

Summary

Dark Triad Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy

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The Dark Triad reveals the malevolent side of human beings and consists of the personality traits Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy which have recently begun to be a subject of interest to the studies with the term Dark Triad revealed by Paulhus and Williams (2002). People who are high in the Dark Triad traits often disregard moral values and social norms and engage in socially-aversive behaviors such as lying, cheating, deception, and bullying (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). They are also likely to employ ineffective coping strategies (e.g.; Birkás, Gács, & Csathó, 2016; Kealy, Ogrodniczuk, Rice, & Oliffe, 2017), which make them more vulnerable to the negative consequences of a stressful event and negatively affects their psychological well-being.

Sub-clinical narcissism is characterized by a lack of empathy, feelings of superiority, egocentrism, self-enhancement, arrogance, and manipulative behaviors (Emmons, 1987; Fernie, Fung, & Nikčević, 2016; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). Machiavellianism is mostly defined by a cynical worldview and interpersonal manipulation (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). In order to succeed, Machiavellians often make decisions based on the practical outcomes of a situation rather than the possible emotional consequences of their behavior (Zeigler-Hill & Vonk, 2015). Lastly, sub-clinical psychopathy is described by deviant behaviors, a lack of empathy, remorselessness, disinhibition, a desire for dominance, and dishonesty (Cleckley, 1976).

In this literature review, the Dark Triad traits will be presented with their similarities and differences and their relationship with the major personality models. Moreover, facets of the three traits and frequently used measures of the construct will be introduced. Then, the relationships between the Dark Triad traits, different coping styles and psychological well-being will be discussed. The main aim of this literature review is to

provide a detailed Turkish reference for the researchers as Dark Triad has become a growing research interest.

Similarities and Differences among the Dark Triad Traits

Although the three traits have several common features, different opinions appear related to labeling them. Various researchers labeled common features differently including “callousness” and “manipulativeness” (Jones & Paulhus, 2011), “low agreeableness” and “low conscientiousness” (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006), “low level of honesty-humility” (Lee & Ashton, 2005), “interpersonal antagonism” (Lynam & Derefinko, 2005), and “social exploitativeness” (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009). On the other hand, some other researchers argued, there is no similarity between the Dark Triad traits and need to be measured separately. However, significant differences were found between the relations of the Dark Triad traits and the Big Five personality traits (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Moreover, the “darkness” levels of the Dark Triad traits are different, such as on a continuum, psychopathy falls on the darkest end, narcissism on the lightest, and Machiavellianism finds itself a place in the middle (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). Nevertheless, although Machiavellianism and Narcissism are more adaptive personality traits compared to Psychopathy, the negative behavioral outcomes of all three Dark Triad traits outweigh the positive ones (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). Moreover, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy have different relationships with other constructs such as self-enhancement (Christie & Geis, 1970), intelligence (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and positive mood (Egan, Chan, & Shorter, 2014). In other words, although the Dark Triad traits share some fundamental features, they are distinct enough and need to be measured separately.

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The Relationship between the Dark Triad and the Major Personality Models

The Dark Triad traits are correlated with Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to Experience, and Neuroticism which are dimensions of Big Five Personality Model (Costa, McCrae, & Dye, 1991). According to that, people who are getting higher scores from the measures of Dark Triad traits, they also get lower scores from the measures of Agreeableness (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). Also Narcissists scored higher on both Openness to Experience and Extraversion (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016), and both Machiavellians and Psychopaths get low scores on Conscientiousness (Muris et al., 2017). In addition, the three traits correlated differently with the facets of the Big Five dimensions of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013).

The Dark Triad traits were also correlated with the Hexaco Model of personality, including the dimensions Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotionality, and Honesty-Humility (Lee & Ashton, 2005). People with higher scores in the Dark Triad traits were score lower on the Honesty-Humility dimension (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016), which indicates that these people are not fair, sincere, faithful, honest, and trustful. Similarly the Dark Triad traits correlated differently with the facets of the Honesty-Humility dimension (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017).

Finally, the Dark Triad traits showed significant correlations with the two dimensions of the Interpersonal Circumplex, named as the Agency and the Communion axes (Wiggins, 1979). People who are high in the three traits were also located in a high agency and low communion (Jones & Paulhus, 2011) so they seek autonomy and superiority rather than a deep connection with other people (Wiggins, 1979). Similar to the personality models discussed previously, the Dark Triad traits differed on the facet level (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). In conclusion the Dark Triad traits share some common correlations with the dimensions of the personality while they have different relationships at the facet level of the major personality models.

Facets of the Dark Triad Traits

Despite the emphasis on the necessity to include the facets of Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy in the study of Dark Triad by many researchers (e.g., Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012), most studies measured them as a composite score (e.g.; Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015; Birkás, Gács, & Csathó, 2016; Noser, Zeigler-Hill, & Besser, 2014).

Facets of Narcissism. Although various propositions have been made for the factor structure of the Narcissism only two of them have been recognized by researchers. One of them suggested by Ackerman et al. (2011) including the “Leadership/Authority”, “Grandiose Exhibitionism”, and “Entitlement/Exploitativeness” facets. Considering their relationships with the other constructs (e.g.; Buelow & Brunell, 2014; Clarke, Karlov, & Neale, 2015; Hill & Roberts, 2012; Zeigler-Hill & Vonk, 2015), the most adaptive facet is the *Leadership/Authority* and the least adaptive facet is *Entitlement/Exploitativeness*. Third facet named as *Grandiose Exhibitionism* is located in between the two facets. Second factor structure distinguishes “grandiose” and “vulnerable” Narcissism. While *Grandiose Narcissism* is characterized by arrogance, extraversion, and exploitation, *Vulnerable Narcissism* is described as being fragile, introverted, and neurotic (Giacomin & Jordan, 2016).

Facets of Psychopathy. “Primary” and “secondary” distinction of psychopathy (Berg et al., 2013) is the one that has driven the most research attention. While *Primary Psychopathy* involves characteristics such as fearlessness, manipulation, callousness, and ability to regulate emotions, *Secondary Psychopathy* is defined by impulsivity, anxiety, and aggressive behaviors (Berg et al., 2013; Lee & Salekin, 2010). Primary psychopathy involves more adaptive characteristics in comparison to secondary psychopathy (e.g.; Johnson, Beehr, & O’Brien, 2015). Another widely known conceptualization of Psychopathy includes four facets which are “Interpersonal”, “Affective”, “Lifestyle”, and “Antisocial” (Hare & Neumann, 2008). The facets of Interpersonal and Affective have similar characteristics with the Primary Psychopathy while the facets of Lifestyle and Antisocial have similar characteristics with the Secondary Psychopathy (Hare & Neumann, 2008).

Facets of Machiavellianism. There is a limited research about the factor structure of Machiavellianism. Originally, Christie and Geis (1970) considered Machiavellianism with three facets including “*Manipulative Tactics*”, “*Cynical View of Human Nature*”, and “*Disregard for Conventional Morality*”. In one of the studies, Machiavellianism divided into two facets which are “*Tactics*” and “*Views*” (Monaghan, Bizumic, & Sellbom, 2016). Another study found a four-factor solution including “*Positive Interpersonal Tactics*”, “*Negative Tactics*”, “*Positive View of Human Nature*”, and “*Cynical View of Human Nature*” (Corral & Calvete, 2000). In conclusion more research is needed to determine the factor structure of Machiavellianism.

Common Measures Used in Measuring the Dark Triad Traits

There are two major ways of measuring the Dark Triad traits, one by composite scores and one by separate measures for each triad. For the composite scores there are two frequently used inventories in the literature. Dirty Dozen developed by Jonason and Webster in 2010 which is a quite short inventory with 12 items. However there are some criticisms related to the adequacy of the psychometric properties of the scale (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). Short Dark Triad (SD3) is another questionnaire developed by Jones and Paulhus in 2014 (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017) with 27 items and described as having better psychometric properties compared to the previous inventory (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017).

Some researchers prefer to measure the Dark Triad traits separately, so use single inventories with high reliability and validity. For measuring sub-clinical Narcissism, the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) developed by Raskin and Hall in 1979 is used frequently (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). For measuring Machiavellianism, 20-item Mach-IV is the standard measure that was created by Christie and Geis in 1970 (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). For sub-clinical Psychopathy, the scale with 64-item Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP-III) developed by Paulhus, Neumann, and Hare in 2009 is used frequently (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Relationship between the Dark Triad Traits and Coping Styles

Coping is a crucial resource which has a potential to reduce the negative effects of stressful situations and the choice of coping styles depends on the personality besides many other factors (Birkás, Gács, & Csathó, 2016). In general, task-focused coping is considered to be more adaptive than emotion-focused or avoidance coping (Endler & Parker, 1994) since task-focused coping has a higher correlation with psychological well-being compared to the other two coping styles (Endler & Parker, 1990). According to the literature, people who have higher scores in any of the Dark Triad traits are not very successful in selecting adaptive coping styles when dealing with stress. Narcissism is the most adaptive one, Psychopathy is the most maladaptive, and the Machiavellianism falls in between the two traits. Studies showed that both Machiavellianism and Psychopathy, but not Narcissism, were negatively related to task-focused coping (Birkás, Gács, & Csathó, 2016) and Psy-

chopathy was positively related to emotion-focused and avoidance coping styles (Hasking, 2007; Pastwa-Wojciechowska, Kaźmierczak, & Błazek, 2012). Moreover, although Machiavellians do not seek social support in a stressful situation, they engage in positive reappraisal (Birkás, Gács, & Csathó, 2016) and Narcissists show substance use and risky behaviors (Kealy, Ogrodniczuk, Rice, & Oliffe, 2017), but they also use adaptive coping strategies like planful problem solving and self-controlling (Birkás, Gács, & Csathó, 2016).

Moreover several studies showed that for different facets of the Dark Triad traits people may prefer to use different coping styles. For instance, Vulnerable Narcissists were more likely to utilize denial and behavioral disengagement compared to Grandiose Narcissists (Fernie, Fung, & Nikčević, 2016), Secondary Psychopathy predicted coping through substance use more than Primary Psychopathy (Gillen, Barry, & Bater, 2016), and Primary and Secondary Psychopaths differed in their coping styles when faced with feelings of shame (Campbell & Elison, 2005). Nevertheless, more research is needed in order to clarify the specific differences in coping among different facets of the Dark Triad traits.

Relationship between the Dark Triad Traits and Well-Being

It is a well known fact that personality plays a significant role in physical and psychological well-being. Based on the studies about well being and the Dark Triad traits, there are negative relationship between three traits and well-being, but Psychopathy has the worst relationship, followed by Machiavellianism and Narcissism (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). Studies showed that Psychopathy had a negative relationship not only with subjective health indicators, but also with protective health behaviors (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016). Also it was related to lower life expectancy (Jonason, Baughman, Carter, & Parker, 2015), greater vulnerability to stress (Noser, Zeigler-Hill, & Besser, 2014), negative affect and depression (Love & Holder, 2014). Although Machiavellians were shown to have decreased risk of injuries, they also had decreased positive mood (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016) and were more likely to be depressed (Yılmaz & Yavas, 1996). Narcissism was positively related to both hedonic and eudemonic well-being (Aghababaei & Błachnio, 2015), higher life expectancy (Jonason, Baughman, Carter, & Parker, 2015), and decreased risk of skin diseases (Hudek-Knežević, Kardum, & Mehić, 2016). Moreover Narcissistic adults were more likely to be perceived as neurotic (Hill & Roberts, 2012) and Narcissistic male prisoners were more psychologically distressed (Ireland, Brown, & Ballarini, 2006).

Discussion

In this literature review, the definitions, similarities, and differences of Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy, their facets, the most commonly used measures, their relationships with coping styles and psychological well-being were discussed in detail. It can be concluded that although the Dark Triad traits share some common features, it is required to measure them separately as they differ in some significant ways. Considering their relationships with coping styles and psychological well-being indicators, the level of darkness of the three traits are not the same so that psychopathy is located at the darkest end, narcissism at the lightest, and Machiavellianism falls in between the two. Despite this difference in the level of darkness and the positive findings regarding narcissism's relation to well-being, the negative psychosocial consequences associated with each of the Dark Triad traits still predominate over positive ones in order to render them maladaptive.

In addition to that, also the facets of narcissism and psychopathy differ in terms of adaptiveness, but more research needs to be conducted in order to distinguish among the different facets in a more elaborate manner. Moreover, there is insufficient research to clarify the factor structure of Machiavellianism. The most important reason for investigating the different facets of the Dark Triad traits may be to distinguish between the adaptive and maladaptive facets of each trait and to develop an awareness raising and support programs to make these individuals acquire adaptive coping skills. It will not only be helpful in making people possessing Dark Triad traits more psychologically healthy but will also be likely to reduce their malevolent behaviors since people coping with stressors in a more successful way are expected to engage in antisocial acts less.