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Personality, the Dark Triad and violence



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ABSTRACT

Aggression involves using force to dominate a situation, whereas violence uses force to do intentional harm. Previous research suggests the Dark Triad underlies much anti-social behaviour, and is associated with aggression. We extend this work to examine whether Dark Triad constructs predict self-reported violence. The Dark Triad, measured using the SD3, was examined in relation to normal personality traits as indexed by the HEXACO, which comprises a general Big Five structure with the addition of an Honest–Humility dimension. We also measured impulsivity using the I-7. A sample of 159 adults completed the measures. Principal Components Analysis revealed Machiavellianism, psychopathy and violence loaded on the same factor, which also had negative loadings for HEXACO domains of Honesty–Humility and Agreeableness. Narcissism loaded on a separate factor which was also defined by Extraversion. Hierarchical regression analyses found Agreeableness a more powerful predictor of violence than psychopathy or Machiavellianism, both of which showed a trend to this association; narcissism had no effect. Agreeableness emerged as the strongest negative predictor of violence, and exclusively explained the majority of variance in violence scores. Findings are discussed regarding the centrality of low agreeableness as a driving force behind the Dark Triad and the constructs it predicts.

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1. Introduction

The Dark Triad comprises three distinct (but overlapping) socially-averse personality constructs: psychopathy, Machiavellianism and narcissism (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). A number of studies have examined the Dark Triad in relation to anti-social outcomes and aggression (Baugman, Dearing, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2012; Chabrol, Leeuwen, Rodgers, & Sejourne, 2009; Jones & Paulhus, 2010). Anderson and Bushman (2002, pp.29) suggest aggression is a strategy to physically or verbally dominate an opponent or rival, rather than denoting violence (the explicit intent to do physical harm to a rival). Violence is thus more salient to forensic psychologists than aggression. This study extends research on the Dark Triad by focusing on how it is associated with self-reported violence, using normal personality (as indexed by the HEXACO model; Lee & Ashton, 2004) to structure general dispositional factors underlying the construct.

The concepts of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy help in the understanding of different propensities for anti-social behaviour. Machiavellianism comprises a selfish, manipulative propensity motivated by instrumentality (Jones & Paulhus, 2009,

2010). Psychopathy, as a multidimensional construct, has core elements of low empathy and callousness (Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012) that are more characteristic of primary psychopathy (Kennealy, Skeem, Walters, & Camp, 2010), whereas secondary psychopathy is associated with high Neuroticism (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006) and impulsivity (Kimonis, Skeem, Cauffman, & Dmitrieva, 2011). Psychopathy is thus associated with reckless, impulsive behaviour (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). Narcissism is also a multidimensional construct, and has vulnerable and grandiose dimensions (Pincus & Lukowitski, 2010). Given narcissism concerns fundamental tendencies for grandiosity and self-affirmation (Houlcroft, Bore, & Munro, 2012), it is often associated with Extraversion (Pincus & Lukowitski, 2010; Lee et al., 2012), and is perceived as the least socially averse construct of the Dark Triad (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012).

The constructs in the Dark Triad differentiate behavioural outcomes of aggression; Jones and Paulhus (2010) found psychopathic aggression dominated by impulsive retaliation following physical provocation, whereas narcissistic aggression was dominated by an instrumental need to prevail over an opponent following a perceived ego-threat. Egan and Lewis (2011) found purposeful narcissistic aggression was predicted by low Agreeableness, masculinity and Extraversion, whereas angry hostile aggression was predicted by Neuroticism. These subtypes of aggression echo a reactive/instrumental dichotomy often advanced in violent research, and

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implicate psychopathy and narcissism respectively. No research to date has examined the Dark Triad constructs exclusively in relation to violence. This research extends our understanding of the Dark Triad's contribution to behaviour causing actual harm (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012).

Psychopathy is often implicated as the most directly callous construct of the Dark Triad (Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012), predicting engagement in delinquent behaviours (Chabrol et al., 2009) and indirect aggression associated with pre-planned, intentional revenge (Baughman et al., 2012). This is akin to the instrumentality of Machiavellianism (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). We propose Machiavellianism's planfulness works in conjunction with the callous properties of psychopathy to predict self-reported violence, and that the two traits have more in common with each other than does narcissism.

The McArthur Community Violence Screening Instrument (MCVSI; Monahan et al., 2001) is one of few instruments available to differentiate aggression and violence. Michie and Cooke (2006) examined the victimising subscale of the MCVSI in a forensic population using factor analytic and item response theory methods, and concluded the scale dichotomises violence into instrumental and reactive subtypes. Dark Triad models have previously differentiated subtypes of aggression. Here we explore whether personality and the Dark Triad similarly refine trajectories to types of violence, as defined by the MCVSI.

The Dark Triad is a second-order set of constructs underpinned by more basic personality traits. Following joint factor analysis of the Dark Triad and personality dimensions derived from the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992), Jakowitz and Egan found the Dark Triad (with the exception of secondary psychopathy), solely underpinned by low Agreeableness. One reason for this singular influence is the relative lack of other dark dispositional traits in measures using variants of the Big Five/Five Factor Model (FFM).

Derived from recurring findings in lexical studies of personality structure, the HEXACO model (Lee & Ashton, 2004) provides an alternative model to the FFM, subsuming six dimensions of personality; Honesty–Humility (HH), Emotionality (EM), Extraversion (EX), Agreeableness (A), Conscientiousness (C) and Openness to Experience (OP). Despite conceptual similarity with the FFM, the HEXACO domains do not directly correspond with the FFM, and are seen as rough variants of the more conventional domains (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Lee and Ashton (2005) challenged the notion of low Agreeableness being the core of the Dark Triad constructs, showing the HEXACO's most novel factor, HH (which contains facets of sincerity, fairness, greed-avoidance and modesty), was the only domain from the HEXACO model and the FFM to negatively correlate with all three Dark Triad constructs. HH has also predicted desires associated with the Dark Triad, such as power beyond any FFM construct (Lee et al., 2012). This implies that low HH may tap into tendencies associated with the Dark Triad which the FFM does not, so suggesting the HEXACO may better accommodate dispositional factors underlying the Dark Triad, and any anti-social outcomes it predicts. We sought to clarify the personality domains underlying the Dark Triad as indexed by the HEXACO model in the current study, and test whether HH improved the prediction of violence.

Given the relevance of impulsivity to the Dark Triad constructs and anti-social behaviour (e.g., Gordon & Egan, 2011), specifically psychopathy's association with reckless impulsivity (Jones & Paulhus, 2011) predisposing reactive aggression (Jones & Paulhus, 2010), we sought to use a separate measure of impulsivity to assess the Dark Triad's relationship with impulsivity and violence once HEXACO dimensions are accounted for. Using this measure allowed us to provide a more refined explanation of the core dispositions underlying the Dark Triad constructs, and those that

provide substantial contributions to the prediction of violent behaviour.

In the current study, we first explore the relationship of the Dark Triad with the HEXACO personality dimensions. Given previous research, we predicted that all three Dark Triad constructs would negatively correlate with HH and A, and this would reflect a singular dimension when the data was subjected to factor analysis. We then explore whether we can extract meaningful subtypes of violence from the MCVSI, in line with the instrumental/reactive subtypes found by Michie and Cooke (2006). Finally, we examine the ability for individual Dark Triad constructs to predict self-reported violence, ordering these in a stepwise manner based on the prior literature. We predicted that psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and then narcissism would predict self-reported violent behaviour as measured by the MCVSI, specifically expecting psychopathy to predict reactive acts of violence above narcissism and Machiavellianism, but made no specific prediction regarding the order of influence for dark triad traits in relation to instrumental violence.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study comprised 159 participants; 73% female ($N = 116$) and 27% male ($N = 43$) with a mean age of 29.25 ($SD = 11.09$ years) recruited from the general population completed the study by means of an online survey. Participants over the age of eighteen were recruited using opportunity sampling, having responded to an online link to the study advertised via social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, or on the Hanover online research web-page. In attempt to sample participants beyond a convenience sample restricted in personality and behavioural variance, we also used a taxi service local to the lead author to recruit participants, distributing leaflets advertising the study to customers using the service. Participants were asked to report their forensic histories to test for forensic effects; only 11.3% of participants ($N = 18$; 10 male, 8 female) reported they had received a caution, arrest, or criminal conviction. To maximise data, all participants were pooled together for analysis.

2.2. Measures

All scales were valid and reliable indices of the constructs under consideration.

2.3. The Short Dark Triad (SD3) (Jones & Paulhus, 2014)

The Short Dark Triad (SD3) is a 27 item questionnaire measured on a 5 point Likert scale. Response categories range from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, with higher scores indicating an increased tendency toward the personality construct. Each sub-scale comprises 9 items.

2.4. HEXACO-PI-R (Lee & Ashton, 2006)

The HEXACO-PI-R (100 item version) was used to measure the six normal personality domains. The HEXACO-PI-R comprises six subscales that measure each domain, and each subscale consists of 4 facets of 16 items, measured on a 5 point Likert scale of agreeability; 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree, with higher scores on a domain indicating an increased tendency toward that domain. The scale also contains an interstitial facet scale of Altruism (AL) (4 items) (Lee & Ashton, 2006).

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