



Introduction to the special issue of *Primenjena psihologija*: Dark Traits in Applied Context

Passing the torch: Second-generation research on the Dark Triad/Tetrad traits


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When people think of personality traits, they tend to think only of socially desirable ones like extraversion or empathy. Rarely do they consider so-called darker aspects of personality as something that has relevance outside the clinical or pathological space. However, if traits exist along continua and only excessive and rigid manifestations of them translate to problems, traits like narcissism and psychopathy may have relevance to understand human nature and the nature of personality in general (Rad et al., 2018). In the last twenty years, a remarkable amount of research has been done to catalogue and understand subclinical manifestations of the Dark Triad traits (e.g., Dinić & Jevremov, 2021; Furnham et al., 2013; see Figure 1). The Dark Triad traits are narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), all of which are moderately-to-highly intercorrelated (Muris et al., 2017) with shared characteristics of callousness and manipulation (Jones & Figueredo, 2013) highly linked to antagonism trait (Dinić et al., 2021). Narcissism is associated with a sense of grandiosity, entitlement, egotism, self-orientation, and a lack of empathy (Turner & Webster, 2018), Machiavellianism is associated with manipulative behaviors, cynicism, the exploitation of others, and a ruthless lack of morality (Jones, 2016), and

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psychopathy is associated with recklessness, cruel and callous attitudes, antisocial behavior, and a lack of remorse (Cale & Lilienfeld, 2002). Candidate traits have been offered to add to the group like sadism (Chabrol et al., 2009), forming Dark Tetrad, and spitefulness (Marcus et al., 2014), both of which also try to capture sub-clinical manifestations of socially undesirable personality traits.

This surge of research has been enabled by three factors. First, research on these traits started just about the same time as researchers started adopting internet methods for data collection. Most of this research draws on samples of social media users and community members through online services like Mechanical Turk. This means researchers were enabled, like never before, to collect copious amounts of quality data quickly and, therefore, flood journals with studies about whatever they were interested in like ghosting in romantic relationships, happiness, and the use of cosmetics. Second, prior attempts to study these traits relied on isolated and sometimes lengthy scales. In a situation in which quick screening of dark traits is enough for the research goals, brief measures were created (e.g., Jonason & Webster, 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2014) to expedite and streamline the measurement of all three traits. These scales proved useful when studying English speaking and non-English speaking participants which further enabled research on these traits in mostly non-Western countries like Serbia, Japan, and Brazil. Third, research in this area was especially helped by the integration of these traits within a life history theory paradigm (e.g., Jonason et al., 2010) which is taken from evolutionary biology/ecology which suggests organisms can be described by patterns of trade-offs between survival (e.g., maturation, parenting effort) and reproductive (e.g., mating effort, interest in casual sex).

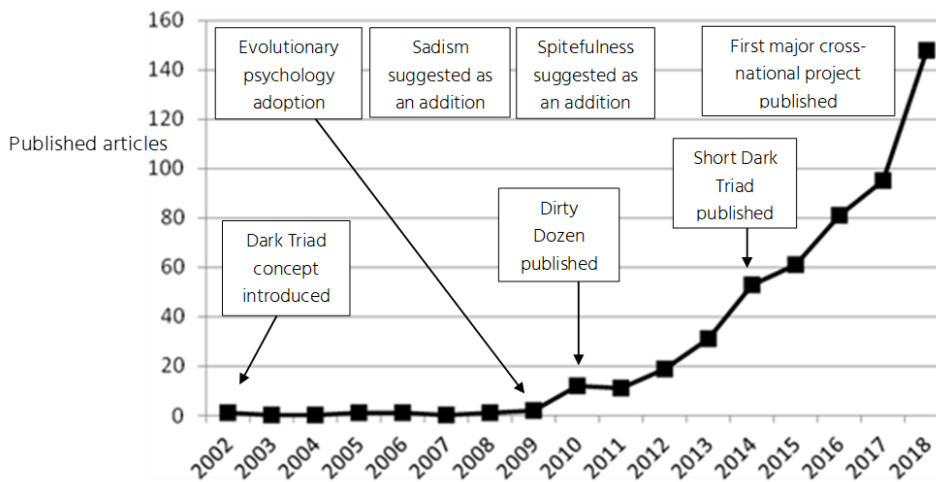


Figure 1. Bibliometric count of citation rates and major milestones in the study of the Dark Triad traits.

Note. Figure—minus milestones—is from Dinić and Jevremov (2021).

Unfortunately, the research tends to come predominantly from three researchers from Canada, the United States, and Australia because the most productive and cited researchers in this field (e.g., Paulhus, Jonason, and Jones, respectively, see Dinić & Jevremov, 2021) work or worked in those places. While there are notable exceptions of dark traits research outside these countries, this research tends to come from a limited number of researchers from different countries with focus on how the Dark Triad/Tetrad traits manifest in specific national or cultural contexts. Recent attempts to redress this relied on data from a cross-national project (Jonason et al., 2020) where researchers captured data from 49 nations (see Figure 2) to understand how people differ in the Dark Triad traits from country to country and how sex differences in the traits might be sensitive to variance in country-level factors.

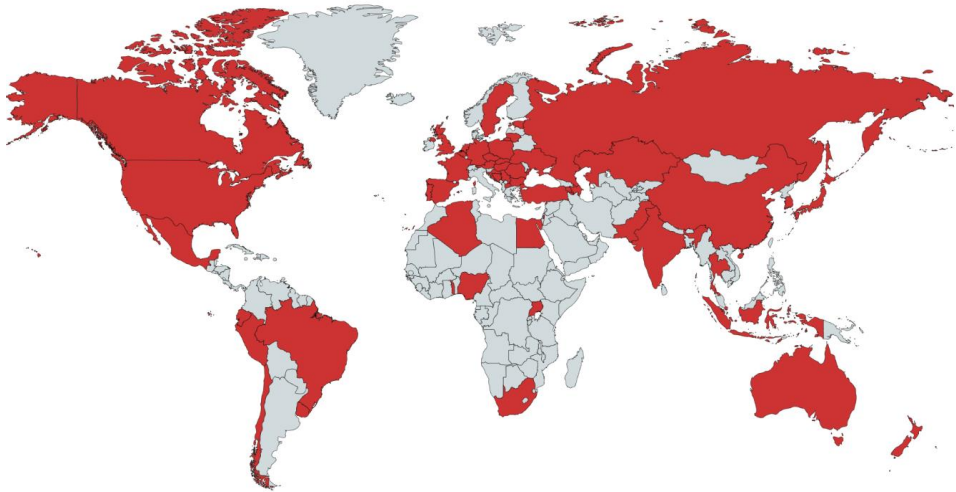


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of data collected in Jonason et al. (2020).

This is where this special issue steps in, with work from the second generation of Dark Triad/Tetrad researchers who are from under-represented countries. Researchers from this special issue draw on data or come from Serbia, Brazil, Hungary, Australia, and Croatia and all of which touch on new topics that have relevance for three applied contexts (i.e., tourism/business, aesthetics, and mental health) and help researchers better understand the nature of how these traits manifest in subclinical ways and samples. In the first study conducted in Serbia, Jovanović, Mijatov, and Metod examined how the Dark Tetrad traits predicted a unique kind of tourism preferences characterized by trip to conflict-laden or dangerous places, building on work that suggests the traits are associated with “sensational interests” (James et al., 2014). When engaged in this kind of tourism, people may do so for various reasons like compassion and curiosity which are predicted by different traits. For instance, interest exhibitions about conflict and danger were associated with Machiavellianism and interest in conflict or battle sites was associated with more psychopathy. Similarly, in the second study by Tucaković and Marković conducted in Serbia, researchers examined how the Dark Tetrad traits predicted aesthetic preferences for paintings. That is personality traits may predict the kinds of art people enjoy (Jonason et al., 2015). Researchers

presented the participants with 15 different paintings reflecting five different motives (i.e., religious, abstract, oriental, violence, and landscape), and showed that narcissism was associated with liking violent paintings and psychopathy was associated with a dislike of religious painting, suggesting that one can infer some degree of narcissism if he/she sees a painting on someone's wall or Facebook page and infer the lack of psychopathy if someone has religious paintings as part of their external displays to the world. In the third paper, we move from applied aspects of the traits in the tourism and aesthetics context to the mental health context. Researchers from Brazil, Bonfá-Araujo, Lima-Costa, Couto, Baptista, and Hauck-Filho, focused on the utility of the so-called Dark Core of personality (i.e., the shared variance among the traits; Moshagen et al., 2020) in predicting individual differences in locus of control and religiousness to understand how people cope with emotional distress. The Dark Core was better linked to external as opposed internal locus of control which then leads to spiritual coping strategies. In the fourth study, researchers from Serbia, Grabovac and Šakotić-Kurbalija, collected data from Hungarian adults living in Serbia and focused on the foundations of positive psychology (i.e., well-being, savoring, creative and executing efficiency, self-regulation, and resilience). As expected, narcissism (self-reported) showed positive correlations with all five and psychopathy has opposite associations with all but resilience. Machiavellianism provided a mixed profile with positive correlations for savoring and creative executive efficiency but associated with less self-regulation and resilience and no relationship with well-being. These mixed profiles further support the idea that each trait is distinct and warrants personalized attention (but see Miller et al., 2022). In the next paper, researchers from Serbia, Oljača, Sadiković, Dinić, and Baić, expanded previous research on relationships between Dark Tetrad traits and clinical outcomes (Dinić et al., 2020) and collected data from both men convicted of murder and rape and a community sample of men. The researchers revealed that violent offenders were more psychopathic and had more problems in social and general functioning, but had lower narcissism compared to the community members. Furthermore, while both psychopathy

and physical aspect of sadism showed the main effects on various clinical outcomes, only the physical sadism was linked to risk-taking in community members, but not in violent offenders. Next, if we take our lead from the APA commission on masculinity and building on prior research on sex roles (Jonason & Davis, 2019; Waddell et al., 2020), the sixth study conducted on English-speaking participants by researchers from Australia, Van Doorn and Dye, showed that aspects of each of the Dark Triad traits manifest a different “style” of traditional masculinity, but it was only the leadership, exhibitionism, and vanity aspects of narcissism that revealed any negative associations with forms of masculinity (i.e., self-reliance, emotional control). The most robust correlations were for the winning and risk-taking aspects of traditional masculinity which may align with arguments from evolutionary psychologists about sex roles (Janicke et al., 2016) and the traits (Jonason et al., 2010). And last, in a rare study relying on electrodermal activity and game theory, researcher from Croatia, Krupić, frustrated participants and showed that those characterized by psychopathy experience stronger emotional reactions when faced the threat of loss, which is partially a function of an approach motivation, not a lack of avoidance motivation.

For researchers in the Dark Triad/Tetrad traits, expanding the breadth of topical coverage and the range of psychological, national, cultural, and philosophical frames is essential to improve the area. Researchers from different frames will bring unique insights to spark debate, resolve controversies, and draw attention to new matters of concern. The work presented here by this international array of second-generation researchers speaks both to old and new issues in the field. Old issues like what is the Dark Core, and if it is a viable concern (see Dinić & Jevremov, 2021), and new issues like the relationships between the traits and touristic and aesthetic preferences. We encourage researchers from around the world to draw their attention to issues surrounding dark traits to make research on these traits rival the Big Five/HEXACO traits in magnitude, breadth, and quality.

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