



Mutually attracted or repulsed? Actor–partner interdependence models of Dark Triad traits and relationship outcomes



C. Veronica Smith^{a,*}, Benjamin W. Hadden^b, Gregory D. Webster^c, Peter K. Jonason^d,
Amanda N. Gesselman^c, Laura C. Crysel^c

^a Department of Psychology, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS 38677, USA

^b Department of Psychology, University of Houston, Fred J. Heyne Building, Houston, TX 77204, USA

^c Department of Psychology, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA

^d School of Social Sciences and Psychology, University of Western Sydney, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 17 February 2014

Keywords:

Actor–partner interdependence model
Dark Triad
Machiavellianism
Narcissism
Psychopathy
Romantic relationships

ABSTRACT

Although the Dark Triad traits – narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy – have been studied in individuals, little is known about their roles in dating relationships. Forty-five heterosexual undergraduate couples ($N = 90$) reported measures of the Dark Triad and relationship commitment and satisfaction. Within couples, assortative mating was slightly negative for narcissism, marginally positive for Machiavellianism, and significantly positive for psychopathy. Using actor–partner interdependence models, we explored the extent to which satisfaction mediated the direct associations between the Dark Triad and commitment. Men's satisfaction marginally mediated the women's Dark Triad → men's commitment negative association. Among the three Dark Triad subscales, satisfaction marginally mediated both of the actor–effect–based psychopathy → commitment negative associations. We discuss possible implications for couples' relationship strategies.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont are former lovers with unmistakable Dark Triad traits – both characters are self-centered (narcissism), manipulate and sexually seduce others for sport or revenge (Machiavellianism), and have little empathy for their victims (psychopathy). Indeed, that the two were once lovers, that Valmont seeks sexual reunion with Merteuil, and that both ultimately betray one another begs the question of whether people high on Dark Triad traits are mutually attracted or repulsed–or both–in romantic relationships. Moreover, how do men's and women's Dark Triad traits relate to their own (actor effects) and their partners' (partner effects) relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment? And are the associations between Dark Triad traits and commitment mediated by satisfaction?

The Dark Triad describes a constellation of three subclinical, socially undesirable personality traits: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Although research on the Dark Triad has grown rapidly in the past decade (see

Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013, for a review), in the context of romantic relationships, most research has focused on characteristics associated with the Dark Triad and how they affect attraction. For instance, people scoring high on Dark Triad traits have limited executive control (Jonason & Tost, 2010), have a ludic (game-playing) love style (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010), pursue a short-term mating strategy (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009), and are low on conscientiousness (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Prior research suggests that some of these correlates are associated with poor relationship quality. For example, a ludic love style relates to more negative relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., spying) and decreased satisfaction and commitment (Goodboy & Myers, 2010). In addition, both men and women in dating and married relationships reported less relationship satisfaction if both they and their partners lacked conscientiousness (Decuyper, de Bolle, & de Fruyt, 2012). Research on assortative mating–pairing with others who share similar characteristics or attitudes (Gonzaga, Carter, & Buckwalter, 2010; Luo & Klohnen, 2005) – suggests people who score high on Dark Triad traits are likely to pair with others who also score high (and low with low).

While some research has examined how narcissism (Brunell & Campbell, 2011; Foster & Twenge, 2011) and psychopathy (Savard, Sabourin, & Lussier, 2011) relate to relationship outcomes, none

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 662 915 1075.

E-mail address: csmith4@olemiss.edu (C. Veronica Smith).

has examined all three Dark Triad traits in the same study. Our study seeks to examine the separate and joint influences of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy on relationship commitment and satisfaction in couples.

Given the literature reviewed above, we made three specific predictions. First, given that prior research has shown positive assortative mating on some traits – even socially undesirable ones, such as psychoticism (Dubuis-Stadelmann, Fenton, Ferrero, & Preisig, 2001; Russell & Wells, 1991; Savard et al., 2011) – Dark Triad traits should show positive assortative mating for both men and women.

Second, because the Dark Triad as a whole functions to facilitate an exploitative short-term mating strategy (Jonason et al., 2009), it should be negatively related to relationship satisfaction and commitment, for both actor and partner paths, both because its traits are often viewed as socially undesirable and because commitment and relationship satisfaction are hallmarks of long-term mating strategies rather than short-term ones. In line with Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model, which proposes that satisfaction is a predictor of commitment, we expected satisfaction to mediate the direct effect of the Dark Triad mean on commitment; however, we remained agnostic as to whether this would be more likely for men or women, or for which combination of actor and/or partner effects, for both this and subsequent predictions. As such, these analyses were exploratory.

Third, we sought to examine the links between the individual Dark Triad traits and various outcomes. For instance, Machiavellians may be adept at cultivating feelings of commitment and satisfaction in their partners. In addition, because attractive partners are valued and because narcissists are more physically attractive (Holtzman & Strube, 2010) and sexually appealing (Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013), narcissism may be positively associated with partner commitment and satisfaction. On the contrary, although psychopathy may have some positive associations with relationship quality (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009), it should be negatively related to commitment and satisfaction, in part because a key component of psychopathy is lack of interpersonal empathy, which is arguably a *sine qua non* of relationship quality. Because of these inconsistencies, we view our analyses as largely exploratory; however, we also believe that the potential negative consequences of the Dark Triad traits on relationship satisfaction and commitment likely outweigh the potential positive ones and we predicted negative associations between each Dark Triad trait and both relationship satisfaction and commitment.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 45 heterosexual exclusive dating couples (90 individuals) from undergraduate psychology classes at a medium-sized mid-Atlantic American university. Participants ranged from 18 to 25 years old. The average relationship duration was 55 weeks ($SD = 62$). The sample was fairly homogeneous regarding race/ethnicity, with 79% being White/Non-Hispanic.

To be eligible, participants needed to be in a self-defined committed relationship and have a romantic partner who was willing to participate. We compensated couples by entering them into several raffles for gift cards (US\$25) to area businesses. We also compensated participants from psychology classes with extra credit. Participants arrived at the lab with their romantic partner for the first session. Couple members completed questionnaires at computers on opposite sides of the room, to prevent contamination or communication of their responses. Upon their completion, we thanked, debriefed, and dismissed participants.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Dark Triad

We measured narcissism using the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988). The NPI presents respondents with two statements; one representing a narcissistic attitude (“have a natural talent for influencing people”), and its opposite (“I am not good at influencing people”). Respondents choose the statement that best applies to them. Narcissistic responses were averaged; larger numbers indicated more narcissism (range: 0–1).

The Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-II was used to measure subclinical psychopathy (Hare, Harpur, & Hemphill, 1989). Respondents indicate their agreement with 31 statements (e.g., “I think I could beat a lie detector”) using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Items were averaged to create an index of psychopathy.

We measured Machiavellianism using the 20-item MACH-IV (Christie & Geis, 1970). Participants were asked how much they agreed (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) with statements such as: “It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there”. The items were averaged to create an index of Machiavellianism.

2.2.2. Relationship outcomes

We measured relationship satisfaction with the Quality of Relationships Index (QRI; Knee, 1998). This scale measures how satisfied participants are in their romantic relationships. Participants rated six items about how much they liked their relationship (e.g., “My relationship with my partner makes me happy”) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

We measured relationship commitment in two ways. One was a 5-item measure (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991) that asked participants to consider the likely duration and commitment to their relationship (e.g., “How likely is it that you will date someone other than your partner within the next year?”) using a 9-point scale (each question had unique anchors). The other was an unpublished 7-item measure that asked participants to consider various aspects of commitment, such as obligation (e.g., “We feel a responsibility toward each other”) and loyalty (e.g., “I am faithful to my partner”) using a 7-point scale (1 = *very strong disagreement*, 7 = *very strong agreement*). We then standardized (*z*-scored) both measures and averaged them to form a composite measure called “commitment mean.”

2.3. Actor–partner interdependence model (APIM)

Given the dyadic nature of our data, couples were the unit of analysis ($N = 45$), and we used actor–partner interdependence models (APIMs) to test simultaneously actor and partner effects (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). *Actor* effects describe the associations among a target person's own traits and outcome variables (e.g., men's Dark Triad means predicting their own commitment means). In contrast, *partner* effects describe the association among a target person's own traits and their partner's outcome variables (e.g., men's Dark Triad means predicting women's commitment means). Using an APIM framework, we also tested the extent to which satisfaction mediated the relationship between the Dark Triad (both as a composite and as three traits) and commitment. APIM mediation models are increasingly common in the relationships literature (e.g., Brunell & Webster, 2013; Brunell et al., 2010).

3. Results

Correlations and descriptive statistics appear in Table 1. All measures had adequate internal consistency. Although small, our

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/890448>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/890448>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)