

Psychology 100 Lab: The Dark Triad Personality Traits

The concept of “The Dark Triad” in personality research was introduced by psychologists Delroy Paulhus and Kevin Williams in a 2002 article in the *Journal of Research in Personality*. They identified three personality traits (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy) that figure prominently in the personalities of individuals who cause a lot of trouble for other people. In its most extreme form, the Dark Triad traits can be the calling card for individuals who show a lifetime pattern of criminal activity. In a less dramatic way, Dark Triad people also cause trouble for those individuals unlucky enough to get involved with them as romantic partners or as business associates.

Dark Triad individuals usually have an unrealistically high opinion of themselves (narcissism) and become angry when others do not share this opinion. They can also be manipulative in getting what they want (Machiavellianism), and they may behave impulsively and show no remorse when they hurt others (psychopathy).

Recently, the “Dark Triad” has been expanded to include the new trait of *Sadism*, and it is now sometimes referred to as “The Dark Tetrad.” Although this is an interesting development, this term we will only be working with the three original Dark Triad traits.

There have been several different questionnaire measures of Dark Triad personality traits, notably the “Dirty Dozen” measure developed by two friends of mine, Peter Jonason and Greg Webster in 2010. However, a measure developed by Paulhus & Daniel Jones has become the most popular measure, and it is the one that we will use in the lab for this course.

Instructions for Collecting Data:

1. Go to the following web address: <https://openpsychometrics.org/tests/SD3/>
2. Fill out the Dark Triad Personality Test. Please note that your answers will be recorded and possibly used for research and/or otherwise distributed in an anonymous fashion.
3. Examine the results of the test. Write down your scores and the percentile that you got for each trait.

Instructions for Writing the Lab Report:

I want you to write an essay describing your Dark Triad Scores and your reactions to them. Be sure you write the report in the form of an essay. Use complete, grammatically correct sentences; do *not* just use bullet points. In your essay, be sure to address the following points:

- 1) Report your scores and summarize the pattern of your results. Which trait did you score highest on? Which one was your lowest score? If you scored above the 50th percentile on all three traits, you have clear Dark Triad tendencies. The higher the percentile, the stronger the tendency.
- 2) Were you surprised by the results? Were your scores higher (or lower) than you expected? Were you pleased or distressed by your scores? Did you feel as if the test was accurate, or do you think it totally misrepresented your personality?

- 3) Some writers and researchers have suggested that having a Dark Triad Personality may not be all bad. In fact, being able to get what you want and having high self-esteem may be good as long as you do not harm others. In other words, might it be necessary to be at least a little “Dark Triady” in order to get ahead in the world? Reflect on this and explore your own opinion about how good or bad it is to score high on Dark Triad traits.
- 4) Have you ever had a friend, co-worker, or romantic partner that in hindsight you now believe to have been a Dark Triad individual? If so, please provide an example or two of things they did to make you feel this way.
- 5) Speculate about which occupations probably attract the highest concentration of Dark Triad individuals, and which ones have the lowest concentration of Dark Triad personalities. Explain why you made these choices.

References:

- Jonason, P. K., & Webster, G. D. (2010). The Dirty Dozen: A Concise Measure of the Dark Triad. *Psychological Assessment, 22*, 420-432.
- Jones, D.N., & Paulhus, D.L. (2014). Introducing the Short Dark Triad (SD3): A brief measure of dark personality traits. *Assessment, 21*, 28-41.
- Paulhus, D.L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality, 36*, 556=568.