

**Andrea Menzalin**<sup>40</sup>**Janko Međedović**<sup>41</sup>

Faculty of Media and Communications, Belgrade

Institute of Criminological and Sociological Research, Belgrade

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BASIC HUMAN VALUES AND THE DARK TRIAD TRAITS

### Abstract

The aim of our research was to better understand the motivation of the Dark Triad traits by investigating their relationship with Schwartz's basic human values. Our hypothesis was that power, achievement and hedonism would be positive predictors, while benevolence and universalism would be negative predictors of the Dark Triad traits. An online study was conducted in Serbian (N=383, M=32.34, SD=11.72, 66.8% female). The Dirty Dozen (Jonason & Webster, 2010) and the PVQ-21 measures (Schwartz, 2002) were used. Three regression models were set with narcissism, machiavellianism and psychopathy as criterion variables, and basic human values and demographic variables as predictors. Significant predictors of narcissism ( $R^2=.44$ ;  $F(13)=21.63$ ;  $p<.01$ ) were power ( $\beta=.35$ ,  $p<.01$ ), achievement ( $\beta=.34$ ,  $p<.01$ ), gender ( $\beta=-.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and age ( $\beta=-.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Significant predictors of machiavellianism ( $R^2=.26$ ;  $F(13)=9.68$ ;  $p<.01$ ) were power ( $\beta=.32$ ,  $p<.01$ ), benevolence ( $\beta=-.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ), gender ( $\beta=-.12$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and age ( $\beta=-.12$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Significant predictors of psychopathy ( $R^2=.23$ ;  $F(13)=8.01$ ;  $p<.01$ ) were power ( $\beta=.20$ ,  $p<.01$ ), benevolence ( $\beta=-.25$ ,  $p<.01$ ), universalism ( $\beta=-.12$ ,  $p<.05$ ), gender ( $\beta=-.10$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and age ( $\beta=-.11$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Machiavellianism and psychopathy were predicted by values that run against the group's interests, making them "darker" in the context of relations and the society.

**Key words:** Dark Triad, narcissism, psychopathy, machiavellianism, basic human values

### Introduction

#### The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad construct was coined by Paulhus and Williams (2002) to include non-pathological but socially aversive personality traits, consisting of narcissism, psychopathy and machiavellianism. All three represent a socially malevolent character, with elements of emotional coldness, duplicity and aggressiveness, and their behavior is oriented towards self-promotion.

Narcissism and psychopathy refer to subclinical forms of clinical syndromes (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Raskin and Hall (1979, as cited by Paulhus & Williams,

<sup>40</sup> andrea.menzalin.20181015@fmk.edu.rs

<sup>41</sup> janko.medjedovic@fmk.edu.rs

2002) distinguished a subclinical version of narcissism, which entails feelings of grandiosity, dominance, entitlement and superiority. Psychopathy was also adapted to a subclinical form, by including such traits as high impulsivity, thrill-seeking, low empathy and low anxiety (Hare, 1985, as cited by Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Machiavellianism does not have a clinical form, it is a construct that emerged after Christie and Geis (1970, as cited by Paulhus & Williams, 2002) created a questionnaire based on statements from Machiavelli's books, who was famous for his manipulative tactics, to measure cynicism, lack of principles and manipulation (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013).

All Dark Triad traits have been linked with the Big Five and the HEXACO models (Furnham et al., 2013). All three are low on Agreeableness and Honesty-Humility (Furnham et al., 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2018). Narcissism is associated with Extraversion, machiavellianism and psychopathy are negatively associated with Conscientiousness, and psychopathy is low on Neuroticism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Men are consistently found to score higher than women on all Dark Triad traits (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Machiavellianism and psychopathy are closely related since they both have similar affective characteristics, such as emotional coldness, and similar behavioral characteristics, such as manipulation and antisocial tendencies, but what seems to distinguish the two is that psychopathy involves impulsivity and risk-taking while machiavellianism seems to have better impulse regulation ability (Glenn & Sellbom, 2015). Psychopathy is seen as the "darkest" of the three traits as it combines disagreeableness with low anxiety (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Antisocial behavior is significantly predicted by psychopathy but not by machiavellianism or narcissism.

### **Schwartz's basic human values**

Schwartz postulated the existence of 10 universal human values that are critical motivators of people's attitudes and behaviors (Schwartz, 2012). The values are self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence and universalism. Values reflect one's beliefs that are closely linked to affect. In this way, when they are activated or threatened, they invoke feelings, depending on their importance to the individual. For example, if someone highly values achievement but does not have favorable surroundings to demonstrate their competence, they may feel helpless and desperate.

Values have hierarchy in each person's system of priorities, which defines them as individuals (Schwartz, 2012). Each value has a goal that it expresses, which conflicts with some and is congruent with other values. For example, if a person is motivated by power and strives for prestige and dominance over other people, this will typically conflict with benevolence and the pursuit of the common good.

To reflect this dynamic, the values are organized along two bipolar dimensions (Schwartz, 2012). One dimension contrasts openness to change (self-direction and stimulation) with conservation (security, conformity and tradition). Conflict, reflected in this opposition, is between the values that put emphasis on independent thought, action and embracing of new things, and the values that focus on order, restriction of oneself, conservation of past and resistance to change. Self-direction entails making choices, creating, exploring and being independent. Stimulation refers to seeking excitement, challenges and new things. Security represents valuing personal safety, group stability and harmony in relationships and society. Conformity values obedience and self-discipline and its goal is to restrain individual actions that may violate social norms or harm others. Tradition is defined by respect, commitment and acceptance of cultural or religious norms. Conformity and tradition are close in motivation, but the main difference is that conformity means subordination to one's parents, teachers and bosses, while tradition entails subordination to religion, culture and society in general.

Schwartz (2012) postulated that the other dimension contrasts self-enhancement (power and achievement) with self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence). Conflict in this opposition is between the values that emphasize personal interests, pursuit of success and dominance over others, and the values that reflect concern for the welfare and interests of others. Defining goal of power is to gain social status and control over people and resources. Power value is important in groups that are organized in hierarchies, so it motivates individuals to take on responsibility and seek dominance in social institutions. Achievement reflects ambition and the pursuit of personal success by showing competence according to social standards. Both power and achievement highly value social esteem, but achievement value is more focused on successfully demonstrating competence in specific interaction, while power value puts emphasis on keeping a dominant position in a broader social system. Hedonism belongs both to self-enhancement and openness to change, and its goal is to seek pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself. Benevolence refers to the goal of preserving and improving the welfare of people close to oneself, like family and other primary groups, and showing concern for them. Universalism value emphasizes social justice, understanding, tolerance and protection of the welfare of all people and nature.

Previous research showed that Schwartz's value theory is validated cross-culturally, implying that the meaning of the 10 basic human values is similar across the numerous cultures (Knafo, Roccas, & Sagiv, 2011). Cross-culturally, benevolence, universalism and self-direction values are found to be at the top of hierarchy, while power, tradition and stimulation are at the bottom (Schwartz, 2012). This is probably due to the fact that people value adaptive functions of values, that help them maintain societies and that are close to human nature (Parsons, 1951, as cited by Schwartz, 2012). Values that go against the group's interests and clash with human nature are less desirable.

## **The Dark Triad and the basic human values**

To better understand the Dark Triad traits, it is important to look at the value systems that they are correlated with, since values express motivation and could point to what drives each Dark Triad trait (Jonason, Foster, Kavanagh, Gouveia, & Birkás, 2018). However, limited research has been conducted on the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and Schwartz's basic human values, and none has been conducted in Serbian language.

Previous findings showed that the Dark Triad traits exhibit strong preference for valuing power, achievement, hedonism, and stimulation (Kajonius, Persson, & Jonason, 2015; Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2018). Agreeableness is positively correlated with benevolence and negatively with power and achievement, which would be in line with the fact that all three Dark Triad traits score low on agreeableness (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). While narcissism is associated with a more individualistic value system (self-enhancement), its interests do not necessarily go against the group's interests (Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, 2015). However, machiavellianism and psychopathy tend to pursue values that run against the group's interests: both are low on conservation while psychopathy is also low on self-transcendence.

### **Research hypothesis**

The research problem was to investigate which basic human values could contribute to the prediction of the Dark Triad traits. Based on the previous findings, our hypothesis was that power, achievement and hedonism would be positive predictors, while benevolence and universalism would be negative predictors of the Dark Triad traits.

### **Method**

#### **Sampling**

The survey was in Serbian language and conducted online. Snowball sampling was used where we asked each participant to forward the survey to five more people of the same gender as them, trying to ensure the approximately equal number of male and female participants. The research sample consisted of 383 participants, aged 16 to 79 ( $M=32.34$ ,  $SD=11.72$ , 66.8% female). Age range of most participants was 19 to 37 (72.4%).

#### **Instruments**

The Dirty Dozen inventory was used to measure the Dark Triad traits (Jonason & Webster, 2010). It is a 12-item measure, with four items per each Dark Triad trait: narcissism ( $\alpha=.82$ ), machiavellianism ( $\alpha=.84$ ) and psychopathy ( $\alpha=.68$ ). It is a concise measure that reduced the number of items that normally assesses

the Dark Triad from over 90 items to 12 items. The measure includes items from the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory, the 31-item Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III and the 20-item Mach IV. Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with statements like “I have used deceit or lied to get my way” and “I tend to lack remorse” from 1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 = ‘strongly agree’. The Dirty Dozen measure showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha=.86$ ).

The 21-item version of Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-21) was used to measure Schwartz’s 10 basic human values (Schwartz, 2002). It is a shortened version of the original 40-item instrument, adapted for the purposes of the European Social Survey. PVQ-21 measures self-direction ( $\alpha=.49$ ), stimulation ( $\alpha=.80$ ), hedonism ( $\alpha=.62$ ), achievement ( $\alpha=.63$ ), power ( $\alpha=.58$ ), security ( $\alpha=.47$ ), conformity ( $\alpha=.42$ ), tradition ( $\alpha=.17$ ), benevolence ( $\alpha=.65$ ) and universalism ( $\alpha=.55$ ). Each value is measured with two items, only universalism is measured with three. The inventory includes short verbal portraits of 21 different people, each describing a person’s goals and wishes, for example, “It’s very important to him/her to help the people around him/her. He/she wants to care for their well-being” and “Being very successful is important to him/her. He/she hopes people will recognize his/her achievements”. For each portrait, participants were asked “How much like you is this person?” and responses were in the range from 1 = ‘very much like me’ to 6 = ‘not like me at all’. Participants were asked to compare the portrait to themselves and in this way the questionnaire captured the participants’ values without explicitly saying that the values were being measured. PVQ-21 showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha=.78$ ).

### Data analysis

Correlation and regression analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics software version 26. Three regression models were run where each Dark Triad trait was set as a criterion variable, while 10 basic human values and demographic variables (gender, age and education) were set as predictors.

## Results

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the Dark Triad traits and Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for the basic human values.

Table 1  
*Descriptive statistics for the Dark Triad traits*

Trait	M	SD	Scale
Narcissism	2.46	.96	1 = ‘strongly disagree’
Machiavellianism	1.84	.86	5 = ‘strongly agree’
Psychopathy	1.99	.80	

Narcissism had the highest mean score of all Dark Triad traits (M=2.46), which shows it was the most expressed trait of the three, followed by psychopathy (M=1.99) and machiavellianism (M=1.84).

Table 2  
*Descriptive statistics for the basic human values*

Value	M	SD	Scale
Self-Direction	4.79	1.01	
Power	3.29	1.19	
Universalism	4.92	.87	
Achievement	4.21	1.17	
Security	4.27	1.16	1 = 'very much like me'
Stimulation	3.79	1.36	6 = 'not like me at all'
Conformity	3.37	1.13	
Tradition	3.00	1.17	
Hedonism	4.29	1.19	
Benevolence	5.12	.88	

Benevolence and universalism values had the highest mean scores (M=5.12 and M=4.92, respectively), suggesting that the participants identified the least with portraits that expressed these goals. On the other hand, tradition and power values had the lowest mean scores (M=3.00 and M=3.29, respectively), which means that the participants identified the most with portraits that expressed these values.

Table 3 shows correlation analyses between the basic human values, demographic variables and the Dark Triad traits.

Table 3  
*Correlations between the basic human values, demographic variables and the Dark Triad traits*

Variable	Narcissism	Machiavellianism	Psychopathy
Self-Direction	.136**	.041	-.024
Power	.563**	.369**	.248**
Universalism	-.072	-.132*	-.242**
Achievement	.526**	.209**	.114*
Security	.102*	-.088	-.141**
Stimulation	.207**	.206**	.118*
Conformity	.087	-.029	-.037
Tradition	-.035	.000	-.129*
Hedonism	.311**	.207**	.124*
Benevolence	.016	-.156**	-.265**
Gender	-.126*	-.196**	-.200**
Age	-.231**	-.224**	-.175**
Education	.080	-.032	-.017

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Narcissism had the highest positive correlation with power ( $r=.563, p<.01$ ), followed by achievement ( $r=.526, p<.01$ ), hedonism ( $r=.311, p<.01$ ), stimulation ( $r=.207, p<.01$ ), self-direction ( $r=.136, p<.01$ ) and security ( $r=.102, p<.05$ ), while it was negatively correlated with age ( $r=-.231, p<.01$ ) and gender ( $r=-.126, p<.05$ ).

Machiavellianism had the highest positive correlation with power ( $r=.369, p<.01$ ), followed by achievement ( $r=.209, p<.01$ ), hedonism ( $r=.207, p<.01$ ) and stimulation ( $r=.206, p<.01$ ), while it was negatively correlated with age ( $r=-.224, p<.01$ ), gender ( $r=-.196, p<.01$ ), benevolence ( $r=-.156, p<.01$ ) and universalism ( $r=-.132, p<.05$ ).

Psychopathy had the highest positive correlation with power ( $r=.248, p<.01$ ), followed by hedonism ( $r=.124, p<.05$ ), stimulation ( $r=.118, p<.05$ ) and achievement ( $r=.114, p<.05$ ), while it was negatively correlated with benevolence ( $r=-.265, p<.01$ ), universalism ( $r=-.242, p<.01$ ), gender ( $r=-.200, p<.01$ ), age ( $r=-.175, p<.01$ ), security ( $r=-.141, p<.01$ ) and tradition ( $r=-.129, p<.05$ ).

Table 4 shows the first regression model where the basic human values and demographic variables were set as predictors of narcissism.

Table 4  
*First regression model: the basic human values and demographic variables as predictors of narcissism*

Predictors	Standardized $\beta$	Model Summary
Self-Direction	-.007	
Power	<b>.350**</b>	
Universalism	-.053	
Achievement	<b>.337**</b>	
Security	-.007	
Stimulation	.009	
Conformity	-.017	R=.66
Tradition	-.019	R <sup>2</sup> =.44
Hedonism	.059	p < .01
Benevolence	-.092	
Gender	<b>-.122**</b>	
Age	<b>-.110*</b>	
Education	.052	

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Significant predictors of narcissism were power ( $\beta=.350, p<.01$ ), achievement ( $\beta=.337, p<.01$ ), gender ( $\beta=-.122, p<.01$ ) and age ( $\beta=-.110, p<.05$ ). The model was statistically significant ( $R^2=.44, F(13)=21.63, p<.01$ ) and explained 44% of the variance in narcissism.

Table 5 shows the second regression model where the basic human values and demographic variables were set as predictors of machiavellianism.

Table 5  
*Second regression model: the basic human values and demographic variables as predictors of machiavellianism*

Predictors	Standardized $\beta$	Model Summary
Self-Direction	-.022	
Power	<b>.321**</b>	
Universalism	-.011	
Achievement	.063	
Security	-.095	
Stimulation	.100	
Conformity	-.040	R=.51
Tradition	.055	R <sup>2</sup> =.26
Hedonism	.075	p < .01
Benevolence	<b>-.204**</b>	
Gender	<b>-.120*</b>	
Age	<b>-.123*</b>	
Education	-.028	

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Significant predictors of machiavellianism were power ( $\beta=.321$ ,  $p<.01$ ), benevolence ( $\beta=-.204$ ,  $p<.01$ ), age ( $\beta=-.123$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and gender ( $\beta=-.120$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The model was statistically significant ( $R^2=.26$ ,  $F(13)=9.68$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and explained 26% of the variance in machiavellianism.

Table 6 shows the third regression model where the basic human values and demographic variables were set as predictors of psychopathy.

Table 6  
*Third regression model: the basic human values and demographic variables as predictors of psychopathy*

Predictors	Standardized $\beta$	Model Summary
Self-Direction	.000	
Power	<b>.195**</b>	
Universalism	<b>-.119*</b>	
Achievement	.045	
Security	-.086	
Stimulation	.066	
Conformity	.055	R=.48
Tradition	-.090	R <sup>2</sup> =.23
Hedonism	.085	p < .01
Benevolence	<b>-.245**</b>	
Gender	<b>-.103*</b>	
Age	<b>-.110*</b>	
Education	-.023	

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01



Significant predictors of psychopathy were power ( $\beta=.195$ ,  $p<.01$ ), benevolence ( $\beta=-.245$ ,  $p<.01$ ), universalism ( $\beta=-.119$ ,  $p<.05$ ), age ( $\beta=-.110$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and gender ( $\beta=-.103$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The model was statistically significant ( $R^2=.23$ ,  $F(13)=8.01$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and explained 23% of the variance in psychopathy.

## Discussion and conclusion

In this research, we wanted to investigate what motivates the Dark Triad personality traits by looking at their value systems. Based on previous findings, we hypothesized that power, achievement and hedonism would be positive predictors, while benevolence and universalism would be negative predictors of the Dark Triad traits. Our hypothesis was partly confirmed and our results were in line with previous findings. Power was found to be the common predictor of all Dark Triad traits, especially of narcissism. Negative benevolence was the common predictor of psychopathy and machiavellianism, while negative universalism predicted psychopathy only. Achievement predicted narcissism only. Hedonism did not predict any of the three, nor did other basic human values. Also, gender and age were found to be the common predictors of all Dark Triad traits, with the traits being more prominent in males and younger population. Gender differences were consistent with previous research (Jonason & Webster, 2010; Kajonius et al., 2015; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). More research is needed with regards to age and education, since the majority of the participants in our study belonged to a younger and educated population.

What seemed to be crucial for differentiating the behavior and interpersonal relationships of each Dark Triad trait was the combination of power with other basic human values that predicted them. Narcissism was predicted by power and achievement, but not by negative benevolence and universalism. Although pursuing power as a value may harm others and may have negative consequences on social relations, it should not be seen solely in a negative light, since pursuing power can contribute to motivating people to work for group interests and become leaders, and all societies are based on such a hierarchy (Schwartz, 2012). People with high scores on narcissism would try to gain high social status, success and control over the group, but not necessarily by harming the group, since it is perceived as a valuable resource for them and a source of obtaining approval and admiration (Jonason et al., 2015). Narcissism, although selfish in nature, was previously found to be less antisocial than the other two traits, and linked with values oriented towards social goals (Jonason et al., 2018).

However, psychopathy and machiavellianism were predicted by power and negative benevolence, as well as negative universalism in the case of psychopathy, which means not only that they are pursuing self-promotion and dominance over others, but they are also not concerned about the welfare of people close to them, and the welfare of the broader society in the case of psychopathy. Individuals who

score high on psychopathy are motivated by pure antagonism, lack of respect towards rules, social norms and other people in general (Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2018). Jonason and colleagues also found that psychopathy, and machiavellianism to a lesser degree, were linked with general disregard for existence and normative values (Jonason et al., 2018). It could be said that psychopathy is the “darkest” of the three Dark Triad traits in the context of interpersonal relations and society in general.

Kajonius and colleagues also found that individuals that score high on the Dark Triad traits hold values that enhance themselves and exclude others, and suggested that they have a so-called “dark values” system, characterized by self-enhancing values and opposing self-transcending values (Kajonius et al., 2015). The “dark values” entail manipulation of others as a way to fulfil personal interests. Kajonius and colleagues argued that “dark” personalities do not have some hidden evil inside them, rather they have a value system that is focused on selfish outcomes and differs from most people’s value systems that are focused on pro-social goals.

Although our study made a contribution to the growing, but still limited, field of research and was the first one conducted in Serbian language, it had certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small. The data was collected online and demographic distribution was unequal, which could limit the generalizability of our results. Correlation and regression coefficients, although significant, were not very high. This may be attributed to the fact that shortened versions of instruments were used with a significant reduction in the number of items, which might not have caught all aspects of the Dark Triad and the basic human values. We would recommend the use of original instruments in future research. More research in this field could provide a deeper insight into the motivation and behavior of the Dark Triad traits, which could be used to prevent undesirable or antisocial behavior through education, policy-making and therapy.

## References

- Furnham, A., Richards, S. C., & Paulhus, D. L. (2013). The Dark Triad of Personality: A 10 Year Review. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 7/3, 199-216.
- Glenn, A. L., & Sellbom, M. (2015). Theoretical and empirical concerns regarding the dark triad as a construct. *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 29, 360-377.
- Jonason, P. K., Foster, J. D., Kavanagh, P. S., Gouveia, V. V., & Birkás, B. (2018). Basic Values and the Dark Triad Traits. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 39(4), 220-228.
- Jonason, P. K., Strosser, G. L., Kroll, C. H., Duineveld, J. J., & Baruffi, S. A. (2015). Valuing myself over others: The Dark Triad traits and moral and social values. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 81, 102-106.
- Jonason, P. K., & Webster, G. D. (2010). The Dirty Dozen: A Concise Measure of the Dark Triad. *Psychological Assessment*, 22(2), 420-432.

- Kajonius, P. J., Persson, B. N., & Jonason, P. K. (2015). Hedonism, Achievement, and Power: Universal values that characterize the Dark Triad. *Personality and Individual Differences, 77*, 173-178.
- Knafo, A., Roccas, S., & Sagiv, L. (2011). The Value of Values in Cross-Cultural Research: A Special Issue in Honor of Shalom Schwartz. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 42*(2), 178–185.
- Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality, 36*, 556-563.
- Roccas, S., Sagiv, L., Schwartz, S. H., & Knafo, A. (2002). The Big Five Personality Factors and Personal Values. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*(6), 789-801.
- Rogoza, R., & Ciecuch, J. (2018). Dark Triad traits and their structure: An empirical approach. *Current Psychology, 39*, 1287-1302.
- Schwartz, S. H. (2002). A Proposal for Measuring Value Orientations Across Nations. In Questionnaire Development Package of the European Social Survey. Retrieved from [http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/core\\_ess\\_questionnaire/ESS\\_core\\_questionnaire\\_human\\_values.pdf](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/core_ess_questionnaire/ESS_core_questionnaire_human_values.pdf)
- Schwartz, S. H. (2012). An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2*(1).