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## EXPANDING THE NOMOLOGICAL NETWORK OF DARK TETRAD: THE CASE OF CYNICISM, AGGRESSIVE HUMOR AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS\*

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*The space of immoral, deceitful and antisocial personality dispositions has been usually depicted by the Dark Triad concept, consisted of psychopathy, Machiavellianism and narcissism. Recently, a trait of sadism (enjoyment in pain of others) has been added into the concept, thus forming the Dark Tetrad. In the present research, we tried to expand the nomological network of dark traits by exploring their relations with cynicism, aggressive humor and attitudes towards immigrants (operationalized as realistic and symbolic threat). The research has been conducted on a community sample (N=341) via online study. Study results showed that all of the criteria variables have been successfully predicted by the Dark Tetrad traits, however, the percentages of explained variance largely differed: R<sup>2</sup>s ranged from .11 (for symbolic threat) to .38 (for aggressive humor). Factor analysis showed that aggressive humor and cynicism can be largely viewed as expressions of the dark personality traits, while negative attitudes towards immigrants can be best conceptualized as a correlate of the Dark Tetrad. Research findings provided deeper insight into the*

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*motivational basis for cynicism and aggressive humor and revealed  
new possible dispositions for antagonism towards immigrants.*

*KEYWORDS: Dark Tetrad / aggressive humor / cynicism /  
attitudes towards immigrants*

## INTRODUCTION

### The emergence of the Dark Tetrad

Conceptualizing and describing personality dispositions towards immoral, deceitful and antisocial behavior is an important goal of personality psychology. This goal is not only oriented toward providing a more accurate taxonomy of human personality, but to understanding the motivational and emotional basis for such socially-relevant behavioral outcomes like manipulation and criminal behavior. Until fifteen years ago, the key target for personality roots of immoral behavior was psychopathy - a multidimensional concept commonly described by manipulativeness, emotional coldness/callousness, impulsiveness/ irresponsibility and antisocial behavior itself (Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2009). Indeed, psychopathy turned out to be important for understanding various forms of immoral behavior: domestic violence (Swogger, Walsh, & Kosson, 2007) and violence in general (Gretton, Catchpole & Hare 2004), romantic infidelity (Williams, Spidel, & Paulhus, 2005), criminal behavior (Salekin, 2008), etc.

In the last 15 years, researchers attempted to provide a more detailed topography of the dark side of human personality. It resulted in the Dark Triad concept (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002): psychopathy, narcissism (elevated view of self and self-entitlement) and Machiavellianism (manipulation which is rationalized as necessary and justified). The Dark Triad concept made a shift in our understanding of the immoral personality dispositions: it facilitated the research in general population in contrast to specific samples such as convicted individuals or forensic in-patients. Furthermore, it also provided new empirical data regarding dark traits and morally-relevant behavior: Dark Triad traits were shown to be associated, among others, with manipulation in the workplace context (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012), scholastic cheating (Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2010), poaching mates from others (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010), bullying in adults (Baughman, Dearing, Giammarco, & Vernon, 2012).

Finally, the last trait added to dark personality characteristics is subclinical sadism (Paulhus, 2014). Hence, the Dark Triad became Dark Tetrad, a set of traits which represents personality tendencies toward breaking moral and social conventions (Mededović & Petrović, 2015). Sadism is defined as a proneness to feel pleasant emotions while hurting others or watching others in pain. It is similar to

psychopathy, regarding the lack of care for others, but this disposition for experiencing positive emotions when others are hurt, is its differentia specifica compared to remaining dark traits (Međedović, 2016). Sadism was found to positively correlate with internet trolling (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014), hurting others without provocation and no discernible benefits (Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus, 2013), playing violent video games (Greitemeyer, 2015), as well as juvenile delinquency (Chabrol, Van Leeuwen, Rodgers, & Séjourné, 2009). Thus, it can be said that subclinical sadism made additional contributions to the field of the dark personality traits.

### Goals of the present research

Expanding the nomological network of the Dark Tetrad traits remains one of the crucial research goals on this topic. We believe that this refers especially to the behaviors and psychological dispositions which exist in the general population and are expressed in everyday life. In regard to this aim, we have chosen several psychological phenomena which are not direct markers of immoral behavior, but could result in hurting others. Furthermore, we selected phenomena which we believe that are crucially related to sadism trait. The reason for this is that sadism is the newest addition to the dark traits and it is important to distinguish it from the remaining ones, especially psychopathy. The criteria measures we selected are cynicism, aggressive humor and attitudes towards immigrants.

Cynicism represents negative view of human nature, social institutions and certain groups of people (Leung et al., 2002). Furthermore, cynicism has already been linked to some dark traits such as narcissism (Antes, Brown, Murphy, Waples, Mumford, Connelly, & Devenport, 2007) and meanness in interpersonal relations (Chen, Bond, & Cheung, 2006). Aggressive humor is one of the several humor styles, together with affiliative, self-enhancing and self-defeating humor (Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). It is expressed in the usage of sarcasm and put-downs, in order to hurt others through humor. Previous research showed positive correlations between aggressive humor and the Dark Triad, especially with psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Martin, Lastuk, Jeffery, Vernon, & Veselka, 2012; Veselka, Schermer, Martin, & Vernon, 2010). Finally, attitudes towards immigrants are a part of the integrated threat theory which was developed to comprehensively describe negative attitudes and prejudice towards immigrants (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998). Previous studies indicated that all Dark Triad traits correlate positively (and almost with the exact same effect size) with prejudice towards immigrants and perceiving them as a threat to endogenous group (Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009).

Hence, previous research found positive correlations between all of these behavioral dispositions and the Dark Triad traits. However, we do believe that sadism is also important in explaining the variance of these phenomena, so we expect positive correlations between them. Furthermore, the goal of the present research is to establish whether some of the criteria measures are the expressions of the dark traits

themselves, or they are correlates of the Dark Tetrad. We assume that aggressive humor and cynicism are the expressions of the Dark Tetrad, while attitudes towards immigrants are correlates of the dark personality traits. We expect this because attitudes towards immigrants should be more related to ideology than to personality traits.

## METHOD

### Sample and procedure

The research participants were selected via an online study. Google forms were used as a platform for the questionnaire. Participants were recruited via social networks. The final sample consisted of 341 subjects. Mean age of participants was 23.7 years ( $SD=6.89$ ). Majority of participants were females (69%). Most of the participants had finished high school (68.7%). All of the items were marked as mandatory in the online study, so there were no missing answers.

### Measures

We used the Dirty Dozen questionnaire to explore psychopathy ( $M=1.95$ ;  $SD=0.90$ ;  $\alpha=.73$ ), Machiavellianism ( $M=1.98$ ;  $SD=1.02$ ;  $\alpha=.90$ ) and narcissism ( $M=2.61$ ;  $SD=1.02$ ;  $\alpha=.84$ ). Every trait is represented by four items in this inventory.

Sadism was measured by Short Sadistic Impulse Scale (SSIS: O'meara, Davies, & Hammond, 2011). SSIS has 10 items ( $M=1.52$ ;  $SD=0.56$ ;  $\alpha=.81$ ).

Cynicism was measured by the same-labeled scale from the Social Axioms scale (Leung et al., 2002). Cynicism scale has 18 items ( $M=2.85$ ;  $SD=0.72$ ;  $\alpha=.89$ ).

Aggressive humor was explored via the same-labeled scale taken from the Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003). The scale has 8 items ( $M=2.54$ ;  $SD=0.73$ ;  $\alpha=.70$ ).

Finally, attitudes toward immigrants were measured via Realistic threat and Symbolic threat scales, which are a part of integrative threat theory (Stephan et al., 1998). Both scales comprise 7 items. Realistic threat ( $M=2.42$ ;  $SD=0.85$ ;  $\alpha=.79$ ) reflects perceptions of immigrants as a threat to the economic system of the society, including crime, the loss of jobs and the cost of social-service system. The Symbolic threat scale ( $M=2.98$ ;  $SD=0.71$ ;  $\alpha=.70$ ) contains items concerning cultural differences between groups and the fear that immigrants would not function well in a new society because of these differences.

All the administered inventories represent self-report measures with 5 point scales for responding (1 states for "I completely disagree" while 5 marks "I completely agree"). Higher scores on all scales reflect higher level of measured construct.

## RESULTS

### Relations between the administered measures

First we analyzed bivariate correlations between the examined measures. Pearson's coefficient of linear correlation was used as a measure of association. The results of the correlation analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations between the examined measures

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Machiavellianism	/						
2. Psychopathy	.55**	/					
3. Narcissism	.51**	.30**	/				
4. Sadism	.64**	.57**	.42**	/			
5. Cynicism	.39**	.32**	.31**	.42**	/		
6. Aggressive humor	.46**	.53**	.31**	.53**	.36**	/	
7. Realistic threat	.15**	.20**	.04	.22**	.29**	.22**	/
8. Symbolic threat	.15**	.16**	.17**	.19**	.34**	.16**	.58**

Note: \*\* -  $p < .01$

As it can be seen from Table 1, all of the examined measures (except the relation between Realistic threat and Narcissism) are positively correlated. Furthermore, some of the effect sizes are high in magnitude, although it can be noted that associations between attitudes to immigrants and other measures are lower in effect sizes.

### Prediction of the criteria measures by the Dark Tetrad traits

In order to examine the independent contribution of the Dark Tetrad traits to the explanations of criteria variance, we set four regression models. Cynicism, aggressive humor, realistic and symbolic threat are set as criteria variables, while the Dark Tetrad traits were entered as predictors. Participants' sex (males were coded by 0 and females by 1), age and education are also controlled in the regression models. All four regression functions were statistically significant. The contributions of the predictors and the characteristics of the regression functions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Dark Tetrad traits as predictors of cynicism,  
 aggressive humor and attitudes toward immigrants

	Cynicism		Aggressive humor		Realistic threat		Symbolic threat	
	$\beta$	s. e.	$\beta$	s. e.	$\beta$	s. e.	$\beta$	s. e.
Age	.02	.01	.05	.01	-.03	.01	-.05	.01
Sex	-.14**	.08	-.11*	.07	-.08	.10	-.07	.09
Education	-.11*	.05	.01	.04	-.19**	.06	-.13*	.05
Machiavellianism	.14*	.05	.09	.04	.01	.06	-.01	.05
Psychopathy	.08	.05	.31**	.04	.13*	.06	.08	.05
Narcissism	.16**	.04	.08	.04	-.04	.05	.14*	.04
Sadism	.17*	.09	.25**	.08	.10	.11	.05	.10
F(7, 334)	15.49**		28.83**		5.74**		4.08**	
R <sup>2</sup>	.25		.38		.11		.08	

Note: \* -  $p < .05$ ; \*\* -  $p < .01$

Although all four measures are significantly explained by the predictors, percentages of explained variance are ranged from small to large effect sizes. The variance of Aggressive humor was explained to a highest extent, followed by Cynicism, Realistic and Symbolic threat. Cynical individuals tend to be males with lower education and higher Machiavellianism, narcissism and sadism. Participants who express aggressive humor to a higher extent are males with elevated psychopathy and sadism. Individuals with lower education and higher psychopathy have more pronounced scores on Realistic threat scale. Finally, participants who perceive that immigrants represent symbolic threat to their society are less educated and have elevated narcissistic characteristics.

#### Expressions and correlates of the Dark Traits

Finally, we aimed to explore if some of the examined criteria variables can be considered expressions of the dark traits themselves, while others can be viewed as their correlates. In order to obtain such estimation we conducted Principal Component Analysis (PCA) on administered measures. Two components were extracted (using both Guttman-Kaiser and parallel analysis as criteria for the retention of the components) and rotated in oblique position (promax rotation) in order to estimate their correlations. Pattern structure of the extracted components is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Principal Component Analysis of the examined variables

	Dark traits	Threat estimation
Eigenvalue	3.47	1.43
% of explained variance	43.33	17.92
Machiavellianism	.86	
Sadism	.83	
Psychopathy	.76	
Aggressive humor	.71	
Narcissism	.68	
Cynicism	.47	.37
Realistic treat		.89
Symbolic threat		.88

Note: loadings below .30 are not shown in the table

The first extracted component is constituted of all Dark Tetrad traits, Aggressive humor and Cynicism. This is why this component is labeled Dark traits. Realistic and Symbolic threat, together with secondary loading of Cynicism comprise the second component. This is why we labeled it Threat estimation. These two components correlate significantly ( $r=.31$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Current taxonomies of personality dispositions toward immoral and antisocial behavior converged to the four-trait structure named the Dark Tetrad: psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism and sadism (Međedović & Petrović, 2015; Paulhus, 2014). The majority of research regarding the immoral personality dispositions is conducted in the field of antisocial, criminal behavior and delinquency (Gretton et al., 2004; Salekin, 2008), and indeed there are data which confirm the role of Dark Tetrad in antisocial behavior as well (Chabrol et al., 2009; Chabrol, Bouvet, & Goutaudier, 2017). This line of research is certainly very important, both scientifically and practically, however, in the present study, our goal was to expand the nomological network of the Dark Tetrad mainly in phenomena which are more frequent in general population. Our goal was to pay special attention to sadism, since it is the newest member of the Dark Tetrad and consequently there are fewer empirical findings about it. Our predictions were partially confirmed: sadism is quite important for understanding cynicism and aggressive humor, but not for explaining dispositions for negative attitudes towards immigrants. Furthermore, our data showed that cynicism and aggressive humor could be understood as manifestations of the dark traits themselves.

### The sadistic side of cynicism and aggressive humor

Cynicism and aggressive humor have already been connected to the Dark Triad traits empirically: positive associations were found between cynicism and narcissism (Antes et al., 2007), while aggressive humor has been related to Machiavellianism and psychopathy (Martin et al., 2012; Veselka et al., 2010). Present research confirmed these findings. However, the present data revealed even darker side of these concepts. Our results showed that both cynical attitudes toward individuals, institutions and groups and the usage of humor to hurt or put down others are related to sadistic tendencies. These findings show specific motivational process which probably underlies these behaviors: enjoyment in seeing others hurt (Mededović, 2016). Majority of previous research on sadism has been oriented towards sexual sadism in the psychopathological or forensic context (Berner, Berger, & Hill, 2003; Hill, Habermann, Berner, & Briken, 2006). However, it seems that everyday sadism can manifest itself in various activities which are relatively frequent in the general population, such as making negative commentaries about others online (Buckels et al., 2014), online and traditional bullying (van Geel, Goemans, Toprak, & Vedder, 2017). Our data show that we can add cynicism and aggressive forms of humor to these behaviors as well. The data provides further confirmation that sadism is not only expressed by generating physical pain in others but psychological hurt as well. Furthermore, the present findings show that cynicism and aggressive humor are the common expressions of the dark traits: this means that they can be used as behavioral indicators for recognizing the Dark Tetrad traits in everyday interactions.

### Dark traits as a basis for negative attitudes towards immigrants

For many world countries today the questions of immigration represent important social issue. This problem is certainly very complex, but the reactions of domicile inhabitants towards immigrants represent its major aspect. Having this in mind, the research of attitudes towards immigrants has practical benefits beside its scientific merits. We did not expect large effect sizes in the relations between the dark traits and attitudes towards immigrants, since prejudices are more related to social attitudes than to personality traits (Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004).). However, systematic effects are detected. Negative attitudes towards immigrants generally correlate positively to Dark Tetrad traits, however it seems that psychopathy and narcissism are their key predictors. What could be the mediating process between the dark traits and attitudes towards immigrants? It is plausible to assume that general ideological dispositions could mediate this link, especially conservative ideology. Negative attitudes towards immigrants are rooted in conservative views (Duckitt, Bizumic, Krauss, & Heled, 2010; Petrović, 2017). On the other hand, the emerging data confirm that the dark traits are associated with various forms of conservatism (Arvan, 2013), such as traditional religiousness (Mededović & Petrović, 2015) and in-group authoritarianism (Mededović & Petrović,

2016). If we take all of these data in account, a plausible mediation model emerges: it seems that dark personalities acquire conservative attitudes more easily which leads them further in prejudice and antagonism towards immigrants.

It is interesting that psychopathy has the highest predictive power regarding the realistic threat, while narcissism most successfully predicts symbolic threat. It is possible that these two threats elicit different processes in dark personalities. Narcissism is based on entitlement, the feeling of elevated rights compared to other people, in "I deserve more than others" attitude (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). The symbolic threat probably evokes entitlement feelings in narcissists, which results in fear of losing their privileges as members of the dominant group. On the other hand, psychopathy represents "darker", more malignant personality characteristic based on the lack of empathy. Realistic threat, expressed as fear of losing jobs, a threat to economy or having your kids go to school with immigrants is predicted by psychopathy to the highest extent. However, it is unlikely that realistic threat educes fear in psychopaths since one of the psychopathy characteristics is *the lack of fear* (Neumann, Johansson, & Hare, 2013)! So, if immigrants do not frighten psychopaths, what emotional response do they elicit? It is much more likely that psychopathic individuals react with anger and rage towards foreigners, since psychopathy is reliably related to both proactive and reactive aggression (Mededović, 2015). This could partially explain frequent aggressive behavior oriented towards immigrants. Off course, these are only hypothetical explanations of the present findings, and they should be empirically tested in future research.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Present research has several limitations as well. The crucial one is that all measures used in the design are based on self-report methodology. The design would have elevated validity if criteria measures would be operationalized as real behaviors instead of the questionnaires. Future research could measure different kinds of behavioral reactions in dark personalities and explore the potential mediating processes, mainly emotional responses in the context of threat. The present research represents a small but useful insight into the nomological network of the Dark Tetrad traits. Its findings may be used in both ways: to recognize the dark traits through their everyday expressions, and to better understand the behavioral manifestations of the Dark Tetrad. Bearing in mind the detrimental consequences which dark personalities have on others, this is a task certainly worthy of pursuing.

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## ŠIRENJE NOMOLOŠKE MREŽE MRAČNE TETRADE: CINIZAM, AGRESIVNI HUMOR I STAVOVI PREMA IMIGRANTIMA

*Prostor amoralnih, obmanjujućih i antisocijalnih ličnosnih dispozicija obično se opisuje preko koncepta Mračne trijade, koji se sastoji od psihopatije, Makijavelizma i narcizma. U skorije vreme, u ovaj koncept integrisana je crta sadizma (uživanje u patnji drugih), i tako kreirana Mračna tetrada. U ovom istraživanju pokušali smo da proširimo nomološku mrežu mračnih crta istražujući njihove relacije sa cinizmom, agresivnim humorom, i stavovima prema imigrantima (operacionalizovanim kao realistična i simbolična pretnja). Istraživanje je sprovedeno onlajn na uzorku iz zajednice (N=341). Nalazi studije pokazuju da Mračne crte uspešno predviđaju sve kriterijumske varijable, ali se procenti objašnjene varijanse veoma razlikuju: koeficijent determinacije ( $R^2$ ) varirao je od .11 (u slučaju simbolične pretnje) do .38 (u slučaju agresivnog humora). Faktorska analiza pokazala je da agresivni humor i cinizam mogu u velikoj meri biti posmatrani kao ispoljavanja mračnih crta ličnosti, dok negativni stavovi prema imigrantima mogu biti konceptualizovani kao korelati Mračne tetrade. Rezultati istraživanja pružaju dublji uvid u motivacionu osnovu cinizma i agresivnog humora i otkrivaju nove potencijalne dispozicije za antagonizam prema imigrantima.*

*KLJUČNE REČI: Mračna tetrada / agresivni humor / cinizam / stavovi prema imigrantima*