

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DARK TRIAD AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

<http://doi.org/10.26758/12.1.19>

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Abstract

Objectives. The presence of the so-called Dark Triad (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy) can be toxic to those around, can lead to counterproductive behaviors and dysfunctional behaviors. On the other hand, people who are successful in personal and professional life are considered to have a high level of emotional intelligence, numerous studies showing that this is a predictor of good functioning and personal, social and organizational adaptation. This study investigates the relationship between the "dark side" of personality and emotional intelligence, and whether or to what extent Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy are negative predictors of emotional intelligence.

Material and methods. One hundred and thirty-four individuals aged 21 to 71 years ($M = 42.11$, $SD = 11.68$; Females = 71.1%) took part in this study. The following tools were used: Narcissistic Personality Inventory, The Short Dark Triad Scale, Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale and Battery of Emotional Intelligence profile.

Results. The regression coefficients were calculated, controlling the role of the other predictors (age, gender, marital status). Narcissism was not a predictor of emotional intelligence ($r = .097$, $p > 0.01$). Age and psychopathy were significantly negatively related with the criterion; the gender did not correlate and was removed from the regression model. Emotional intelligence and Machiavellianism did not correlate either positively or negatively, so this dimension cannot be predictor.

Conclusions. As predictors of emotional intelligence, the three dimensions, although in many studies have been negatively correlated, in this study this is partially confirmed. Only psychopathy has a negative relationship, it predicts but to a small extent emotional intelligence.

Keywords: dark triad, Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, emotional intelligence.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the of the 21th century, interest in explaining behaviors that violate social and moral norms has led to an increasing number of studies that have explored the underlying personality traits: dark personality traits (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013), as opposed to positive, bright personality traits (Smith, Hill, Wallace, Recendes, & Judge, 2018), such as those from the Big Five model. Dark personality traits characterize those people who may initially seem pleasant and charming but later their presence further becomes "toxic" (Rauthmann, 2012), being disruptive, dysfunctional for organizations but also for those with whom they come into contact with. This is because, in the short term, they can make a very good impression,

including as leaders, but over time strategies used only for personal gain and to the detriment of others (lying, cheating, manipulation) affect those around them.

Dark Triad model

Paulhus and Williams' (2002) model of the Dark Triad, which combines Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, remains the most widely used in studies. The authors appreciate that, although they may have negative consequences, the traits are between normal and clinical features.

Psychopathy, characterized by impulsivity and the search for sensations, along with low empathy, is seen as the most harmful (Rauthmann, 2012). Subclinical psychopathy is characterized by a high level of impulsivity, sensations seeking, insensitivity, manipulative behavior, people exploitation, with lack or a low level of empathy, anxiety, and lack of remorse (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). People with high scores on psychopathy generally adopt antisocial behaviors and show a negative attitude toward others (Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009).

Narcissism is characterized by feelings of grandeur and entitlement. Narcissism in the constellation of the dark triad (D3) falls between normal and clinical features, being considered subclinical. It is studied by personality psychology which considers that it refers to people who have some characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), but do not meet enough criteria to be diagnosed with NPD.

Grijalva et al. (2015), analyzing over 2,700 employees, concluded that, regarding the presence in the organizational environment, there is a relationship between Narcissism and counterproductive behaviors in the workplace. Narcissists make a good image at first, displaying self-confidence and being convincing, as well as being perceived as suitable for leadership positions, but those around them begin to have an increasingly negative opinion about them with time (Ong, Roberts, Arthur, Woodman, & Akehurst, 2016).

Machiavellianism was named after the famous diplomat and writer Niccolo Machiavelli, the reference being his book *The Prince* written in 1532 in which he presents advice and suggestions for leaders to ensure their position and success at all costs, from careful planning to immoral acts and such as the execution of political rivals. Ever since it was introduced as a term (in 1970 when researchers Christie and Geis developed the questionnaire measuring MACH - Machiavellianism), psychologists have referred to this construct to describe duplicitous people, who pursue only their own interests and who have a cynicism attitude on morality (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017).

Manipulation, the core of Machiavellianism (Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2020) refers to those strategies and tactics that can be used: impression management, flexibility, deception, concealment, emotional manipulation, intrigue, intimidation.

Emotional intelligence

The term emotional intelligence was first coined in 1985 by Wayne Leon Payne in his doctoral dissertation appreciating that EI involves a creative relationship with states of fear, pain, and desire (Roco, 2001/2004). On the other hand, since 1980, Reuven Bar-On discusses the emotional coefficient, being the first one who introduce the acronym EQ (Bar-On & Parker, 2012).

In the last three decades, there have been debates about the definition and measurement of emotional intelligence (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2008), but three dominant theoretical models remained: emotional coefficient theory developed by Bar-On and Parker (2012), Mayer

and Salovey approach with the main focus on emotional skills (1990), and the mixed model of emotional skills developed by Goleman (1995).

Daniel Goleman (1995) presented a mixed model of emotional intelligence, and he formulated his definition starting from the work of Salovey and Mayer in 1990 to which he added optimism, perseverance and the ability to postpone satisfactions (variables that would rather represent personality or character traits). In 1995, the concept of EI he took on was very successful and made it known to the general public through the publication of his book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. According to Goleman (1998), each of us has a certain level of EI that, unlike the degree of intelligence that remains constant throughout life, it can be improved. Moreover, the skills that are based on emotional intelligence can be learned.

Daniel Goleman appreciates that the main components of EI are (as cited in Roco, 2001/2004): self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Self-awareness - self-awareness involves knowing one's emotions and their reason, self-confidence; it involves a high level of consciousness regarding the person's strengths and weaknesses; awareness of personal goals and values.

Emotional self-regulation refers to the ability to manage internal states, controlling strong emotions, impulses in situations of anger, frustration, or crisis situations; it also refers to resilience and the use of resources optimally adapt to change.

Self-motivation refers to internal motivation, mobilization and taking action to achieve personal goals; a positive, optimistic vision, the desire to develop and overcome obstacles and failures.

If the first three categories refer to personal skills, empathy, the fourth, refers to social skills; empathy is the ability to perceive the emotions of others, to understand their perspective and to respond appropriately.

Social skills, the last category, according to Goleman, involve using empathy as well as harmonizing the needs with those of others.

Emotional intelligence and the "dark" triad

Although intensively studied, the relationship between the dimensions of emotional intelligence (EI) and those of the D3 is quite controversial. For example, a meta-analysis (Gómez-Leal, Gutiérrez-Cobo, Cabello, Megías, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2018) showed that the results are contradictory in terms of the association of psychopathy with EI, with most studies still finding a significant negative relationship between the constructs. Moreover, higher scores on psychopathic traits are related to lower EI levels when using the EI model as an ability. When using samples that measure EI by self-reporting, the results were inconclusive (Gómez-Leal et al., 2018) but a recent meta-analysis of 71 studies (Michels & Schulze, 2021) found that the relationships between the D3 and emotional intelligence as a trait and also as an ability are small and similar.

There is evidence to support the positive connection of Narcissism (Michels & Schulze, 2021) and the negative connection of Machiavellianism with socio-emotional intelligence (SEI) (Nagler, Reiter, Furtner, & Rauthmann, 2014). Also, psychopathy correlates positively with some facets of SEI and negatively with others. The purpose of this study is to bring knowledge, to contribute to the model of Paulhus' dark triad by better understanding its relationship with emotional intelligence.

The present study aims to identify predictive models of emotional intelligence by investigating dark personality traits such as Psychopathy, Narcissism, and Machiavellianism.

Material and methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 134 respondents who answered to all the questionnaires (71% women; respondents ranged in age from 20-73 years with $M = 36.3$ and $SD = 12.6$); 208 people completed the Short Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014), 230 NPI-16 Inventory (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006), 259 completed the Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995), and 169 responded to the Battery of Emotional Intelligence Profile (Wood & Tolley, 2003). At the level of the type of activity currently carried out and of the profession, the sample is heterogeneous. People with higher education predominate in this sample, working almost equally in the budget and private sector.

Convenience sampling or snowball technique (Popa, 2008) was used, with the informed consent of the participants and confidentiality.

Data collection

The data were collected both physically by completing the questionnaires (traditional paper and pencil) and online, through the Google Forms platform by directly accessing the link or receiving the email invitation.

The complete answers were considered, eliminating three unfinished questionnaires (from the physically applied ones). 10 items without selected variant were completed with the average of that size.

Instruments

- Demographic data form - included information related to age, gender, level of education, religion, marital status, occupation, city of residence.

- NPI-16 Inventory (Narcissistic Personality Inventory, Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). The scale consists of 16 dual statements, the answer involving the feature of Narcissism being rated with 1 and the other with 0. The short version with 16 items was validated on the Romanian population, showing a good internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.727$) (Dumitrescu, Zetu, Zetu, & Păcurar, 2013).

- The Short Dark Triad Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) which includes 27 items. The scores collected from the three subscales (Machiavellianism, Psychopathy and Narcissism) constitute the overall score of the dark triad.

- Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (26 items). A first subscale measure primary psychopathy which refers to selfish, manipulative, and insensitive attitudes to others (16 items), and the second subscale (secondary psychopathy) refers to a self-destructive lifestyle characterized by impulsivity (10 items).

- Battery of Emotional Intelligence Profile BTPIE (2003) which was reviewed and validated by several studies in Romania (Radu, 2011; Zanfir, 2011; Năstasă, 2016) with alpha Cronbach values between 0.75 and 0.80. The battery contains situational self-assessment subtests specific to each dimension of EI.

Statistical programs used: data were processed using the Jamovi 10.0.0 and JASP 0.11.1.0 statistical processing program.

To test the hypotheses, the following *statistical methods* were used: analysis of asymmetry, fidelity (internal consistency), Bravais-Pearson bivariate correlation (Opariuc-Dan, 2009), multiple linear regression (Popa, 2008); it was used the model of anterograde analysis in

which those models with variables that crossed the significance threshold were kept, thus testing which is the best predictive model.

Results

The analysis of the main descriptive statistical indicators of the scores obtained with the applied scales was useful to verify whether the main conditions for the use of parametric tests are met (especially the normality of the distributions).

Regarding the dimensions of the D3, the analysis of asymmetry and vaulting indicators indicated that most were slight deviations (being between -0.181 and 1.618) except for the NPI-16 narcissism scale which had kurtosis = 7.372.

Analysis of the internal consistency of the instruments used and their scales

Essential quality that directly affects the validity, fidelity in the case of a single application was evaluated by analyzing the internal consistency. Only in the case of the LSRP Psychopathy scale, the test-retest fidelity was used by reapplying on a number of 72 subjects ($r = 0.746, p < 0.01$).

Table 1 shows that, in general, the internal consistency values obtained was good and very good. The only problematic situation was recorded for the Narcissism and Psychopathy subscales in the Short Scale of the Dark Triad, with moderate values (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.673$ and Cronbach $\alpha = 0.631$, respectively), which were at the limit of acceptability.

Table 1

Descriptive analysis and internal consistency for D3 and EI

	N	M	SD	Cronbach α
Scor_global D3	208	2.63	0.685	0.805
Psychopathy				
Psychopathy (SD3)	208	1.91	0.282	0.631
Primary psychopathy (LSRP)	259	1.95	0.309	0.810
Secondary psychopathy (LSRP)	259	2.17	0.281	0.699
Global_psychopathy_score (LSRP)	259	2.04	0.312	0.831
Machiavellianism				
Machiavellianism (SD3)	255	2.80	0.586	0.779
Narcissism				
Narcissism (SD3)	208	3.00	0.449	0.673
Narcissism (NPI-16)	230	0.260	0.194	0.737
Emotional intelligence				
BTPIE	169	1.44	0.359	0.806
Self-regulation	171	1.568	0.3	0.559
Self-awareness	173	1.401	0.292	0.391
Motivation	176	1.570	0.154	0.691
Social abilities	173	1.029	0.532	-0.162

The internal consistency values obtained were of a high level. There was a problematic situation for the Social Skills and Self-Awareness scales.

Narcissism as predictor of emotional intelligence

The conditions for regression were verified and the correlational matrix was analyzed (see Table 2). Also other predictors such as age, gender, marital status were introduced, in order to be able to control them.

Table 2

Pearson coefficients

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Narcissism	—				
2. Age	-0.330 ***	—			
3. Gender	-0.179 **	0.074	—		
4. Marital status	0.193 **	-0.160 *	0.007	—	
5. Emotional intelligence	0.097	-0.189 *	-0.043	-0.079	—

Narcissism was therefore not a predictor of EI, as there was no relation between the two dimensions ($r = .097$, $p > 0.01$, $df = 134$).

Psychopathy, a predictor of emotional intelligence

First, the matrix of correlations between predictors and criteria was analyzed.

Table 3

Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	—				
2. Gender	0.074	—			
3. Global psychopathy	-0.075	-0.024	—		
4. Marital status	-0.160 *	0.007	0.113	—	
5. Emotional intelligence	-0.189 *	-0.043	-0.291 ***	-0.079	—

There were statistically significant but low correlations between marital status and age. Age and psychopathy correlated negatively significantly with the criterion followed. Gender did not correlate and could be removed from the regression model.

Table 4

Description of the Regression Model

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	Durbin-Watson		
					Autocorrelation	Statistic	p
1	0.291	0.085	0.078	15.607	-0.025	2.000	0.995
2	0.377	0.142	0.129	15.169	-0.025	1.994	0.966

The accuracy of the prediction was given by the size of the R coefficient and the statistical significance. Psychopathy together with other predictors explained 14% of the variation of EI. The Durbin-Watson test (Vogt, 2005) on the last column of the table provided information on the error independence condition. It was considered that a test value of less than 1 or greater than 3 should be an alarm signal of non-compliance with the error independence conditions. In this case, the information did not indicate a problem from this point of view.

Table 5

Regression coefficients

Model		Unstandardized	Standard Error	Standardized	t	p
1	(Intercept)	205.716	6.883		29.886	< .001
	Global psychopathy	-0.449	0.128	-0.291	-3.498	< .001
2	(Intercept)	218.645	7.995		27.349	< .001
	Global psychopathy	-0.428	0.125	-0.278	-3.426	< .001
	Age	-0.333	0.113	-0.239	-2.954	0.004

The Beta regression coefficient was not high, but it was statistically significant, which means that the hypothesis of psychopathy as a negative predictor of EI was confirmed.

The prediction relationship between Machiavellianism and emotional intelligence

Regression coefficient was calculated by controlling the role of the other predictors (age, gender, marital status).

Table 6

Correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	—				
2. Gender	0.074	—			
3. Machiavellianism	-0.188**	-0.226***	—		
4. Marital status	-0.160*	0.007	0.061	—	
5. Emotional intelligence	-0.189*	-0.043	0.042	-0.079	—

Emotional intelligence and Machiavellianism did not correlate either positively or negatively, so Machiavellianism could not be a predictor for EI.

Discussions

The issue of fidelity and validity for the used instruments in any research is a fundamental one. One of the best-known definitions of validity (a term derived from the Latin "Validus" - strong) is that offered by M. Hammersley, meaning by validity truth, interpreted as the extent to which a story accurately represents social phenomena to which it refers (Hammersley, 1987). To ensure this aspect, it was investigated whether the instruments to be used in this research meet the necessary psychometric qualities. Analyzed scales that measure the dimensions of the D3 showed good fidelity coefficients, but the only subscales with modest values, at the limit of acceptability, are Narcissism and psychopathy in the Short Dark Triad Scale. Also, the Social Skills and Self-Awareness subscales' internal consistency is problematic.

With the introduction of the D3 and the increase in the number of studies related to it, some controversies have arisen (Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2020). The question was whether the three constructs are indeed separate, given a degree of overlap (Furnham et al., 2013), with a recent meta-analysis indicating that they are intercorrelated (Muris et al., 2017). This study partially confirmed this: only one facet of psychopathy, namely primary (which refers to a way of relating to others selfish, manipulative, and insensitive) has a statistically significant correlation with Narcissism, although low. Which is not consistent with the results of another meta-analysis on the D3 (Vize, Lynam, Collison, & Miller, 2018) which concluded that Narcissism is a distinct construct but, in terms of Machiavellianism and psychopathy, there is a certain overlap. One possible explanation is that we are talking about primary psychopathy different from the secondary one (which refers to a self-destructive lifestyle and characterized by impulsivity), the latter and Machiavellianism not really correlating with narcissism.

Compared to the results of other studies that demonstrated the positive association of Narcissism and the negative association of Machiavellianism with socio-emotional intelligence (Nagler et al., 2014), in the present study the results obtained are not consistent. As predictors of emotional intelligence, the three dimensions, although in many studies they are negatively correlated, in the present study this is partially confirmed. Only psychopathy has a negative relationship, it predicts emotional intelligence but to a small extent. There are no statistically significant correlations between Narcissism or Machiavellianism and emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is negatively associated with Machiavellianism in other studies (O'Connor & Athota, 2013) and the potential "dark" aspect of EI has been demonstrated by highlighting the moderation of agreeableness on the relationship between Machiavellianism and EI. In other words, the results indicate that individuals with high EI tend to have a low level of Machiavellianism because they generally have a positive attitude toward people (i.e., they are pleasant) and not because they are emotionally competent. The results also indicate that people with high scores on perceived emotional competence tend to have high scores on Machiavellianism, especially when they have a low level of agreeableness (O'Connor & Athota, 2013). People with Machiavellian traits, given that they may exhibit agreeableness displayed in their manipulative behavior, may also have an emotional intelligence that involves self-control, managing and recognizing emotions, social skills. A recent meta-analysis (Muris et al., 2017) shows that Machiavellian negatively correlates with traits such as modesty, honesty, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, being generally associated with multiple negative psychosocial effects. To conclude, a possible further direction would be the in-depth investigation

of the moderating role of agreeableness in the relationship between Machiavellianism and emotional intelligence.

Further investigations are needed into the relationship of separate dark features with empathy, the core of emotional intelligence. A relatively recent study, investigating the *dark tetrad*, thus including along with the D3 and sadism as the fourth trait (Pajevic, Vukosavljevic-Gvozden, Stevanovic, & Neumann, 2018), concluded that all dark traits correlated negatively with both emotional empathy and cognitive, except for a positive correlation between Narcissism and cognitive empathy.

Conclusions

Two of the dimensions of the D3 from the perspective of Paulhus and Williams' (2002) model are not negative predictors of emotional intelligence, namely Machiavellianism and Narcissism. Regarding psychopathy, without differentiating between the two sides, primary and secondary psychopathy may predict, although to a lesser extent, emotional intelligence. It requires a larger number of participants and taking into account other variables that may occur to identify a predictive model of emotional intelligence.

Limits

One of the limitations of the present study is related to the fact that participants self-assess themselves by answering questions from questionnaires that contain negative elements, tending to answer desirably. People with "dark triad" traits wear a mask in their interactions with others, hiding them (Muris et al., 2017). It would be good for further studies to investigate these traits by several methods and only by self-reporting.

The weak point of the current study is the fact that it is based on a cross-sectional design and self-evaluation. A recent meta-analysis revealed that most research in this area is cross-sectional and is based on self-assessment (Muris et al., 2017). The advice for future studies is to use longitudinal research designs in order to increase the predictive value of the results.

Acknowledgements

This study is part of the doctoral research project entitled *The Dark Personality Triad: moral and emotional profiles*, coordinated by Prof. Dr. Roco Mihaela from Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest. Part of this paper was presented at the conference entitled *Individual, family, society - contemporary challenges*, fourth edition (October 2021).

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