



Occupational niches and the Dark Triad traits



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ABSTRACT

Our research focused on the vocational interests correlated with the Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism). By understanding how these traits facilitate the structuring of one's environment, we hypothesized that psychopaths will be more interested in realistic and practical careers, narcissists will be more interested in artistic, enterprising, and social careers, and Machiavellians will be more interested in avoiding careers that involve caring for others. In two cross-sectional studies ($N = 424$; $N = 274$), we provide general support for these hypotheses. Overall, our study showed those high on the Dark Triad traits may structure their social environment through idealized career preferences. We also show that sex differences in career preferences might be a function, in part of, individual differences in the Dark Triad traits.

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1. Introduction

In an ideal world, people would work in jobs that matched their preferences and personality traits. Alas, most people do not live in this utopia and must make adjustments to their job choice. Fortunately, the ivory towers of the academy provide the opportunity to examine this hypothetical world by understanding “ideal” preferences. While studying ideal preferences may have its limitations (Haefel & Howard, 2010), it can at least give us insight into the nature of various personality traits by examining them across contexts. In this study, we examine ideals for job-choice and how they relate to the “darker” aspects of personality.

In recent years, Industrial/Organizational (henceforth: I/O) psychologists have begun examining the “dark” side of personality (Brunell et al., 2008; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniels, 2012; Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998; Spain, Harms, & Lebertson, 2014). One grouping of “dark” traits is the Dark Triad (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; Paulhus & Williams, 2002); characterized by entitlement, superiority, dominance (i.e., narcissism), glib social charm, manipulateness (i.e., Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes, impulsivity, and interpersonal

antagonism (i.e., psychopathy). In the workplace, narcissism has been correlated with unethical behavior in CEOs (Amernic & Craig, 2010) and a great need for power (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Corporate psychopaths feel diminished levels of workplace responsibility and can adversely affect productivity (Boddy, 2010). Machiavellianism is associated with less organizational, supervisor, and team commitment (Zettler, Friedrich, & Hilbig, 2011), along with a tendency to be perceived as abusive by subordinates (Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010) and to focus on maintaining power and using manipulative behaviors (Kessler et al., 2010). In contrast to prior work (Furnham, 2010; Henriques, 2011; Spain et al., 2014), we do not focus on the deleterious group-level outcomes associated with the Dark Triad traits; instead we focus on how the traits might be related to individuals' career preferences.

Personality traits of all kinds tend to operate as dispositional biases, drawing individuals toward certain kinds of situations or niches and away from others (Holland, 1997; Johnson, 1999; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Occupational niches are typically distinguished into six categories using the RIASEC model (Holland, 1997): physical, practical, and hands-on (e.g., electrician; *Realistic*), intellectual, introspective, and analytical (e.g., professor; *Investigative*), creative, intuitive, and expressive (e.g., fiction writer; *Artistic*), helpful, caring, and cooperative (e.g., nurse; *Social*), assertive, ambitious, and competitive (e.g., commodities trader; *Enterprising*), and organized, structured, and detail-oriented (e.g., accountant; *Conventional*).

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Unfortunately most work using personality traits in I/O psychology—including the examination of ideal occupational niches—has focused on “brighter” aspects of human nature (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Judge et al., 1999; Oh & Berry, 2009). For instance, work focusing on the Big Five traits suggests extraversion was associated with interests in enterprising and social jobs, openness to experience with interests in artistic and investigative jobs, and agreeableness with interests in social jobs (Larson, Rottinghaus, & Borgen, 2002). Unlike the “brighter” aspects of personality, where positive individual outcomes often arise in tandem with positive organizational outcomes, the self-interested strategies used by individuals high on the Dark Triad traits may be especially effective for the individual *because* they are especially detrimental to other coworkers and the larger work environment (Clark, 1993; Clark, Lelchook, & Taylor, 2010). Indeed, those high on the Dark Triad traits do appear to have this orientation to their social lives (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011) and it, therefore, seems reasonable that this bias would extend to the workplace. Thus, we examine how each of the Dark Triad traits might uniquely relate to vocational interests.

In an overall sense, the Dark Triad traits are likely to provide biases towards job-choice through the manner by which each trait relates to people and power (Furnham, Hyde, & Trickey, 2014). In most jobs one must interact with other people and one must cope with being a subordinate—the standard state for most people in the workforce. For instance, narcissism appears to be the most social of the Dark Triad traits (Jonason & McCain, 2012) while maintaining a simultaneous desire to have status and be admired (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists might, therefore, be drawn to work in artistic jobs for admiration, social jobs to connect to others, and enterprising jobs to be socially dominant (*H1*). Conversely, Machiavellians may be highly concerned with social influence (Jonason & Webster, 2012) meaning they may lean towards jobs that afford them the potential for status like enterprising jobs and away from jobs that are unlikely to lead to status enhancements (*H2*). Third, in general, psychopathy may interfere with employability in as much as the trait is characterized by numerous features that will interfere with employability (e.g., limited self-control; Jonason & Tost, 2010) and general antisociality (e.g., limited empathy; Jonason & Krause, 2013). These tendencies come together to create aversions to work that involves helping others (e.g., teacher) and jobs that have strong oversight (e.g., nurse), leaving those high on psychopathy to prefer jobs that isolate them from others and rules like being a tradesperson doing realistic or practical work (*H3*).

In addition, we also examine whether apparent sex differences in career preferences might be, in part, a function of individual differences in the Dark Triad traits. For instance, women prefer and are more often employed in social (e.g., teaching) and artistic (e.g., interior designer) jobs than men are, whereas men tend to prefer realistic jobs more than women do (Su, Rounds, & Armstrong, 2009). These sex differences might be a function of individual differences in the Dark Triad traits because of their shared associations with limited empathy and alexithymia (Jonason & Krause, 2013). Further, as described above, the antisocial tendencies associated specifically with psychopathy likely orient such individuals towards short-term, hands-on work requiring less formal training. Therefore, we predict that low scores on the Dark Triad may facilitate the preference for artistic and social jobs in women (*H4*) whereas high scores on the Dark Triad may facilitate preferences for realistic jobs in men (*H5*).

We present two studies that examine the vocational interests associated with the Dark Triad and how sex differences in these interests might be accounted for by the cognitive biases associated with the Dark Triad traits. We provide detail about how each of the

Dark Triad traits might be associated with specific vocational interests and provide unique details about the dark side of human nature from the perspective of I/O psychology. In general, we provide tests of the hypothesis that personality traits are associated with biases that encourage individuals to structure their social world in accordance with their character.

2. Study 1

In this study, we try to understand the types of jobs that might appeal to those high on the Dark Triad. We also investigate how the Dark Triad mediates some sex differences in work-related interests. In so doing, we examine the manner by the Dark Triad traits are associated with preferences for a particular type of work environment.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

The sample was composed of 424 American participants (57% male) from various jobs (e.g., telecom, education, healthcare, non-profit, automotive, construction), aged 18–72 years old ($M = 32.27$, $SD = 10.32$), who were paid US\$1 for their online completion of a series of measures on Mechanical Turk (see Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). The average participant was an employee (69%), working full-time (74%), and making \$25,000–\$49,999 (36%). The demographic factors predicted little variance in the Dark Triad and, therefore, results were collapsed across these distinctions.

2.1.2. Measures

The Dark Triad traits were measured with the Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The measure is composed of 27 items measuring Machiavellianism (e.g., It is not wise to tell your secrets; Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$), psychopathy (e.g., Payback needs to be quick and nasty; $\alpha = .80$), and narcissism (e.g., People see me as a natural leader; $\alpha = .78$) where participants report their agreement with each statement (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).¹

To assess vocational interests, we used the Interest Profiler-Short Form (Rounds, Smith, Hubert, Lewis, & Rivkin, 1999; Rounds, Su, Lewis, & Rivkin, 2010). It is composed of 60 items, 10 items each asking participants how much they like (1 = *strongly dislike*; 5 = *strongly like*) doing *realistic* (e.g., Build kitchen cabinets), *investigative* (e.g., Conduct chemical experiments.), *artistic* (e.g., Draw pictures), *social* (e.g., Teach children how to read.), *enterprising* (e.g., Manage a retail store), and *conventional* (e.g., Keep inventory records.) tasks. Each 10-item scale demonstrated good internal consistency (α 's = .85–.91).²

2.2. Results and discussion

In Table 1 we report overall descriptive statistics and sex differences. Consistent with prior research, men scored higher than women did on all the Dark Triad traits. Men also scored higher than women did on realistic job-type interests. In contrast, women scored higher than men did on the artistic and social job-type interests. Table 2 (top panel) contains correlations and multiple regression weights (controlling for overlap between Dark Triad traits) in predicting career interests. Consistent with our hypotheses, narcissism was positively associated with interest in artistic, enterprising, and social jobs (*H1*), Machiavellianism was negatively

¹ Psychopathy was correlated with narcissism ($r(422) = .32$, $p < .01$) and Machiavellianism ($r(422) = .47$, $p < .01$) and narcissism was correlated with Machiavellianism ($r(422) = .16$, $p < .01$).

² Specific details are available upon request.

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