



Shrouded in the Veil of Darkness: Machiavellians but not narcissists and psychopaths profit from darker weather in courtship



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ABSTRACT

We proposed in the “Veil of Darkness” hypothesis that dark personalities (narcissists, Machiavellians, psychopaths) profit from conditions of less illumination where they can better manipulate others. As an initial test of this hypothesis in the domain of mating, we predicted that male dark personalities should be more successful in their courtship during dark/cloudy rather than bright/sunny weather. In a large naturalistic field-study, 59 men romantically advanced 1395 women on the street, while they were unobtrusively followed by confederate observers. We thus obtained ratings from men, women, and observers on women’s reactions to men’s advances. Machiavellians, but not narcissists and psychopaths, elicited more positive reactions from women during cloudy weather. This effect was mediated by Machiavellian men’s assuredness. We discuss different mechanisms that may constitute the observed Veil of Darkness effect for Machiavellianism.

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1. Background

When are women drawn to shady, self-centered, sly, cunning, and manipulative men? Popular media, lay beliefs, and empirical research suggest that this is the case under some conditions (Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012; Kruger, Fisher, & Jobling, 2003; Li & Kenrick, 2006). In this work, we postulate in our novel *Veil of Darkness* hypothesis that men with “dark” personality traits fare particularly well in contexts of less illumination. We test this hypothesis in the mating/courtship domain with the example of dark/cloudy vs. bright/sunny weather. Specifically, we examine whether weather conditions may function as a moderator of beneficial courtship outcomes of male dark personalities.

1.1. The Dark Triad

A large body of literature (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012) suggests that dark personalities score highly on the sub-clinical Dark Triad traits narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits share an exploitative behavioral style at the expense of or

disregard for others’ welfare (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissism encompasses the seeking of admiration and attention; a grandiose self-view; vanity and arrogance; exhibitionism and charm; manipulation; and feelings of superiority and entitlement (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2009; Raskin & Hall, 1979). Machiavellianism encompasses immoral, pragmatic, and cynical thinking; coldness; agentic striving for money, status, and power; and deceit, exploitation, and strategic manipulation tactics (Christie & Geis, 1970; Fehr, Samsom, & Paulhus, 1992; Rauthmann, 2012). Psychopathy encompasses callousness and a lack of empathy; interpersonal manipulation; impulsivity and thrill-seeking; and anti-social behaviors (Hare, 2003). The adaptive purposes of the Dark Triad traits for short-term mating have been repeatedly emphasized (e.g., Jonason et al., 2012).

1.2. The Dark Triad and short-term mating

Low empathy and low agreeableness – hallmarks of the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) – have been found to facilitate exploitative mating strategies (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). Accordingly, dark personalities – particularly males – have been described as opportunistic, casual, volatile, and manipulative in mating contexts (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010; Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Jonason et al., 2009, 2012). It has been suggested that the Dark Triad co-evolved as a set of exploitative tendencies that

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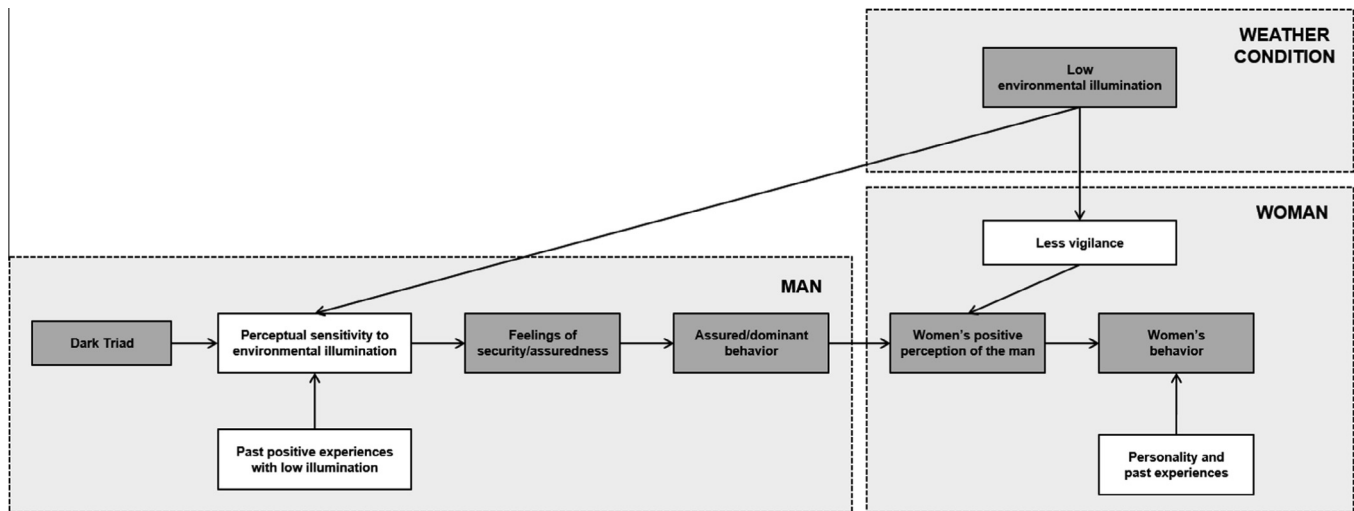


Fig. 1. A process model of potential variables involved in the Veil of Darkness effect in the domain of courtship and mating.

prioritize and facilitate short-term mating particularly in men (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010; Jonason & Webster, 2010; Jonason et al., 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012). However, there has so far not been any ecologically valid investigation under which conditions male dark personalities fare well in *actual* courtship situations (i.e., not self-reported, recalled, hypothetical, or in a laboratory).

1.3. The Veil of Darkness Hypothesis

If dark traits have evolved as social exploitation and cheater strategies, dark personalities should fare particularly well in their manipulation of others in ambiguous, secretive, and anonymous contexts where they can covertly unfold their dark intentions and tactics (Jonason et al., 2012; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Less illumination or “darkness” in surroundings (e.g., when clouds obstruct sunshine, at night, etc.) may provide such ambiguity, secrecy, and anonymity. It may function in two ways. First, selfish/agonistic behavior may be difficult to detect by those who are being exploited or cheated on so that aversive consequences (e.g., getting caught, punishment, social exclusion) for cheaters are reduced. Second, cheaters may feel more secure in their selfishness, agonism, or exploitation of others (perhaps in the hopes of better getting away of it). Hence, particularly dark personalities should benefit from less environmental illumination. We refer to this as the “Veil of Darkness” (VoD) hypothesis. In the current study, we test the idea that less illumination due to cloudy weather (“dark skies” in lay language) may be conducive to dark personalities in courtship endeavors. Figure 1 illustrates the VoD hypothesis for a courtship situation of a male dark person.¹ This process model is to describe potential mechanisms that constitute the effect. Male dark personalities may be consciously or unconsciously perceptively attuned to recognizing situations in which interpersonal manipulation strategies may unfold well. One such situation may be less illumination because dark personalities may have learned that they are beneficial (e.g., more anonymity, more stealth, etc.). In this work, less illumination is caused by cloudiness obstructing sunshine. Not only night-time vs. day-time (as extreme poles of illumination) may have effects on behavior and decision-making as human perception is sensitive to even small variations of darkness (Steidle, Werth, & Hanke, 2011) as well as weather

conditions (see Guéguen, 2013 for an application in a mating context). The explicit or implicit perception of less illumination may trigger feelings of assuredness which then manifest in assured, dominant, and bold approaching behavior. Such behavior is positively evaluated by the approached women (see Dufner, Rauthmann, Czarna, & Denissen, 2013), entailing beneficial courtship outcomes (e.g., smiling). Low environmental illumination may not only impact male dark personalities, but also approached women. The women could be less vigilant in darker weather conditions and allocate less attention to the approaching male (e.g., because of being in a hurry). This may impact their evaluations and according behavior. In sum, low environmental illumination may operate in two ways: It may boost men’s assuredness or decrease women’s attention. As we focus in the current study solely on male dark personalities, we examine the former mechanism only (see gray-shaded boxes in Fig. 1).

1.4. Evidence for a Veil of Darkness effect

Circumstantial evidence suggests that dark personalities could indeed be particularly successful in contexts of less illumination. First, less light means less visibility, more secrecy, and more anonymity – and hence more freedom for “shady operations.” For instance, crimes and sexual activity are much more common at night (e.g., Atkins, Husain, & Storey, 1991; Reinberg & Lagoguey, 1978). Particularly dark personalities may have evolved strategies to avoid their detection by others (Jonason & Webster, 2012) by seeking out times, situations, and areas with less illumination that represent generally underexploited niches (because less people are active at night) (for this argument, see Jonason, Jones, & Lyons, 2013). As most people dislike going out in “bad” or “dark” (i.e., cloudy, rainy, etc.) weather, such weather represents an underexploited niche that dark personalities could use to their advantage. Second, the Dark Triad traits have been linked to a nocturnal chronotype (Jonason et al., 2013). This chronotype – same as the Dark Triad – has also been linked to increased short-term mating success (Gunawardane, Piffer, & Custance, 2011; Piffer, 2010). The tendency towards a nocturnal chronotype in dark personalities may be taken as an indication that dark traits may be attuned to reaping mating benefits in underexploited niches of less illumination. Taken together, we hypothesized that dark personalities should be able to take advantage of less light to successfully lure potential mates into their fangs. We test this with dark weather as the VoD hypothesis predicts that more cloudiness should lead to more positive outcomes for dark personalities (see Fig. 1).

¹ Previous literature suggests that effects are strongest for male dark personalities. Moreover, the current design was limited to men approaching women. It is desirable to investigate in future research to which extent findings generalize to female–male approaches.

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