

EDITORIAL

Shedding more light on the dark side of personality

Dark personalities fascinate us. We wonder how it is possible for someone to hurt others without feeling guilt or shame, to manipulate and deceive without concern for the feelings of the victimized person. This fascination became a global phenomenon in the popular culture: there is a vast number of films and TV shows which involve individuals with dark personalities as protagonists. Certainly, this partly generates an interest in dark personality traits: TV shows usually cover the most extreme consequences of dark personality characteristics, like serial or mass murders, or other type of serious crimes. However, most of us have actually had an opportunity to face deceitful and exploitative behaviour followed by egocentricity and diminished empathy in our everyday life: in the workplace context, partner relationships or socializing with people in various occasions. And, indeed, these are more common outcomes of dark personality traits than the ones usually depicted in the popular media content.

The dark side of human personality is often described by traits like psychopathy (Hare & Neumann, 2008), Machiavellianism (Jones & Paulhus, 2009) and narcissism (Cain, Pincus, & Ansell, 2008). These traits are known as the Dark Triad of personality (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). However, psychologists are still trying to depict these personality characteristics in more detail. This has led to the inclusion of the subclinical or everyday sadism (Buckels, Jones, & Paulhus, 2013) in the constellation of the dark personality traits and this broadened taxonomy is labelled as the Dark Tetrad (Međedović & Petrović, 2015; Paulhus, 2014). Of course, the attempts at an even more precise description of the personality's dark side will continue, perhaps to include the markers like Amoralism personality traits (Knežević, 2003) or status-driven risk taking (Visser, Pozzebon, & Reina-Tamayo, 2014).

Historically, the scientific exploration of the dark traits was closely related to the clinical and forensic context. These traits were thought to be inextricably associated with personality disorders and expressed in antisocial and criminal behaviour. However, this view began to change in

the last fifteen years. It has been reliably demonstrated that dark personality traits exist outside clinical and convict samples as well. In fact they have a continuous distribution in the general population (Tran, Bertl, Kossmeier, Pietschnig, Stieger, & Voracek, 2018). I believe this had at least two important consequences for our understanding of this set of traits. First, we learned that the dark side of personality is not present only in some specific types of people, but in all people to a certain extent (yes, even ourselves). An inevitable consequence of this fact is a question of other personality or environmental (especially social) factors which may enhance the levels of dark personality features in individuals or, on the contrary, may decrease them, leaving more space to prosocial behaviour characterized by care, empathy and the concern for social justice. Secondly, it showed the researchers that dark personality characteristics can have more diverse expressions in everyday life, apart from delinquency and criminal behaviour. This resulted in the examination of the relations between the dark personality traits and various outcomes like political leadership (Lilienfeld, Waldman, Landfield, Watts, Rubenzer, & Faschingbauer, 2012), the advancement in corporate environment (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010), the tendency to pursue certain career choices (Falkenbach, Glackin, & McKinley, 2018; Hassall, Boduszek, & Dhingra, 2015; Jonason, Wee, Li, & Jackson, 2014), the workplace behaviour (Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012), etc. This diversity of behavioural outcomes made the picture of dark personality traits more complex, but it helped us to better understand them, which has led to more sophisticated theoretical models of the dark traits as well (e.g. Fowles & Dindo, 2006).

The diversity of dark traits' expressions is clearly visible in the contributions sent to this special issue of *Psihološka istraživanja*. Personality traits may be examined in two basic ways: by exploring their mean levels in a given sample (the variable-centered approach) or by detecting and investigating the taxa of individuals clustered by similar combinations of personality characteristics (the person-centered approach). The second approach is still quite rare in the dark traits research. Dinić, Velimirović and Sadiković applied this approach to examine the existence of personality types produced by the Dark Tetrad traits. They detected two profiles of individuals characterized by the individuals with low and high expression of the dark traits. Since there were no qualitative differences between the profiles, Dinić et al. conclude that the variable-centred approach may be more appropriate in the context of the dark traits, but interesting questions still remain, especially regarding the role of the trait sadism in the dark traits' taxa and the existence of different profiles in specific populations (like forensic or clinical populations).

Hanzec Marković, Vujinović Malivuk, and Wertag were focused on the narcissism trait in their current study. Their goal was to further distinguish grandiose and vulnerable narcissism as two qualitatively different forms of narcissistic traits, this time in the context of their associations with personal

distress and wellbeing in young adults. The research has a developmental aspect as well, since the authors examined the role of risky family environment (defined primarily as harsh parenting) in childhood in the above-mentioned associations. Hanzec Marković et al. found that both forms of narcissism were related to harsh family conditions but only vulnerable narcissism was associated with higher distress and lower wellbeing. Hence, vulnerable narcissism could emerge as a mostly maladaptive reaction to stressful environment in childhood, and it may contribute to diminished psychological health of individuals who grew in a harsh environment.

As I stated before, the topic of examining the dark traits in corporate and workplace environment has become especially prominent in the dark traits literature. Dostanić and Gojković examined the associations between the Dark Triad traits and various forms of employee commitment in the organizational context. They found detrimental relations between psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and employee commitment, especially the forms of commitment towards colleagues and the organization itself. However, the results showed that the narcissism trait may enhance commitment in the cases where personal and organizational objectives coincide. Hence, the data of Dostanić and Gojković further demonstrate the difference between narcissism and other dark traits which was noticed in previous research as well – narcissism may be the least dark of all the malevolent personality traits.

Pavlić and Međedović had a similar research topic: they explored the role of psychopathy in predicting various forms of workplace success indicators. However, they were oriented towards the adaptive characteristics of psychopathy and thus hypothesized that this set of traits may positively contribute to the workplace success. They indeed found positive relations between psychopathic characteristics, monthly salary, the received bonus for workplace performance, and the self-reported workplace competence; furthermore, psychopathy was more expressed in the group of managers compared to lower level workers. The findings of Pavlić and Međedović confirm the adaptive potentials of psychopathy, which may lead psychopathic individuals to corporate success and enhance their social and economic status. The authors warn of potential dangers these findings suggest because psychopathic individuals may produce more harm if they are situated in higher positions in society.

Sučić, Wertag, and Juničić tried to further explore the question of the way in which dark personalities perceive other individuals. Namely, previous findings have suggested that individuals with high levels of dark features tend to hold a specific bias in evaluating the characteristics of others – they tend to see more negative features in other people. This is important because such attribution may serve as a rationale in the process of manipulating or hurting others. Indeed, in the present research, Sučić et al. obtained positive associations between narcissism, Machiavellianism and seeing others as

criminals, thus confirming the negative attribution bias in the individuals with these traits.

Petrović tackled a sensitive question of great societal importance – the attitudes towards immigrants. This is an important ideological, political and security question which is imposed on many countries, including Serbia. Hence, any policy regarding this issue must take into account the attitudes of domicile citizens towards immigrants, together with their psychological correlates and determinants. The work of Petrović as shown that dark personalities (especially the individuals with highly expressed narcissism and sadism) hold negative views against immigrants and that these views are mediated by the so-called Binding Moral Foundations, namely, loyalty towards someone's group, respect for authority, and highly valuing the purity or sanctity of body and soul. Besides the potential practical implications, this research provided another criticism of the Moral Foundations Theory as the unifying framework of human morality.

Sokić and Ljubin Golub expanded the nomological network of psychopathy by focusing on the trait of Boldness which has some unusual features. Namely, it is a trait without almost any immoral features, but instead it has some adaptive characteristics: resilience, self-confidence, social assurance, to name a few. The content of this trait made some researchers suggest that Boldness may not be the core psychopathic trait at all. Sokić and Ljubin Golub explored the associations between boldness and both adaptive and maladaptive features. They found the expected positive associations between Boldness, low personal distress, and low non-planning impulsivity; however, the maladaptive characteristics of this psychopathy trait were revealed as well – higher motor impulsivity and elevated proactive aggression.

Finally, Cupać, Mijatović, Micić, Pavlović and Stekić proposed a new self-report inventory for measuring psychopathy. This question is still very important because psychopathy is a multidimensional trait, while at the same time there is a lack of consensus between researchers regarding the content of this trait. Cupać et al. started from a large number of potential psychopathy markers and via two studies reduced them to forty indicators which measure six psychopathy facets. They show the validity of the extracted traits by demonstrating the expected associations between new psychopathy scales, the existing psychopathy inventories, the measures of Machiavellianism, and general personality. Hence, they provided a short but comprehensive measure of psychopathy, which may be of help to both researchers and practitioners interested in the assessment of psychopathy.

In sum, the manuscripts published in this special issue cover a variety of conceptually and practically important topics. The research described in them is based on sound methodology, primarily regarding the statistical power and the metric characteristics of the applied measures. This is why I believe that

the papers published in this special volume will significantly contribute to the field and shed some more light on the shady space of human personality.

On behalf of the *Psihološka istraživanja* Editorial board, I would like to thank our contributors for sending their well-written proposals. I would also like to express gratitude to our colleagues who reviewed these manuscripts, because we would not be able to publish this special issue without their contribution.

Unfortunately, one of our contributors, Boban Petrović, will not be able to see this special issue published. He had passed away suddenly several months before we completed this volume. Boban was a passionate and dedicated researcher who spent a great deal of his scientific career to the investigation of the dark and immoral part of human nature. In fact, his research was not constrained to the darkness in human personality: he was especially interested in the interaction between individual characteristics and wider social factors, like nationalism, conservatism, and inter-group antagonism in producing detrimental societal outcomes. His profound care for the questions of social justice and egalitarian social practices was reflected in his psychological practice as well – for many years Boban worked in the Serbian Association for Promoting Inclusion, where he helped individuals with intellectual disabilities to achieve a higher quality of life. Besides all these things, he was my best friend. With great sorrow in my heart, I dedicate this special issue to him.

*In Belgrade,
29/05/2019*

Janko Međedović

References

- Babiak, P., Neumann, C. S., & Hare, R. D. (2010). Corporate psychopathy: Talking the walk. *Behavioral sciences & the law*, 28(2), 174-193. doi:10.1002/bsl.925
- 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%2F0956797613490749>
- Cain, N. M., Pincus, A. L., & Ansell, E. B. (2008). Narcissism at the crossroads: Phenotypic description of pathological narcissism across clinical theory, social/personality psychology, and psychiatric diagnosis. *Clinical psychology review*, 28(4), 638-656. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.09.006>
- Falkenbach, D. M., Glackin, E., & McKinley, S. (2018). Twigs on the same branch? Identifying personality profiles in police officers using psychopathic personality traits. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 76, 102-112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2018.08.002>

- Forsyth, D. R., Banks, G. C., & McDaniel, M. A. (2012). A meta-analysis of the Dark Triad and work behavior: a social exchange perspective. *Journal of applied psychology, 97*(3), 557-579. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0025679>
- Fowles, D. C., & Dindo, L. (2006). A dual deficit model of psychopathy. In C. J. Patrick (Ed.), *Handbook of psychopathy* (pp. 14–34). New York: Guilford Press.
- 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. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12018>
- Jones, D. N., & Paulhus, D. L. (2009). Machiavellianism. In M. R. Leary & R. H. Hoyle (Eds.), *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior* (pp. 93-108). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Hare, R. D., & Neumann, C. S. (2008). Psychopathy as a clinical and empirical construct. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 4*, 217-246. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.3.022806.091452>
- Hassall, J., Boduszek, D., & Dhingra, K. (2015). Psychopathic traits of business and psychology students and their relationship to academic success. *Personality and Individual Differences, 82*, 227-231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.03.017>
- Jonason, P. K., Wee, S., Li, N. P., & Jackson, C. (2014). Occupational niches and the Dark Triad traits. *Personality and Individual Differences, 69*, 119-123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.05.024>
- Knežević, G. (2003). *Koreni amoralnosti [The roots of amorality]*. Beograd: Institut za kriminološka i sociološka istraživanja, Institut za psihologiju.
- Lilienfeld, S. O., Waldman, I. D., Landfield, K., Watts, A. L., Rubenzer, S., & Fashingbauer, T. R. (2012). Fearless dominance and the US presidency: Implications of psychopathic personality traits for successful and unsuccessful political leadership. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 103*(3), 489-505. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0029392>
- Mededović, J., & Petrović, B. (2015). The dark tetrad: Structural properties and location in the personality space. *Journal of Individual Differences, 36*, 228–236. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000179>
- Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Toward a taxonomy of dark personalities. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*(6), 421-426. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0963721414547737>
- Tran, U. S., Bertl, B., Kossmeier, M., Pietschnig, J., Stieger, S., & Voracek, M. (2018). “I’ll teach you differences”: Taxometric analysis of the Dark Triad, trait sadism, and the Dark Core of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences, 126*, 19-24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.01.015>
- Visser, B. A., Pozzebon, J. A., & Reina-Tamayo, A. M. (2014). Status-driven risk taking: Another “dark” personality? *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science/Revue canadienne des sciences du comportement, 46*(4), 485-496. doi:10.1037/a0034163