathy scale (SRP-4; Paulhus, Hemphill, & Hare, 2015) includes subscales measuring Interpersonal Manipulation, Callous Affect, Erratic Lifestyle, and Antisocial Behavior, also yielding two factor scores (Factor 1: Interpersonal Manipulation and Callous Affect, and Factor 2: Erratic Lifestyle and Antisocial Behavior). The zero-empathy model used the Callous Affect subscale, as items pertaining to lack of empathy are represented there.

1.2.4. Fast-life-history strategy

The Exploitation and Entitlement subscales from the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1979) were included in this model. A fast-life-history strategy is really a combination of the tendency to exploit others, and short-term mating orientation, thus we included the 10-item Short-Term Mating Orientation from the Sociosexuality Scale (STMO; Jackson & Kirkpatrick, 2007). Because Jonason, Li, Webster, and Schmitt (2009) argued that interpersonal manipulation is an important aspect of a fast-life-history strategy, we included the Interpersonal Manipulation subscale from the SRP (below).

1.2.5. HEXACO Personality Model

The 60-item HEXACO-PI (Ashton & Lee, 2009) assessed Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience.

2. Results

Bivariate correlations are reported in Table 1. Alpha was set at .01 to minimize Type I error increases that come with large samples/multiple tests (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). All Tetrad members were positively correlated with Factor 1 and 2, STMO, exploitiveness, and entitlement, and negatively related to Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, and Agreeableness. Effect sizes were moderate-to-large for psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and Sadism, but small-to-large for narcissism. Findings support the inclusion of sadism in the Tetrad, even suggesting that sadism is a better fit than narcissism. Intercorrelations between the Tetrad members (Table 2) find large correlations among psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and sadism, with small-to-moderate relationships with narcissism.

Canonical correlation analyses (CCAs) were conducted using MANOVA syntax in SPSS20 to test all of the proposed models of the core. The Big Five model significantly predicted the Tetrad, $F(20, 1592.93) = 34.25$, $p < .001$, yielding a λ of .31 indicating that 69% of the variance in the Dark Tetrad variables was accounted for. The second model tested the low empathy model, employing the Callous Affect (CA) subscale of the SRP-III-R. The CCA was significant, $F(4, 491) = 243.34$, $p < .001$, accounting for 66% of the variance. Our fast-life-history strategy model included STMO, Exploitation, Entitlement, and Interpersonal Manipulation (IPM). The CCA was significant, $\lambda = .22$, $F(16, 1421.24) = 57.47$, $p < .001$. Effect size indicated that 78% of the

Table 1
Correlations between Dark Tetrad and Study Variables.

	Narcissism	Psychopathy	Machiavellianism	Sadism
Psychopathy				
Factor 1	.31	.77	.73	.76
Factor 2	.28	.78	.52	.67
Exploitiveness	.42	.43	.49	.38
Entitlement	.38	.46	.44	.42
STMO	.17	.52	.36	.52
Big Five				
Extraversion	.50	.03 (.58)	−.28	.26
Agreeableness	−.09 (.05)	−.59	−.53	−.52
Conscientiousness	.03 (.58)	−.37	−.26	−.34
Neuroticism	−.28	−.01 (.84)	.05 (.26)	−.16
Openness	.26	−.12 (.01)	.07 (.13)	.01 (.84)
Honesty-Humility	−.40	−.61	−.66	−.53
Emotionality	−.16	−.41	−.27	−.52
Extraversion	.51	−.40	−.13 (.003)	−.13 (.003)
Agreeableness	−.17	−.44	−.42	−.32
Conscientiousness	−.04 (.44)	.05 (.26)	−.13 (.003)	−.13 (.003)
Openness	−.11 (.01)	−.44	−.42	−.32

Note. $N = 490$, p value in brackets unless $p < .001$.

Table 2
Tetrad Intercorrelations.

	Psychopathy	Machiavellianism	Sadism
Narcissism	.34	.31	.24
Psychopathy	-	.63	.69
Machiavellianism		-	.56

Note. All correlations significant $p < .001$.

variance in the tetrad variables was accounted. Our Factor 1 model was also significant, $\lambda = .21$, $F(8, 974) = 149.31$, $p < .001$, accounting for 79% of the variance. Our final model used the HEXACO to predict the Tetrad. The overall CCA was significant, $\lambda = .16$, $F(24, 1675.73) = 45.48$, $p < .001$, accounting for 84% of the variance.

Comparing the models to the HEXACO model (using Z-tests), the HEXACO model significantly outperformed the other models (Table 3), thus, we further interpreted the HEXACO model. Five canonical functions were produced with squared canonical correlations of .81, .64, .38, and .14. All sets of functions were significant (p values < .02). Because subsequent functions are difficult to interpret (Sherry & Henson, 2005), we only interpreted the first. Standardized coefficients and loadings are in Table 4. Loadings smaller than .30 were not interpreted. All Tetrad members loaded on the canonical function, with Narcissism having a much lower, but still large, loading. On the other side, loadings are negative for Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Thus, the *core* of the Tetrad is negatively related to Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, with Honesty-Humility being the largest contributor.

To examine whether Tetrad members show similar patterns of relationships with the HEXACO, we ran simultaneous MRAs predicting each Tetrad variable from the HEXACO. As can be seen in Table 5, all Tetrad members score low on both Honesty-Humility and Agreeableness. Further, psychopathy and sadism share a lack of emotionality and conscientiousness. However, while low Honesty-Humility is the strongest

Table 3
z-tests Comparing HEXACO Model with Other Models on R_c^2.

Model	z	p
Big Five	8.47	< .001
Callous Affect	10.93	< .001
Fast Life History	5.78	< .001
Psychopathy Factor 1	4.79	< .001