

Peer-reviewed academic journal

**Innovative Issues and Approaches in
Social Sciences**

IIASS VOLUME 18 (2025)

Innovative Issues and Approaches in Social Sciences

IIASS is a double blind peer review academic journal published 3 times yearly (January, May, September) covering different social sciences: political science, sociology, economy, public administration, law, management, communication science, psychology and education.

| 2

IIASS has started as a Sldip – Slovenian Association for Innovative Political Science journal and is being published by ERUDIO Center for Higher Education.

Typeset

This journal was typeset in 11 pt. Arial, Italic, Bold, and Bold Italic; the headlines were typeset in 14 pt. Arial, Bold

Abstracting and Indexing services

COBISS, International Political Science Abstracts, CSA Worldwide Political Science Abstracts, CSA Sociological Abstracts, PAIS International, DOAJ, Google scholar.

Publication Data:

ERUDIO Education Center

Innovative issues and approaches in social sciences, 2025,
vol. 18

ISSN 1855-0541

Additional information: www.iiass.com

IN THE CONSTELLATION OF DARK PERSONALITY TRAITS: A SCOPING REVIEW OF THE DARK PERSONALITY CORE

Nik Čavlovič¹, Vesna Jug²

Abstract

Since the emergence of the Dark Triad/Dark Tetrad personality constructs, a growing body of literature has suggested a common core underlying socially aversive behaviors. With a multitude of diverse explanations on the horizon, the literature has become ambiguous and vague within the context of the dark personality framework, warranting further clarity. A scoping literature review was conducted by electronically searching five databases, yielding 12 articles included in the investigation. The results support the notion that the field of dark personality traits can progress from factorial trait labels toward a perspective where aversive traits are seen as emergent from interactions between individual components. These traits manifest as the most prominent candidate for the dark core, the Dark Factor of Personality (D), which encompasses the general tendency of malevolent characters in normal populations. The most notable measures in this context are the HEXACO model, with an emphasis on the Honesty-Humility dimension, and the D70, a set of items providing the most comprehensive representation of D. It is concluded that manifested socially aversive behaviors, accompanied by beliefs that serve as justifications, parallel two main components: the Antagonism component (promoting disutility for others) and the Emotional component (deficits in affective empathy).

Keywords: Dark Personality Core, Dark Factor of Personality, Dark Triad, Dark Tetrad, HEXACO Honesty-Humility

Introduction

¹ Nik Čavlovič is a Master student of Psychology at University of Primorska, Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Information Technologies. Contact email address: 89232100@student.upr.si

² Vesna Jug, PhD, is an Assistant professor of Psychology at University of Primorska. Contact email address: vesna.jug@upr.si

The tides of dark personality research were shifted by Paulhus and Williams (2002) when they coined the term Dark Triad (DTr), comprising three conceptually distinct but empirically overlapping malevolent personalities: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The term narcissism derives from a Greek mythological story of a young man named Narcissus, who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. In personality psychology, narcissism is characterized as a socially aversive personality trait defined by grandiose self-views, a sense of entitlement, lack of empathy, and egotism, traits which to some degree can be present in any individual. Excessive preoccupation with issues such as personal adequacy, power, prestige, and vanity may manifest pathologically as Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Conversely, subclinical narcissism is considered a personality trait that is not clinically significant enough to be classified as a pathological personality disorder by clinical psychologists. Nevertheless, it is regarded as a socially undesirable personality trait in normal populations, encompassing behavioral traits such as grandiose self-views, exhibitionism, exploitativeness, superiority, authority, and self-sufficiency (Balaji & Balasundaram, 2014).

Ancient and modern writings such as *The Book of Lord Shang* and *Arthaśāstram* were reviewed by Christie et al. (2013), who identified two recurring themes. First, the view that humans are inherently weak, fallible, and gullible intertwines with the second theme, which posits that it is rational for individuals to take advantage of others who cannot be trusted due to their own weaknesses. Therefore, manipulation and exploitation of others serve as a means of self-protection. Furthermore, the term Machiavellianism emerged from Christie et al.'s (2013) selection of statements from the original works of the Renaissance Italian diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli (*The Prince* and *The Discourses*). By adapting these statements into reliable measures of personality traits, Christie et al. (2013) established a connection between respondents' agreement with Machiavelli's views and their success in manipulating others. Finally, Machiavellianism is characterized as a personality trait that encompasses an individual's tendency to successfully manipulate other (weaker) individuals to gain personal benefit.

Hare's (1996) definition of psychopathy describes it as a socially devastating personality disorder that includes affective, interpersonal, and behavioral antisocial characteristics, along with certain lifestyle traits such as egocentricity, impulsivity, irresponsibility, shallow emotions, lack of empathy, guilt or remorse,

pathological lying, manipulateness, and continuous violations of the law and social norms. Blair et al. (2006) note that psychopathy is distinct from antisocial personality disorder and conduct disorder, involving a pattern of both emotional and behavioral symptoms. Although psychopathy has four main dimensions (see Hare & Neumann, 2008), Blair et al. (2006) argue that at a cognitive level, disruption between the amygdala and the orbital/ventrolateral cortex prevents individuals from forming stimulus-reinforcing associations, which are linked to deficits in empathy, resulting in an inability to be properly socialized during earlier life stages. For this reason, the emotional component, including emotional dysfunction, is considered central to psychopathy. It is important to note that when psychopathy is investigated as a dark personality trait, it is not viewed as a pathology in a clinical setting (i.e., personality disorder) but rather as a tendency in non-clinical populations. Smith and Hung (2013) describe individuals with higher subclinical psychopathy as average individuals with steady, often high-paying jobs, spouses, children, and psychopathic tendencies. These individuals manipulate others to get their way and engage in dishonest activities, but they do not commit serious criminal acts that could result in arrest or other forms of penal consequences, instead remaining on the outskirts of the criminal justice system.

Adding new members: The Dark Tetrad

Nearly a decade ago, Buckels, Jones, and Paulhus (2013) introduced Sadism as the fourth element, completing the Dark Tetrad (DTe) of personality, which extends the initial concept of the DTr. While most people find hurting innocent individuals to be a distressing and guilt-inducing experience, individuals with higher sadism experience quite the opposite. They can be malevolent and derive pleasure, excitement, and even sexual arousal from enhancing suffering, rather than alleviating it, especially once they realize the innocent person is not fighting back, thus enjoying cruelty. As a result, these individuals may actively seek opportunities to engage in activities where they can exercise their brutality. An example of this behavior is online trolling, where individuals with higher sadism exhibit trolling behavior toward other online users simply for enjoyment. Research suggests that this online trolling persona mirrors the individual's actual personality and ideal self, represented by an archetypal villain who wreaks chaos and mayhem for personal enjoyment (Buckels et al., 2014). Unlike the other three dark personalities, sadism is characterized by an intrinsic motivation

to cause suffering, with individuals willing to spend extra time and energy to hurt an innocent person (Buckels et al., 2013).

The Dark personality core

With the emergence of theoretically distinct but empirically overlapping dark traits, there has been a recurring question regarding the overlap, or common core, that accounts for the shared variance among antagonistic traits. Since the breakthrough of Paulhus and Williams (2002), the literature has been somewhat ambiguous about this underlying common element, as researchers offer various explanations for the overlap. Paulhus and Williams (2002) initially posited that the DTr members share a common core of disagreeableness within the Big Five framework, which was later supported by factor analyses revealing that dark personalities are primarily expressed through low agreeableness, high neuroticism, and low conscientiousness (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006).

Among the concepts of fundamental personality traits, Lee and Ashton (2014) argue that identifying the core of the DTr members is best achieved through the HEXACO model, rather than the Big Five, as the latter does not reduce the conceptual redundancy between models to the same extent. The Honesty-Humility dimension of the HEXACO model represents individual differences in the tendency to cooperate with others, even when exploitation is possible, while the DTr members reflect a willingness to exploit others when perceived as advantageous. Therefore, it is argued that the HEXACO dimension is essentially equivalent to the shared variance of the DTr members at its opposite pole. Additionally, the Honesty-Humility dimension has received strong support from studies testing various models to account for the overlap, standing out significantly more than any other investigated model (Book et al., 2015).

Although Honesty-Humility has a strong case, it is missing key elements, such as Hare's Factor 1 psychopathy—manipulation and callousness—which are considered primary contributors to the shared variance among DTr members (Jones & Figueredo, 2013). As a lack of empathy towards others (i.e., callousness) covers both theoretical and empirical overlap, it is important to note that callousness behaviorally manifests in various ways among the four malevolent characters. For example, individuals with higher narcissism lack empathy for those they step on in pursuit of public admiration, while individuals with higher psychopathy impulsively

take what they want without concern for others' well-being (Paulhus, 2014).

Since the emergence of the DTr (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and the DTe (Chabrol et al., 2009) personality constructs, various explanations have arisen regarding the Common Core that these traits share. These explanations mainly support the view of shared variance from the perspective of fundamental personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Lee & Ashton, 2014), with a focus on the Honesty-Humility dimension of the HEXACO model of personality, which is arguably the most suitable representation of the dark core (Kowalski et al., 2021). Additional empirical studies support the idea that Factor 1 psychopathy—manipulation and callousness—is responsible for the overlap (Jones & Figueredo, 2013). However, the extensive literature on dark personality traits remains ambiguous and vague regarding whether the Common Core can be limited to a single shared element (a single dark core), along with theoretical issues concerning what is included in the category of 'dark traits' (Kowalski et al., 2021). Therefore, the aim of this scoping literature review is to identify which constructs fall under the umbrella of dark personality traits and to determine whether that core can be limited to a single shared element of dark personality traits.

Moreover, the goals of this scoping review were as follows:

Evaluate if the Dark Triad/Dark Tetrad construct remains the best representation of dark personality traits.

Investigate broader aspects of aversive personality traits in exploration of a common core of all dark personality traits.

Convey the idea of HEXACO Honesty-Humility dimension, being the best representation of a common core from perspective of fundamental personality models (as proposed by Kowalski et al., 2021; Lee & Ashton, 2014).

Methods

This section presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the article search strategy and the PRISMA flow diagram.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria were as follows:

Subclinical populations not limited by age.

Studies focusing on Dark Triad and Dark Tetrad constructs.

Research studies producing single or multiple outcomes regarding the dark core of personality.

Written in English.

Studies with linked full text and open access available.

Studies ranging from 2018 to 2023.

Subject area limited to Psychology³.

Exclusion criteria were as follows:

Clinical populations reflecting pathology.

The constructs of Dark Triad/Dark Tetrad have not been concurrently studied in studies that focused solely on one construct (e.g., only psychopathy).

Emphasis has been placed on the psychometric properties of individual dimensions in articles.

Case studies, RCTs, literature reviews, meta-analyses.

Differences in article dating across databases have been noted.⁴

Search strategy

Articles relevant for the current review were identified through electronic searches of Science Direct, APA PsychArticles, PubMed, Medline, and Scopus databases. The searches were conducted in July and August of 2023 using the following search string with Boolean operators: ("Dark Triad" OR "Dark Tetrad") AND (core OR network); ("Dark Triad" OR "Dark Tetrad") AND "shared variance"; ("Dark Triad" OR "Dark Tetrad") AND "Honesty-Humility"; "Dark Personality" AND core; "Dark Personality" AND "Honesty-Humility".

Filters were applied in each database to include articles published within the last five years (2018-2023) because first publications on the dark core date back to 2018 (Moshagen et al., 2018), written in English, available in full text, and open access. In databases where subject area filters were available (Science Direct and Scopus), searches were additionally restricted to the field of psychology.

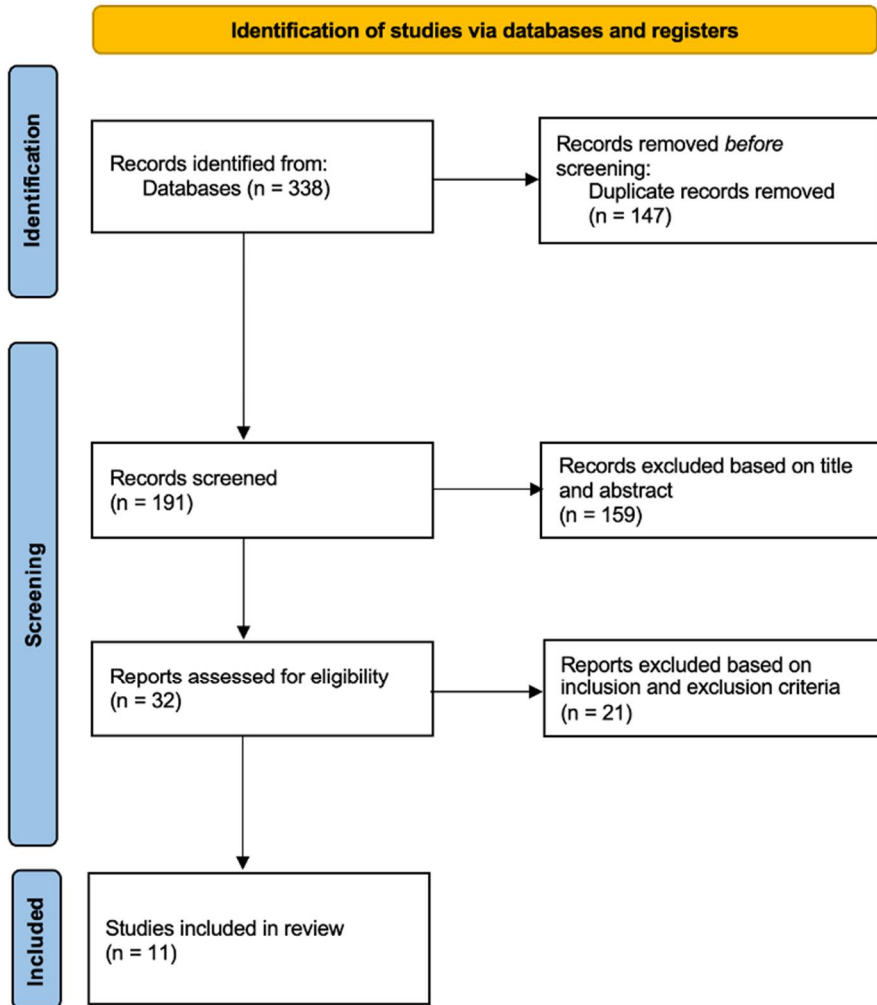
After initiating the search using all five search strings, the articles from each database were exported to the reference manager Zotero. PRISMA guidelines were adhered to for identifying articles suitable for the review. Initially, duplicates were removed using the citation program EndNote. Subsequently, each article underwent screening based on title and abstract to exclude those that were

³ Subject area was limited to the field of Psychology if the searched database had the option.

⁴ Duplicates have been additionally found due to differences in database article dating, those articles have been therefore excluded.

clearly irrelevant to the study. Finally, eligibility of the remaining articles was assessed by reviewing their full texts against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study selection process is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram



Results

The initial search across five databases (Science Direct, APA PsychArticles, PubMed, Medline, and Scopus) resulted in 338 articles being identified. Following the removal of duplicates using the EndNote citation program, 191 articles remained. Subsequently, the

remaining articles underwent screening based on titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of 159 clearly irrelevant articles. The 32 remaining articles were then subjected to full-text review using inclusion/exclusion criteria. Ultimately, 21 articles were excluded due to not meeting the inclusion and exclusion criteria, leaving 11 articles included in the final review, as detailed in Table 1.

Eleven articles were included in the present review. Among these, seven employed a single study design: five were cross-sectional studies, one was longitudinal, and one was characterized as a two-phase cross validation study (Bader, personal communication, August 18, 2023). The remaining five studies utilized a mixed study design, encompassing cross-sectional, theoretical, correlational, longitudinal, comparative, and exploratory study designs.

Regarding the demographics of the included articles, three reported data from multiple countries (with two studies including participants from over 150 countries). Three studies were conducted in the USA, two in the UK, two in Germany, and one each in Italy and Serbia, respectively. Furthermore, the final sample sizes ranged from 263 to more than 160,000 participants across the included articles, with four studies reporting samples larger than 25,000 participants. The measures used in the included articles varied depending on the construct under study. Studies were categorized as using 'multiple measures' when they employed more than five measures in the methodology section. For studies using fewer than five measures, these are detailed in the Notes section of Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of included studies

Article	Study design	Participants		Measures	Main findings
		Country	Sample		
Bader et al., 2021	Two-phase cross-validation	Multiple countries	3 samples, N > 160,000	D70	The Common Core of aversive traits is optimally conceptualized through the Dark Factor of Personality (D). The internal

					structure of D is described as a combination of five themes: callousness, deceitfulness, narcissistic entitlement, sadism, and vindictiveness. additionally, antagonism, lack of empathy, and selfishness are identified as aspects of D based on their utility.
Bader et al., 2022	Longitudinal	UK	N > 1,000	D70	Dark Triad (DTr) traits share aversive features conceptually and are empirically mapped onto the underlying disposition of D. Psychopathy is regarded as a combination of D and disinhibition, while narcissism is considered a combination of D and vulnerability.

Gojko vić et al., 2022	Cross- section al	Serbia	N = 263	SD3, ACME, NARQ	Machiavellianis m has failed to show evidence in relation to D. DTr traits should be conceptualized as manifestations of D with non- aversive characteristics rather than as a triad of distinct traits.	Based on closeness and betweenness criteria, affective dissonance is identified as the central node of the network. In terms of strength, rivalry (rather than psychopathy) is the most central. Psychopathy is positioned at the core of DTr) Affective dissonance is the strongest candidate for the core of dark personality
---------------------------------	-------------------------	--------	------------	-----------------------	--	--

Heym et al., 2019	Cross-sectional	UK	N = 301	SD3, QCAE, IAS-A	<p>traits. Machiavellianism, while being the weakest link, is not considered redundant.</p> <p>DTr traits are best viewed as three separate constructs. All three DTr traits share at least one affective empathy deficit—reduced peripheral responsivity—but this does not drive Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). Evidence was found linking IRI with cognitive empathy deficits in both sexes alike. In psychopathy and Machiavellianism, IRI is characterized by a failure in simulating others' cognitions and emotions.</p>
-------------------	-----------------	----	---------	------------------	---

Hilbig et al., 2022	Correlational, theoretical	Germany	6 studies, N > 25,000	D35, D70	The proposed theoretical model illustrates how justifying specific beliefs sets aversive behavior in motion. D differentiates from fundamental personality models by explaining variance in specific beliefs and is uniquely related to them. Individuals protect their moral self-image by neutralizing potential threats through justifying engagement in aversive behaviors.
Jordan et al., 2022	Cross-sectional	USA	4 studies, N = 1,800	Multiple measures	Antagonism explains the overlap between Dark Tetrad (DTe) features and spitefulness. The study supports previous

findings that low agreeableness is a strong and consistent correlate with DTr. Network analysis offers a conceptualization that does not rely on factorial trait labels (e.g., DTr) and proposes that traits emerge from interactions between individual components.

Moshagen et al., 2018	Cross-sectional, theoretical, longitudinal	Germany	4 studies, N > 2,500	Multiple measures	Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that dark traits can be attributed to a single dark core (D). High D saturation is indicated by strong loadings on traits such as Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and spitefulness. D captures
-----------------------	--	---------	----------------------	-------------------	---

Moshagen et al., 2020	Cross-sectional, theoretical	Multiple countries	7 samples, N > 165,000	Multiple measures	<p>behaviorally relevant meaning and acts as the primary source of variance. In basic personality models, D is linked to low agreeableness and low conscientiousness. Additionally, D has a strong negative correlation with the Honesty-Humility dimension, to which it is most closely related.</p> <p>D can be assessed using D70, D35, and D16. High internal consistencies, high retest reliabilities, and high criterion-related validity are observed for D70, D35, and D16. D70 is recognized for providing the most comprehensive representation</p>
-----------------------	------------------------------	--------------------	------------------------	-------------------	---

Somma et al., 2020	Cross-sectional	Italy	N = 279	Mach-IV, FFNI-SF, TriPM, PID-5, MDS	of D. PID-5 antagonism traits (callousness and manipulativeness) occupy a central position among DTr traits. DTr traits should be examined through a common feature of moral disengagement rather than dysfunctional morality. Viewing DTr as a personality is misleading because it does not provide information beyond antagonism.
Vize et al., 2020	Cross-sectional, comparative, exploratory	USA	N = 1,255	Multiple measures	Agreeableness, Honesty-Humility, callousness, and manipulation explain nearly all shared variance among DTr members.

Vize et al., 2021	Cross-sectional	USA	N = 487	D70, Agreeabl. items, IPIP-NEO-120, RPQ, CAB	Concerning the core of DTr, these traits collectively fall under the umbrella term of antagonism. D can be conceptualized as the opposing pole of agreeableness, specifically as antagonism. Further exploration is needed to establish D as theoretically and empirically distinct from low agreeableness, as D and agreeableness exhibit significant overlap, suggesting a potential jangle fallacy.
-------------------	-----------------	-----	---------	--	---

Notes. ACME = Affective and cognitive measure of empathy; CAB = Crime and analogous behavior scale; D = The Dark Factor of Personality; D35, D705 = Self-report measure of D; FFNI-SF = Five factor narcissism inventory-short form; IAS-A = Indirect Aggression Scale-Aggressor Version; IPIP-NEO-120 = Five factor model of personality-120 item; MACH-IV = Machiavellianism questionnaire;

⁵ 35 or 70 items set in Moshagen et al. (2020).

MDS = Moral disengagement scale; NARQ = Narcissistic admiration and rivalry questionnaire; PID-5 = Personality inventory for DSM-5; QCAE = Questionnaire of cognitive and affective empathy; RPQ = Reactive-proactive aggression questionnaire; SD3 = Short Dark Triad; TriPM = Triarchic psychopathy measure.

Content overview of the studies

The Dark Triad disintegration

Among the eleven selected studies in the review, four identified empirical evidence suggesting that the Dark Triad (DTr) traits—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—should not be considered a unified triad of traits but rather as distinct constructs. Bader et al. (2022) specifically examined the conceptual and empirical overlap of DTr traits and their relation to each other and to the broader construct of D (dysfunctional personality traits). They found significant correlations among the subdimensions of different DTr traits, such as meanness, self-centered antagonism, tactics, amoral manipulation, and SD3 Machiavellianism. Notably, Machiavellianism emerged as a distinct entity within the DTr, showing substantial variance independently from the broader construct of D.

Two studies employed network visualization and analysis (Bader et al., 2022; Jordan et al., 2022) and found no clustering of subdimensions, supporting the view of three distinct traits rather than a triad. Furthermore, DTr traits exhibit significant overlap with D and are manifested through non-aversive characteristics like vulnerability and disinhibition. In network theory, these traits emerge from interactions among individual components, with Antagonism showing connections to detachment, grandiose exhibitionism, exploitation/entitlement, and sadism/callous affect.

Heym et al. (2019) revealed that all DTr traits share deficits in affective empathy, although this is unrelated to Indirect relational aggression (IRA). They also noted that the joint dark core model does not adequately fit the triadic model of traits.

Somma et al. (2020) explored moral disengagement through the lens of various DTr traits. They found that FFNI-SF antagonism, TDM-IV, and TriPM meanness are strong predictors of moral disengagement, attributing dysfunctional morality to DTr traits. Moreover, the antagonism domain, encompassing attention-seeking, callousness, manipulateness, deceitfulness, and grandiosity, shows significant associations with DTr traits.

Common features of dark personality traits

Moshagen et al. (2018) conducted a series of four studies to critically test new conceptualizations of a shared core encompassing aversive personality traits. They concluded that dark traits can be unified under a single construct, termed the Dark Factor of Personality (D). This conceptualization was further supported by Bader et al. (2021) in a Two-phase cross-validation study involving a sample of over 160,000 participants. Bader et al. identified five core themes surrounding the nine refined traits: callousness, deceitfulness, narcissistic entitlement, sadism, and vindictiveness. These traits encapsulate the essence of antagonism, as emphasized in the studies of Vize et al. (2021), where D is viewed as the antithesis of agreeableness (i.e., antagonism). Somma et al. (2020) also identified callousness and manipulativeness as key antagonistic traits within the DTr, conceptually sharing aversive features that empirically map onto the underlying disposition of D (Bader et al., 2021). Additionally, Jordan et al. (2022) found antagonism to be a central feature in explaining the overlap between the Dark Tetrad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and sadism) and spitefulness.

Two studies focused on the common features of dark personality traits through the lens of empathy, revealing significant insights. Gojković et al. (2022) identified affective dissonance as the central node in the network, suggesting it as a candidate for the dark core of personality. They also highlighted rivalry, rather than presumed psychopathy, as the strongest component. Meanwhile, Heym (2019) found that all DTr traits share at least one deficit in affective empathy, characterized by reduced peripheral responsivity.

Further confirmation of aspects related to the D was provided by six studies conducted by Hilbig et al. (2022), involving a final sample of over 25,000 participants. They proposed a theoretical model to justify aversive behaviors, suggesting that individuals protect their moral self-image by neutralizing potential threats through engagement in such behaviors. Additionally, empirical evidence supporting the measurement of D was presented using psychometric questionnaires such as D16, D35, and D70, demonstrating high internal consistencies and retest reliabilities (Moshagen, 2020).

Fundamental personality models

From the perspective of fundamental personality models, research indicates that low agreeableness and low

conscientiousness consistently correlate strongly with DTr traits (Jordan et al., 2022), HEXACO Honesty-Humility (Vize et al., 2020; Moshagen et al., 2018), and D (Hilbig et al., 2022; Moshagen et al., 2018). Hilbig et al. (2022) provided substantial support for distinguishing D from basic personality models on a large scale (final sample $N > 25,000$), demonstrating that D explains variance in specific beliefs uniquely attributed to D.

Discussion

The aim of the present scoping literature review was to address the ambiguity in the literature concerning dark personality traits, specifically focusing on their dark core. Given the extensive body of literature, it is challenging to ascertain whether the Common Core of aversive personality traits or dark personality traits captures a singular or multiple underlying elements. Through a thorough examination of selected studies, the exploration into the constellation of dark personality traits has yielded significant findings, highlighting the concept of a unified dark core that underlies all aversive personality traits.

The synthesis of the findings emphasizes the pivotal role of the Dark Factor of Personality (D) in conceptualizing the Common Core of aversive traits, defined as "the general tendency to maximize one's individual utility – disregarding, accepting, or malevolently provoking disutility for others –, accompanied by beliefs that serve as justifications" (Moshagen et al., 2018, p. 5). Furthermore, the internal structure of D identifies five themes: callousness, deceitfulness, narcissistic entitlement, sadism, and vindictiveness, collectively encapsulating the essence of antagonism. These aspects of D, along with lack of empathy and selfishness, represent dimensions based on utility (Bader et al., 2021).

To refine the conceptualization of D, the first part of the definition relates to the fluidity of the proposed construct, suggesting that D underlies individual differences in dark traits, akin to how Spearman's *g* factor represents the central role of mental abilities (Moshagen et al., 2018). The second part of the definition sheds light on the mechanisms by which specific beliefs justify aversive behavior, elucidating how malevolent individuals rationalize their engagement in such behaviors by adopting subjective beliefs that protect their moral self-image through the neutralization of threats. In this context, D distinguishes itself from fundamental personality models by accounting for unique variance in beliefs related to distrust and hierarchy (Hilbig et al., 2022).

Empirically measuring D, and consequently the Common Core of dark traits, Moshagen et al. (2020) identified sets of 16, 35, and 70 items, resulting in the D16, D35, and D70 questionnaires, which psychometrically indicate D. Reflecting the definition of D, which focuses on consolidating items into a single factor, all of these measures demonstrate high internal consistencies, high retest reliabilities, and high criterion-related validity, with D70 offering the most comprehensive representation of D.

Moving forward in the exploration of dark personality traits, a critical scrutiny of the Dark Triad (DTr) traits – Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy – is imperative. Current investigation has revealed that DTr traits are best understood as three distinct constructs (Heym et al., 2019). It is suggested that these traits should be conceptualized as manifestations of D, with some non-aversive characteristics, rather than as a triad of traits, as they conceptually share aversive features such as low agreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Jordan et al., 2022). However, empirically, they are mapped onto the underlying disposition of D (Bader et al., 2022).

Further dissociation of DTr traits shows that Machiavellianism lacks evidence of a strong relationship with D (Bader et al., 2022), positioning it as the weakest link in the network but not entirely redundant (Gojković et al., 2022). In contrast, narcissism demonstrates a combination of D and vulnerability, while psychopathy emerges as a blend of D and disinhibition (Bader et al., 2022), characterized by impulsivity and an inability to inhibit unwanted behaviors, consistent with previous studies (Hare, 1996). Despite assertions by Bader et al. (2022), other research emphasizes high D saturation indicated by strong loadings on Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and spitefulness (Moshagen et al., 2018), raising ambiguity regarding Machiavellianism's relationship with D.

These findings underscore the need for cautious interpretation, suggesting that observed phenomena may stem from measurement issues where psychopathy and Machiavellianism measures appear to assess the same construct, exhibiting nearly identical profiles (Miller et al., 2017). All DTr traits share at least one deficit in affective empathy (Heym, 2019), aligning with the centrality of emotional dysfunction in psychopathy (Blair et al., 2006). Gojković et al. (2022) assert that psychopathy constitutes the core of the DTr construct, explaining the shared variance among empirically overlapping traits.

Network analyses further support psychopathy as the core of the DTr construct, with affective dissonance emerging prominently as a core feature of dark personality traits based on closeness and betweenness criteria in the analyzed network. Additionally, the concept of antagonism as a core principle elucidates the overlap between Dark Tetrad (DTe) features and spitefulness, while the centrality of low agreeableness reaffirms its consistent correlation with DTr traits. Jordan et al. (2022) advocate for a shift in focus from factorial trait labels like DTr/DTe towards a perspective where traits emerge from interactions between individual components.

The core of the DT appears unified around a single element, as all traits fall under the umbrella of antagonism (Vize et al., 2020), particularly characterized by callousness and manipulateness (Somma et al., 2020). These findings replicate earlier research indicating that manipulation and callous affect primarily account for shared variance (Jones & Figueredo, 2013). Somma et al. (2020) argue against viewing DTr as a personality, asserting it fails to provide information beyond antagonism. They propose instead that DTr traits should be viewed through the lens of moral disengagement rather than dysfunctional morality.

Furthermore, Vize et al. (2021) highlight that D can be understood as the antithesis of agreeableness, characterized by antagonism. They stress the need for further investigation due to substantial overlap, hinting at a jangle fallacy where distinct constructs are mistakenly conflated due to shared terminology.

Before concluding the discussion on dark personality traits, it is important to highlight significant findings from the perspective of fundamental personality traits. The structure of the DTr traits has been revealed to occupy a hierarchical position as a distinct higher-order factor above both HEXACO and the Five-Factor Model (FFM) personality frameworks.

This relationship between HEXACO's Honesty-Humility dimension and dark personality traits is underscored by D's loadings on low agreeableness and conscientiousness (Moshagen et al., 2018). It is evident that alongside traits such as callousness and manipulation (Vize et al., 2020; Somma et al., 2020; Jones & Figueredo, 2013), D and HEXACO's Honesty-Humility dimension explain virtually all shared variance among DTr members (Vize et al., 2020). This aligns with previous research by Lee & Ashton (2014), suggesting that the HEXACO model, specifically the Honesty-Humility dimension, is better suited than the FFM for studying the core of DTr traits, given its equivalence to the opposite pole of the

core. With D showing strong negative correlations with Honesty-Humility (Moshagen et al., 2018), Lee & Ashton's (2014) proposition gains credibility, highlighting Honesty-Humility as particularly fitting for measuring aversive traits within the HEXACO framework.

In light of the current review, several limitations in this investigation must be acknowledged. Firstly, possible issues with the measurement of psychopathy and Machiavellianism within the DTr construct were not addressed, which could potentially impact the findings on their correlations with the dark core. Secondly, the review focused exclusively on research from the most recent years in the field of dark personality traits and their dark core (2018-2023), thereby excluding earlier conceptualizations of the dark personality core from consideration in this study. Thirdly, emphasis on demographic variables influencing the manifestation of aversive personality traits was not provided in the review, suggesting that further research in clinical settings is needed to explore potential implications. Finally, as the concept of D has emerged relatively recently, more research is needed to explore its conceptual and empirical aspects to firmly establish this construct in the study of personality differences. There is some indication of a jangle fallacy, as substantial overlap between D and agreeableness has been observed (Vize et al., 2021), highlighting the need for further investigation.

Conclusions

The evidence presented in the current scoping literature review suggests that the field of dark personality traits can move beyond factorial trait labels (e.g., Dark Triad/Dark Tetrad), as these constructs appear redundant concerning broader aspects of aversive personality traits. It is emphasized that the core of dark personality traits can be encapsulated by a single underlying element. Presently, the most prominent element in this constellation of dark personality traits is The Dark Factor of Personality (D), embodying the general inclination of malevolent individuals within society.

Furthermore, this inclination towards malevolence seems to manifest through two primary components: Antagonism, which involves actively promoting disutility for others, and an Emotional component characterized by deficits in affective empathy (e.g., affective dissonance). These components give rise to manifestations of aversive behaviors, often accompanied by specific beliefs that serve as justifications.

For those seeking to measure such behaviors, the most effective approach would be to utilize the D70 questionnaire (which captures D) or the HEXACO model, with particular attention to the Honesty-Humility dimension. As clarity in the literature surrounding the dark core of personality has improved in recent years, further investigation is necessary to address potential theoretical issues and misconceptions in the constellation of dark personality traits.

References

- Bader, M., Hartung, J., Hilbig, B. E., Zettler, I., Moshagen, M., & Wilhelm, O. (2021). Themes of the dark core of personality. *Psychological Assessment*, 33(6), 511–525. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0001006>
- Bader, M., Hilbig, B. E., Zettler, I., & Moshagen, M. (2023). Rethinking aversive personality: Decomposing The Dark Triad traits into their common core and unique flavors. *Journal of personality*, 91(5), 1084–1109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12785>
- Balaji, V., & Balasundaram, I. (2014). A Study on Sub-Clinical Narcissistic Personality Score and Its Relationship with Academic Performance-An Indian Experience. *Asian Social Science*, 11(2), p96. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v11n2p96>
- Blair, R. J. R., Peschardt, K. S., Budhani, S., Mitchell, D. G. V., & Pine, D. S. (2006). The development of psychopathy. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 47(3–4), 262–276. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2006.01596.x>
- Book, A., Visser, B. A., Blais, J., Hosker-Field, A., Methot-Jones, T., Gauthier, N. Y., Volk, A., Holden, R. R., & D'Agata, M. T. (2016). Unpacking more “evil”: What is at the core of the dark Tetrad? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 90, 269–272. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.11.009>
- Book, A., Visser, B. A., & Volk, A. A. (2015). Unpacking “evil”: Claiming the core of the Dark Triad. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 73, 29–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.09.016>
- Buckels, E. E., Jones, D. N., & Paulhus, D. L. (2013). Behavioral Confirmation of Everyday Sadism. *Psychological Science*, 24(11), 2201–2209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613490749>
- Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Trolls just want to have fun. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 67, 97–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016>
- Chabrol, H., Van Leeuwen, N., Rodgers, R., & Séjourné, N. (2009). Contributions of psychopathic, narcissistic, Machiavellian, and sadistic personality traits to juvenile delinquency. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 47(7), 734–739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2009.06.020>
- Christie, R., Geis, F. L., Festinger, L., & Schachter, S. (2013). *Studies in Machiavellianism*. Elsevier Science. <https://books.google.si/books?id=d5tGBQAAQBAJ>
- Freyth, L., & Jonason, P. K. (2023). Overcoming agreeableness: Sociosexuality and The Dark Triad expanded and revisited.

- Personality and Individual Differences, 203, 112009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2022.112009>
- Gojković, V., Dostanić, J. S., & Đurić, V. (2022). Structure of darkness: The Dark Triad, the 'Dark' Empathy and the 'Dark' Narcissism. *Primenjena Psihologija*, 15(2), 237–268. <https://doi.org/10.19090/pp.v15i2.2380>
- Hare, R. (1996). Psychopathy: A clinical construct whose time has come. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 23, 25–54.
- Hare, R. D., & Neumann, C. S. (2008). Psychopathy as a Clinical and Empirical Construct. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 4(1), 217–246. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.3.022806.091452>
- Heym, N., Firth, J., Kibowski, F., Sumich, A., Egan, V., & Bloxson, C. A. J. (2019). Empathy at the Heart of Darkness: Empathy Deficits That Bind The Dark Triad and Those That Mediate Indirect Relational Aggression. *Front Psychiatry*, 10, 95.
- Hilbig, B. E., Moshagen, M., Thielmann, I., & Zettler, I. (2022). Making rights from wrongs: The crucial role of beliefs and justifications for the expression of aversive personality. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 151(11), 2730–2755. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001232>
- Jonason, P. K., & Sherman, R. A. (2020). Personality and the perception of situations: The Big Five and Dark Triad traits. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 163, 110081. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110081>
- Jones, D. N., & Figueredo, A. J. (2013). The Core of Darkness: Uncovering the Heart of the Dark Triad. *European Journal of Personality*, 27(6), 521–531. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1893>
- Jordan, D. G., Jonason, P. K., Zeigler-Hill, V., Winer, E. S., Fletcher, S., & Underhill, D. (2022). A Dark Web of Personality: Network Analyses of Dark Personality Features and Pathological Personality Traits. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 44(1), 186–201. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-021-09882-3>
- Kowalski, C. M., Rogoza, R., Saklofske, D. H., & Schermer, J. A. (2021). Dark Triads, Tetrads, tents, and cores: Why navigate (research) the jungle of dark personality models without a compass (criterion)? *Acta Psychol (Amst)*, 221, 103455.
- Lee, K., & Ashton, M. C. (2014). The Dark Triad, the Big Five, and the HEXACO model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 67, 2–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.048>

- Miller, J. D., Hyatt, C. S., Maples-Keller, J. L., Carter, N. T., & Lynam, D. R. (2017). Psychopathy and Machiavellianism: A Distinction Without a Difference?: Psychopathy and Machiavellianism. *Journal of Personality*, 85(4), 439–453. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12251>
- Moshagen, M., Hilbig, B. E., & Zettler, I. (2018). The dark core of personality. *Psychological Review*, 125(5), 656–688. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000111>
- Moshagen, M., Zettler, I., & Hilbig, B. E. (2020). Measuring the dark core of personality. *Psychological Assessment*, 32(2), 182–196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pas0000778>
- Paulhus, D. L. (2016). The Dark Tetrad of Personality. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (pp. 1–6). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1059-1
- Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(6), 556–563. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566\(02\)00505-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00505-6)
- Smith, C. S., & Hung, L.-C. (2013). *Subclinical psychopaths: How they adapt, their interpersonal interactions with and effect on others, and how to detect them*. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, Ltd.
- Somma, A., Borroni, S., Sellbom, M., Markon, K. E., Krueger, R. F., & Fossati, A. (2020). Assessing dark Triad dimensions from the perspective of moral disengagement and DSM–5 alternative model of personality disorder traits. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 11(2), 100–107. <https://doi.org/10.1037/per0000388>
- Vize, C. E., Collison, K. L., Miller, J. D., & Lynam, D. R. (2020). The “core” of the dark Triad: A test of competing hypotheses. *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment*, 11(2), 91–99. <https://doi.org/10.1037/per0000386>
- Vize, C. E., Miller, J. D., & Lynam, D. R. (2020). Examining the conceptual and empirical distinctiveness of agreeableness and “dark” personality items. *Journal of Personality*, 89(3), 594–612. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12601>