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Identifying the Prevalence of the “Dark Triad” Personality Traits in Law Students:  
Eradicating an Unwarranted Stereotype

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London, Ontario, CANADA  
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### **Abstract**

The personalities of lawyers are often categorized to be immoral, at least more so than those of other professionals. An abundance of literature parallels this generalization and depicts lawyers’ personalities as narcissistic, psychopathic and high in Machiavellian attitudes. Together, these three traits form the “Dark Triad” of personality. 53 law students from 3 law schools in Ontario completed a survey measuring their levels on the “Dark Triad” traits. Furthermore, each participant revealed their gender, year of study, and the field of law they aspired to enter. Results show that the law students from the present sample do not display any “Dark Triad” trait significantly greater than the general population. Furthermore, it found that male law students were not significantly “darker” than female law students, on average. However, 1<sup>st</sup> year law students were found to score significantly higher on the narcissism trait than both second and third-year students. There were no other significant differences between the students in different years of schooling. Lastly, those wishing to enter criminal law scored significantly higher on the Machiavellianism trait than those wishing to enter tax law. No other fields of law differed significantly on any of the three traits. These findings suggest that law students, and perhaps lawyers themselves, are not deserving of the pejorative stereotype assigned to them. Furthermore, it suggests that male law students are no more responsible for the assigned stereotype than females. Next, the present research implies that law school, or perhaps the aging process, may actually serve to reduce the narcissism trait suggested to be present in law students. Finally, the research proposes that those aspiring to enter criminal law may be more responsible for the assigned stereotype whereas those aspiring to enter tax law experience the most apparent wrongful stereotyping.

### **Identifying the Prevalence of the “Dark Triad” Personality Traits in Law Students: Eradicating an Unwarranted Stereotype**

There exists a view in popular culture that lawyers and law students display immoral and “dark” personality traits as a general entity. Friedman (1989) highlights the abundance of jokes regarding lawyers, few of which placed them in a favourable light. Friedman goes on to claim that the most common impression held by the layperson regarding the generic lawyer is that they come across as vile, obsessed with money and callous. A further impediment to the perceptions of lawyers exists because the ordinary person only interacts with a lawyer in times of serious trouble (Friedman, 1989). The depiction of lawyers in mass media contributes to the negative stereotype of lawyers. Friedman specifically exemplifies the television show “L.A. Law” as a reflection of the real changes in the personalities of lawyers, specifically business lawyers. The show depicts lawyers as loud and flamboyant, and as those who displayed these traits proudly before the public (Friedman, 1989). In contrast, Friedman describes the “gentlemanly” lawyers as those who keep low profiles, he specifically mentions the disdain held by the latter regarding the former. The present research question becomes clear with the seminal quote presented by Friedman, “The Bar (the society of lawyers) worries about ‘professionalism’” (p. 1602), or as implied by Friedman’s tone, the lack thereof. Clearly, if the presiding entity representing lawyers is worried about the impression given off by its constituents, the measurement of whether these traits actually exist, or are instead born from a stereotyped view of the public, is worthy of investigation. Furthermore, if such a problem is found to exist, does the root of the problem lay in the profession itself, the people it attracts, or the schools who teach the curriculum? If the stereotype is found to be substantiated, there appears to be a requisite overhaul of the lawyer profession, however, if the views are found to be significantly exaggerated, there instead requires an overhaul of the perception of lawyers. Regardless of the answer to the aforementioned

question, the root cause of the issue, whether accurately substantiated or unfairly stereotyped, needs to be addressed. This paper starts from square-one; does the problem exist at the law school level?

### **Sub-Clinical Psychopathy in Lawyers**

Psychopathy can be defined as a cluster of personality traits and socially deviant behaviours: “a glib and superficial charm; egocentricity; selfishness; lack of empathy, guilt and remorse; deceitfulness and manipulateness; lack of enduring attachments to people, principles or goals; impulsive and irresponsible behaviour; and a tendency to violate explicit social norms” (Hare & Hart, 1993, p. 34) The literature discusses several law student and lawyer personality traits that seemingly fall along the continuum of sub-clinical psychopathy’s definition. However, the general ambivalence regarding its applicability to law students epitomizes the research question under consideration, (viz.) whether the views are warranted or instead stereotyped unnecessarily.

In a study conducted to build a body of knowledge on the experiences of the interviewer, Smigel (1958) found that there was significant use of “persuasive charm” among elite lawyers during cross-examination. Bohn (1971) identified that pre-law students are more arrogant and egotistical than others. Elwork and Benjamin (1995) believed that the adversarial legal systems in which lawyers work causes them to suspect others of ulterior motives and that this environment encourages secretiveness, manipulateness and selfishness.

In contrast, Daicoff (1997) reported that law students acted quite extroverted and sociable and that they lacked anxiety and insecurity. She also mentioned their ebullience and comfort within interpersonal relationships, all seemingly non-psychopathic behaviours. Further evidence against the sub-clinical psychopathy stereotype exists in Daicoff’s paper, she polled law students

specifically on the question of whether they expected their peers to be aggressive and competitive. Unsurprisingly, she found that most students expected to find moderate-to-high levels of aggression and competition, the reported findings however revealed the opposite, competitiveness and aggression were found to be much lower than peer expectations. Clearly, certain categorizations are held even within the student population regarding one another.

Although the literature reports findings of law student and lawyer personalities synonymous with the definition for sub-clinical psychopathy, there exists further research defining them with traits incompatible with this definition. In compliance with the notion that certain research holds pre-determined hypotheses and a general stereotype regarding law students and lawyers in general, it is hypothesized that law students would not score significantly greater on measures of sub-clinical psychopathy than the general population.

H1: Law students will display non-significant differences in their levels of sub-clinical psychopathy when compared to the general population.

### **Sub-Clinical Narcissism in Lawyers**

Similarly to psychopathy, sub-clinical narcissism, as it is defined in the literature, has both proponents and dissenters regarding its applicability as a trait pertaining to lawyers and law students. The DSM-IV-TR (2000) defines the narcissistic personality type as someone who displays a pattern of grandiosity, the need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Grandiosity refers to the extent to which one views themselves as superior to others and Raskin and Terry (1988) found that grandiose-narcissistic individuals’ personalities correlate strongly with the need for achievement and high levels of competitiveness.

As mentioned earlier, one of Daicoff’s (1997) main findings was that lawyers were more competitive and achievement oriented than the general population. This suggests that lawyers are more grandiose than the general population, and in turn, may be more narcissistic. In direct contrast, Daicoff found that the competitiveness of law students is much lower than what students assumed it would be regarding one another. The competitiveness levels of law students are clearly one for debate, as are its relation to the levels of narcissism within the profession.

Daicoff (1997) suggested that lawyers seek leadership and dominance roles but that these are not necessarily for the need to maintain power over others. Instead, Daicoff opined that these traits reflect a need for the admiration of others. If, as Daicoff suggests, lawyers are leading and dominating others for the purpose of seeking the admiration of others, it would appear that lawyers display certain levels of the need for admiration trait, this may imply a higher level of narcissism.

Barbara Nachmann (1960) completed a longitudinal study looking at the early childhood of current lawyers, she found that emotions and concern for others’ feelings were de-emphasized in early childhood more than other types of careers. This suggests that lawyers may show a lack of empathy over and above those in different career fields, promoting the idea that lawyers may therefore be more narcissistic than others. However, Rhode (1999) disagrees with this idea and highlights the growing number of attorneys over the past decade who have volunteered their time to poverty law programs.

Although the literature reports findings of law student and lawyer personalities synonymous with the definition for sub-clinical narcissism, there exists research defining them with traits incompatible with the definition as well. In compliance with the notion that certain

research holds pre-determined hypotheses and a general stereotype regarding law students and lawyers in general, it is hypothesized that law students would not score significantly greater on measures of sub-clinical narcissism than the general population

H2: Law students will display non-significant differences in their levels of sub-clinical narcissism when compared to the general population.

### **Machiavellian Attitudes in Lawyers**

The literature search for Machiavellian attitudes in law students and lawyers proved to be even more wavering than those for sub-clinical psychopathy and narcissism. Zettler and Solga (2013) classified Machiavellianism as an umbrella term for thoughts and actions that correlate with self-interest, manipulation, ruthlessness, and as a general term for self-centered action that is suggested to be effective. Within their study, Dahling, Whitaker and Levy (2009) gave a comprehensive analysis of the four aspects of Machiavellianism, namely that it comprised of a distrust of others, a desire for status, a desire for control, and the willingness to engage in the amoral manipulation of others.

In a study of first-year law students, Katz and Denbeaux (1976) employed the use of a cynicism test to measure the personalities of law students by having them complete the “Trust in People Scale.” In contrast to expected results, it was shown that first-year law students had higher levels of trust than the general population (Katz & Denbeaux, 1976). It was suggested by Daicoff (1997) however, that these results may be prejudiced by the fact that the students were tested during their first week of law school and that they were relatively young, she suggested that these traits change as one progresses through law school. The caveat of testing this trait during different time periods within law school appears necessary.



Daicoff (1997) measured the motives of those who enter the legal profession and found that one of the strongest reasons for entering the field was the need to have a status occupation. This suggests that lawyers may display higher levels of the desire for status trait when compared to the general population, and that this may predict higher levels of Machiavellianism in law students. In contrast, Daicoff reported that law students are hugely ambivalent in respect to their occupational future and that up to 50% of law students in the sample reported uncertain career goals as their distinct motive for entering law school. In fact, Daicoff found that in terms of ranking, interest in the subject matter, a desire for being trained professionally and the want for intellectual stimulation all superseded money and prestige in determining the decision to attend law school. The various aforementioned reasons for wanting to enter law school, although not mutually exclusive, seem to put into disrepute the notion that status is overwhelmingly important in law students’ minds.

Daicoff goes on to mention that several traits commonly present in lawyers suggest the presence of a need for control among lawyers. She elaborated by mentioning that lawyers display a need for dominance, leadership, the attention of others, and achievement (Daicoff, 1997). She also concluded that lawyers’ authoritarianism, competitiveness and preference for active, initiative-taking behaviour demonstrates a need for control in their lives (Daicoff, 1997). Furthermore, the shown preference of lawyers for judging others reflects a preference for certainty and closure which may predict a preference for control (Daicoff, 1997). The evidence proposing that lawyers desire control suggests that they may display this trait more often than the general population and in turn may have a greater propensity for Machiavellianism.

Elwork and Benjamin (1995) stated that the adversarial legal system in which lawyers work causes paranoia, which in turn causes them to suspect others of ulterior motives and results

in the encouragement of manipulative behaviour. Brewer (2005) mentioned both the ethical and unethical employment of manipulation by attorneys in the courtroom to their advantage. The idea that the use of manipulation by lawyers is both encouraged in their employment setting and potentially advantageous suggests that lawyers may in fact display the willingness to engage in manipulation over and above the general population. This may display a greater prevalence of Machiavellianism in attorneys. However, Daicoff (1997) found that law students were in fact more trustworthy than the average adult sampled and were “no more Machiavellian than a sample of college undergraduates” (p. 1370). Daicoff concluded from her findings that “law students are not deserving of the pejorative stereotype assigned to them” (p. 1370).

Although the literature reports findings of law student and lawyer personalities synonymous with the definition for Machiavellian attitudes, one of the influential authors presenting these facts admits the lack of Machiavellianism in the sample population when compared to others. Among other findings of traits incompatible with Machiavellianism in the law student and lawyer population, it appears that the underlying stereotype has reared its head once again. Therefore, it is hypothesized that law students would not score significantly greater on measures of Machiavellian attitudes than the general population

H3: Law students will display non-significant differences in their levels of Machiavellian attitudes when compared to the general population.

### **The “Dark Triad” of Personality Traits**

Paulhus (2002) studied the three personality traits of psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellian attitudes and concluded that they represent the “Dark Triad” of personality. In his study comparing the relationship between the three constructs, Paulhus determined that each was overlapping but distinct from one another. All three of the traits entailed a socially malevolent

character with self-promoting, emotionally cold, deceitful and aggressive behaviours (Paulhus, 2002). Norms for each of the three traits were established based on a sample of 387 undergraduate students, (viz.) Machiavellianism ( $M = 3.1$ ), narcissism ( $M = 2.8$ ), and psychopathy ( $M = 2.4$ ; Paulhus & Jones, 2013). Although reliable and valid measures exist to individually measure each of the three traits, such as Raskin and Hall’s (1979) Narcissistic Personality Inventory, Christie and Geis’ (1970) Mach-IV , and Hare’s (1985) Self-Report Psychopathy, Paulhus and Jones (2013) constructed a shorter measure termed the Short Dark Triad (SD3) to validly and reliably measure each of the three “dark” traits at once. It is hypothesized that due to the aforementioned biases in reporting sub-clinical narcissism, sub-clinical psychopathy, and Machiavellianism traits in the law student population, that law students in general will display levels of the “Dark Triad” no greater than those in the general population.

H4: Law students will display levels of the “Dark Triad” of personality to no significant difference than that of the general population.

### **Individual Differences**

The personalities of lawyers and law students are not necessarily constant across each person as there is sure to be a set of individual differences that distinguish between them. Differences in gender, the field of law one is preparing to enter, and one’s current year of law school may act to differentiate the personalities needed for success at their job. It would therefore be useful to obtain this demographic information and compare it across different levels of “Dark Triad” personalities shown by law students.

Firstly, Daicoff (1997) found that men and women reported significant differences in their specified motives for entering law school. She found that males were more likely to cite money as a significant reason whereas women were more likely to cite altruistic reasons for

entering law school. Furthermore, men were found to be more concerned with their perceived status for entering the profession (Daicoff, 1997). For these reasons, the idea that male and female law students may differ in their levels on the “Dark Triad” traits is supported.

Next, in terms of the year of current study in law school (1L vs. 2L vs. 3L), Daicoff (1997) found that cynicism increased and idealism decreased as a result of progressing through law school. This suggests that law school has an active role in changing the personality of the law students and may reflect changes in their personalities as they progress through the three years of schooling. In general, Daicoff found that law school did not cause a change in attitudes in its students, this study seeks to revisit that finding. Lastly, Daicoff reviewed research done by Thielens (1969) who found that law students act more ethically as they progress through law school, but that they decline their ethical behaviour upon graduating. This may suggest that practicing law results in a regression of ethical behaviour.

Finally, Tett, Jackson, and Rothstein (1991) researched the differences in personality types for different jobs. They found that certain personality types will result in a better fit for certain jobs. Additionally, they suggested that some jobs may attract certain personality types more frequently than other positions. In regards to these premises, it is conjectured that different fields within the career of law may attract certain personality types more than others.

In conclusion, past literature states potential personality differences between male and female law students, between lower and upper-year law students, and between those who may look to enter certain fields within law. It is therefore hypothesized that controlling for each of these individual differences may reflect different scores on the “Dark Triad” of personality traits.

H5: Individual differences in gender, the field of law one wishes to enter, and year of law school one is currently in, will affect the “Dark Triad” of personality traits in these aspiring lawyers and result in significant differences in their “Dark Triad” scores.

## Method

### Procedure

Participants were recruited from the Faculties of Law at Western University, Osgoode Hall Law School and The University of Toronto. 53 participants completed the survey, 27 were male and 19 were female. Seven surveys were removed from the study due to significant incompleteness. Although not reported, it is expected that an age range of 22-26 represents the sample population, this mimics the ages of the majority of students currently admitted to each of the above law schools. Participants were recruited by using bulletin board advertisements at the law schools as well as class Facebook group advertisements. Participants completed a single questionnaire individually on their own computers. Participants were compensated for their time by being entered into a draw to win a \$50 gift card, chances of winning were 1/20. The time-frame for data collection was from the middle of January 2015 to the end of February 2015.

### Materials

To determine “Dark Triad” levels, each participant completed the SD3, a 27-item questionnaire consisting of a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*; Paulhus & Jones, 2013). Furthermore, 13 items were added to the SD3 from the Big 5 questionnaire to reduce the effects of participants answering in a socially desirable manner, these items were added in the same 5-point Likert manner as the SD3 (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Next, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire to indicate certain information about them (Appendix A). This demographic questionnaire asked what year they are in, which field of law they wish to enter, and their gender, totaling the entire survey to 43-items. This

demographic measure was designed for the current study so as to gain specific information relevant to the research project.

### **Procedure**

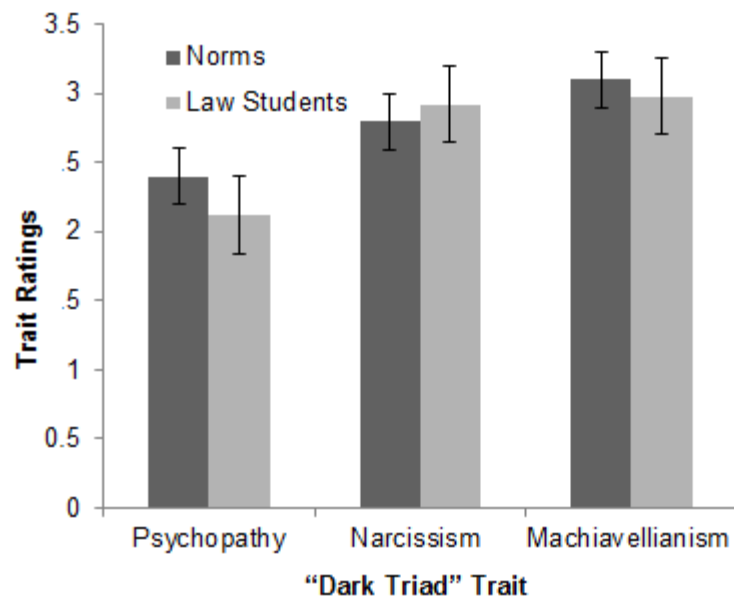
Participants were recruited by posters explaining the study in each of the law school atriums as well as on class Facebook groups. Participants then emailed the indicated email address on the poster and were given the letter of information. Participants implied their consent to participate when they chose to continue on to the survey after reading the letter of information. Next, participants completed the survey, including the SD3, the Big 5 items, and the demographic items at their own location on their own computers. There was no time limit given and participants completed the study in as long as they needed. Following completion of the survey, participant’s email addresses were entered into a draw to win a \$50 gift card with a one in twenty chances of winning. Following completion of the survey, participants were debriefed via a debriefing form attached in an email.

## **Results**

### **Part 1: Comparing Law Students to the General Population**

A single-sample t-test was run to determine whether psychopathy scores in recruited participants were significantly different than the undergraduate population sample’s score of 2.4. Psychopathy scores were normally distributed and there were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. Mean psychopathy scores ( $M = 2.12$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) were lower than the normal psychopathy score of 2.4 as seen in Figure 1, a statistically significant mean difference of 0.28, 95% CI [-0.06 to -0.5],  $t(45) = -2.532$ ,  $p = .015$ . Therefore, contrary to expectations, psychopathy ratings for law students did differ significantly from the general population.

However, in contrast to some of the literature, they were significantly lower than the population norms.



*Figure 1.* Mean ratings across the “Dark Triad” traits in law students compared to the population norms. Error bars represent standard error.



A single-sample t-test was run to determine whether narcissism scores in recruited participants were significantly different than the undergraduate population sample’s score of 2.8. Narcissism scores were normally distributed and there were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. Mean narcissism scores ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) were higher than the normal narcissism score of 2.8 as seen in Figure 1, a statistically non-significant mean difference of 0.12, 95% CI [0.31 to -0.08],  $t(45) = 1.217$ ,  $p = .230$ . Therefore, consistent with expectations, law students did not differ significantly in their narcissism ratings compared to the general population.

A single-sample t-test was run to determine whether Machiavellianism scores in recruited participants were significantly different than the undergraduate population sample’s score of 3.1. Machiavellianism scores were normally distributed and there were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a boxplot. Mean Machiavellianism scores ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) were lower than the normal Machiavellianism score of 3.1 as seen in Figure 1, a statistically non-significant mean difference of 0.12, 95% CI [0.07 to -0.3],  $t(45) = -1.262$ ,  $p = .213$ . Therefore, consistent with expectations, law students did not differ significantly in their Machiavellianism ratings compared to the general population.

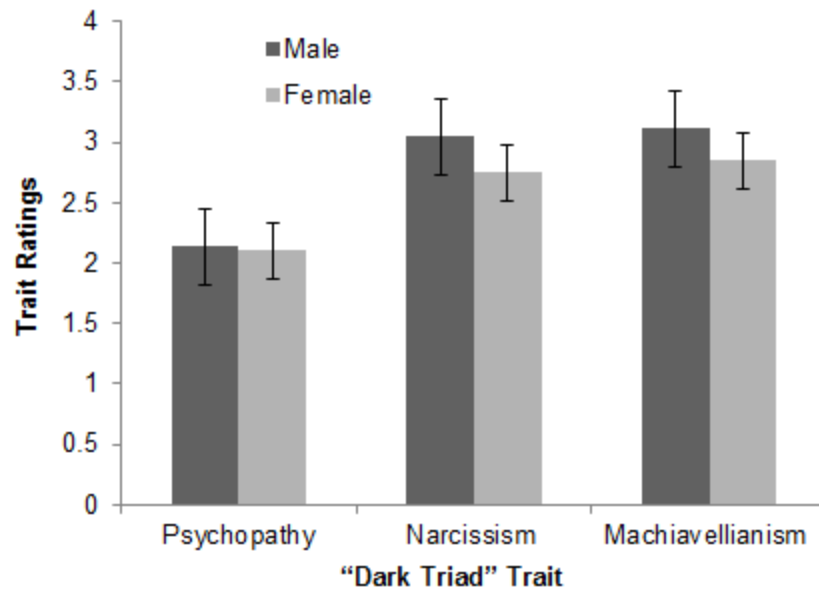
## **Part 2: Comparing Male Law Students to Female Law Students**

This study utilized an independent samples t-test to investigate whether male law students and female law student’s psychopathy levels differed significantly, as measured by psychopathy ratings taken from the SD3. The independent variable measured was gender; the dependent variable measured was psychopathy ratings. The null hypothesis suggests that the two groups will not differ significantly in psychopathy levels; the alternate hypothesis suggests that male law students and female law students will differ significantly in their levels of psychopathy. As

shown in Figure 2, the study found that male law students displayed a non-significant difference of psychopathy ( $M = 2.14$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) compared to female law students ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .84$ ). The null hypothesis for the Levene’s test is that the variances will be equal, the alternate hypothesis is that the variances will be significantly different. Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was not significant; there was an assumption of equal variances, Levene  $F(1, 44) = 0.25$ ,  $p = .620$ ,  $t(44) = .873$ , *ns*. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis that male law students and female law students differ significantly in their levels of psychopathy is not supported.

This study utilized an independent samples t-test to investigate whether male law students and female law student’s narcissism levels differed significantly, as measured by narcissism ratings taken from the SD3. The independent variable measured is gender; the dependent variable measured is narcissism ratings. The null hypothesis suggests that the two groups will not differ significantly in narcissism levels; the alternate hypothesis suggests that male law students and female law students will differ significantly in their levels of narcissism. As shown in Figure 2, the study found that male law students displayed a non-significant difference of narcissism ( $M = 3.05$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) compared to female law students ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = .69$ ). The null hypothesis for the Levene’s test is that the variances will be equal, the alternate hypothesis is that the variances will be significantly different. Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was not significant; there was an assumption of equal variances, Levene  $F(1, 44) = 0.25$ ,  $p = .622$ ,  $t(44) = .118$ , *ns*. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis that male law students and female law students differ significantly in their levels of narcissism is not supported.

This study utilized an independent samples t-test to investigate whether male law students and female law student’s Machiavellianism levels differed significantly, as measured by Machiavellianism ratings taken from the SD3. The independent variable measured is gender; the

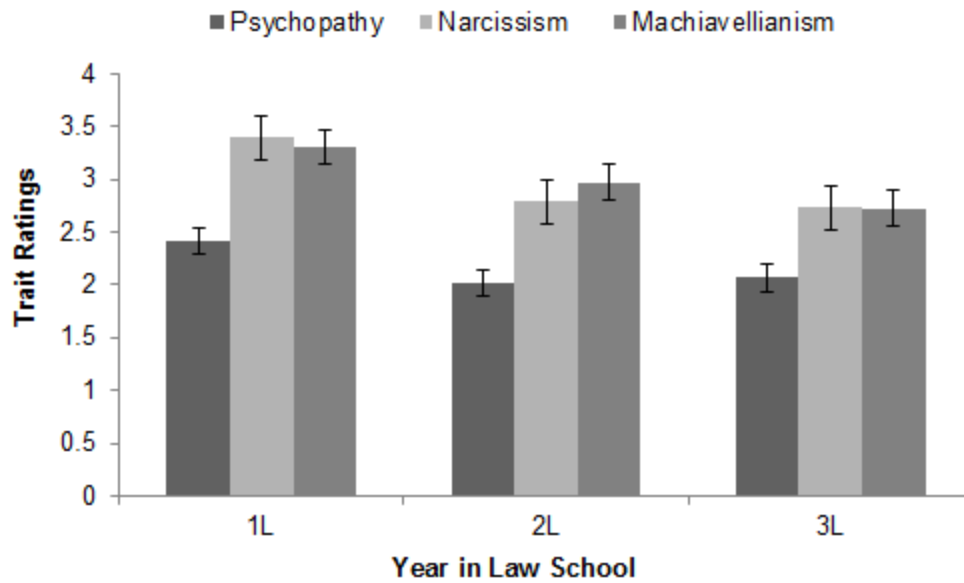


*Figure 2.* Mean ratings across the “Dark Triad” traits in male and female law students. Error bars represent standard error.

dependent variable measured is Machiavellianism ratings. The null hypothesis suggests that the two groups will not differ significantly in Machiavellianism levels; the alternate hypothesis suggests that male law students and female law students will differ significantly in their levels of Machiavellianism. As shown in Figure 2, the study found that male law students displayed a non-significant difference of Machiavellianism ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) compared to female law students ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = .55$ ). The null hypothesis for the Levene’s test is that the variances will be equal, the alternate hypothesis is that the variances will be significantly different. Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was not significant; there was an assumption of equal variances, Levene  $F(1, 44) = 0.001$ ,  $p = .980$ ,  $t(44) = .089$ , *ns*. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis that male law students and female law students differ significantly in their levels of Machiavellianism is not supported.

### **Part 3: Comparing Across Year of Law School**

This study utilized a one-way analysis of variance to investigate the influence of year currently in law school with levels of psychopathy, as measured by comparing the psychopathy levels of first, second, and third-year law students. The procedure was performed to test the hypothesis that the means were not equal to one another ( $H_0: \mu_{2.41} = \mu_{2.01} = \mu_{2.07}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all yearly means are equal). Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was performed to test the hypothesis that the population variances were not all equal ( $H_0: \sigma^2_{0.55} = \sigma^2_{0.53} = \sigma^2_{0.62}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all population variances are equal). Levene’s test was found to be non-significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(2, 43) = 0.67$ , *ns*. Therefore, there is no evidence that the assumptions of ANOVA were violated. As shown in Figure 3, the ANOVA was found to be non-significant, suggesting that none of the group means differed significantly from the others  $F(2, 43) = .330$ , *ns*. Therefore a post-hoc test is not necessary to determine which means differed from



*Figure 3.* Mean ratings across the “Dark Triad” traits in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year law students. Error bars represent standard error.

the others. In conclusion, it can be established that the current year of law school did not affect the groups’ psychopathy ratings.

This study utilized a one-way analysis of variance to investigate the influence of year currently in law school with levels of narcissism, as measured by comparing the narcissism levels of first, second, and third-year law students. The procedure was performed to test the hypothesis that the means were not equal to one another ( $H_0: \mu_{3.38} = \mu_{2.79} = \mu_{2.73}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all yearly means are equal). Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was performed to test the hypothesis that the population variances were not all equal ( $H_0: \sigma^2_{0.45} = \sigma^2_{0.39} = \sigma^2_{0.22}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all population variances are equal). Levene’s test was found to be non-significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(2, 43) = 0.70$ , *ns*. Therefore, there is no evidence that the assumptions of ANOVA were violated. As shown in Figure 3, the ANOVA was found to be significant, suggesting that one or more of the group means differed significantly from the others  $F(2, 43) = .021$ . Therefore a post-hoc test is necessary to determine which means differed from the rest. In conclusion, it can be established that the current year of law school did affect the groups’ narcissism ratings.

The post-hoc Tukey HSD was performed because at least one of the group means was found to differ from the others. Upon analysis, it was found that the 1L group ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SE = 0.202$ ) had narcissism levels significantly more narcissistic than both the 2L group ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SE = 0.125$ ),  $q(2, 43) = .027$ , and the 3L group ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SE = 0.160$ ),  $q(2, 43) = 0.50$ ,  $p = .05$ . In contrast, those in the 2L group ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SE = 0.125$ ) did not differ significantly from the 3L group ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SE = 0.160$ ),  $q(2, 43) = .971$ , *ns*. Therefore, narcissism levels seem to decrease as a law student progresses through law school.

This study utilized a one-way analysis of variance to investigate the influence of year currently in law school with levels of Machiavellianism, as measured by comparing the Machiavellian attitude levels of first, second, and third-year law students. The procedure was performed to test the hypothesis that the means were not equal to one another ( $H_0: \mu_{3.25} = \mu_{2.97} = \mu_{2.72}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all yearly means are equal). Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was performed to test the hypothesis that the population variances were not all equal ( $H_0: \sigma^2_{0.56} = \sigma^2_{0.39} = \sigma^2_{0.15}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all population variances are equal). Levene’s test was found to be non-significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(2, 43) = 0.44$ , *ns*. Therefore, there is no evidence that the assumptions of ANOVA were violated. As shown in Figure 3, the ANOVA was found to be non-significant, suggesting that none of the group means differed significantly from the others  $F(2, 43) = .153$ , *ns*. Therefore a post-hoc test is not necessary to determine which means differed from the rest. In conclusion, it can be established that the current year of law school did not affect the groups’ Machiavellianism ratings.

#### **Part 4: Comparing Across Different Aspiring Fields of Law**

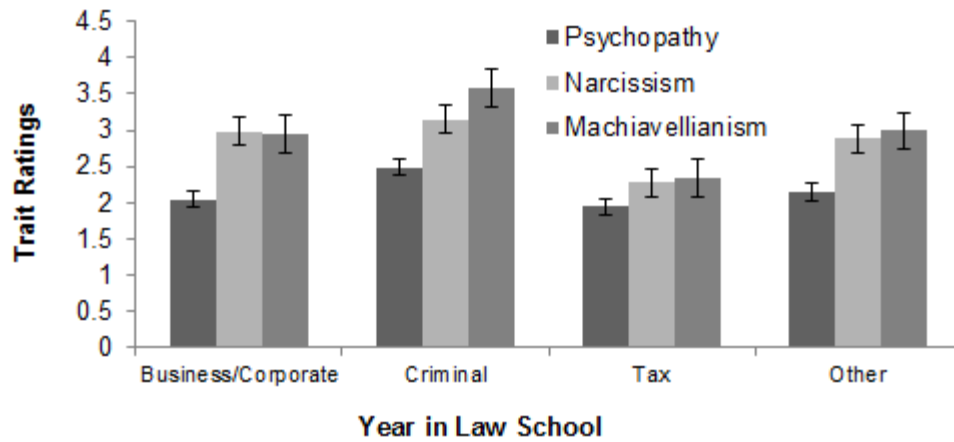
This study utilized a one-way analysis of variance to investigate the influence of the field of law current law students plan on entering with levels of psychopathy, as measured by comparing the psychopathy levels of those wishing to enter business/corporate law, criminal law, an all-encompassing “other” category, and tax law. The procedure was performed to test the hypothesis that the means were not equal to one another ( $H_0: \mu_{2.05} = \mu_{2.48} = \mu_{2.15}, \mu_{1.94}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all field of law means are equal). Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was performed to test the hypothesis that the population variances were not all equal ( $H_0: \sigma^2_{0.43} = \sigma^2_{0.67} = \sigma^2_{0.79} = \sigma^2_{0.86}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all population variances are equal). Levene’s test was found to be non-significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(3, 42) = 0.48$ , *ns*. Therefore, there is no

evidence that the assumptions of ANOVA were violated. As shown in Figure 4, the ANOVA was found to be non-significant, suggesting that none of the group means differed significantly from the others  $F(3, 42) = .62, ns$ . Therefore a post-hoc test is not necessary to determine which means differed from the rest. In conclusion, it can be established that the field of law one wished to enter did not affect the groups’ psychopathy ratings.

This study utilized a one-way analysis of variance to investigate the influence of the field of law current law students plan on entering with levels of narcissism, as measured by comparing the narcissism levels of those wishing to enter business/corporate law, criminal law, an all-encompassing “other” category, and tax law. The procedure was performed to test the hypothesis that the means were not equal to one another ( $H_0: \mu_{2.98} = \mu_{3.13} = \mu_{2.89}, \mu_{2.28}, H_A$ : not all field of law means are equal). Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was performed to test the hypothesis that the population variances were not all equal ( $H_0: \sigma^2_{0.49} = \sigma^2_{0.36} = \sigma^2_{0.34} = \sigma^2_{0.14}, H_A$ : not all population variances are equal). Levene’s test was found to be non-significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(3, 42) = 0.57, ns$ . Therefore, there is no evidence that the assumptions of ANOVA were violated. As shown in Figure 4, the ANOVA was found to be non-significant, suggesting that none of the group means differed significantly from the others  $F(3, 42) = .20, ns$ . Therefore a post-hoc test is not necessary to determine which means differed from the rest. In conclusion, it can be established that the field of law one wished to enter did not affect the groups’ narcissism ratings.

This study utilized a one-way analysis of variance to investigate the influence of the field of law current law students plan on entering with levels of Machiavellianism, as measured by comparing the Machiavellian attitude levels of those wishing to enter business/corporate law, criminal law, an all-encompassing “other” category, and tax law. The procedure was performed





*Figure 4.* Mean ratings across the “Dark Triad” traits in law students aspiring to enter business/corporate, criminal, tax or other fields of law. Error bars represent standard error.

to test the hypothesis that the means were not equal to one another ( $H_0: \mu_{2.95} = \mu_{3.54} = \mu_{2.99}, \mu_{2.33}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all field of law means are equal). Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance was performed to test the hypothesis that the population variances were not all equal ( $H_0: \sigma^2_{0.45} = \sigma^2_{0.14} = \sigma^2_{0.16} = \sigma^2_{0.39}$ ,  $H_A$ : not all population variances are equal). Levene’s test was found to be non-significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(3, 42) = 0.37, ns$ . Therefore, there is no evidence that the assumptions of ANOVA were violated. As shown in Figure 4, the ANOVA was found to be significant, suggesting that one or more of the group means differed significantly from the others  $F(3, 42) = .02$ . Therefore a post-hoc test is necessary to determine which means differed significantly from the rest. In conclusion, it can be established that the field of law one wished to enter affects the groups’ Machiavellianism ratings.

The post-hoc Tukey HSD was performed because at least one of the group means was found to differ from the others. Upon analysis, it was found that the criminal law group ( $M = 3.38, SE = 0.153$ ) had Machiavellianism levels significantly greater than the tax law group ( $M = 2.33, SE = 0.622$ ),  $q(3, 42) = .013$ . In contrast, none of the other field of law groups differed significantly in their levels of Machiavellianism. Therefore, in conclusion, Machiavellianism levels seem to differ significantly depending on if a law student plans on entering the field of criminal law versus tax law.

### **Discussion**

The extant literature on law student and lawyer personalities suggests that those entering the field of law display “dark” personalities consistent with the construct termed the “Dark Triad” of personality. Further research contradicted these assertions and suggested that the former claims may in fact be a stereotype assigned to law students and lawyers without merit.

The results of the present study support this latter idea and suggest that the literature advocating for the “dark” lawyer personalities can be considered an unwarranted stereotype.

### **Review of Hypotheses**

In this light, the seminal hypotheses are supported: both Machiavellian attitudes and narcissism in law students did not differ significantly from the population norms, although the law student psychopathy scores did differ significantly, they were found to be significantly lower than the general population’s and therefore still aligned with the present hypotheses. In terms of individual differences within the sample, in contrast to expectations, sex differences did not result in significant differences for each of the “Dark Triad” traits. The hypotheses regarding one’s current year of law school were partially supported. First year law students were found to be more narcissistic than both second and third year students. However, both Machiavellianism and psychopathy were found to not differ significantly as one progressed through law school. Lastly, the hypotheses concerning the field of law one aspired to enter were also partially supported. Aspiring criminal lawyers scored significantly higher than aspiring tax lawyers in their levels of Machiavellianism. No other fields of law differed significantly in their levels of Machiavellianism. Additionally, no fields of law differed significantly from one another in their levels of psychopathy or narcissism.

### **Implications and Relating Results to Relevant Literature**

Previous research does little to help understand the overall results between law students and the population norms. An abundance of literature classified the present sample as people who display the personality traits in question, however this research paper dispels those notions. The proposed biases of the researchers claiming to categorize law students into these “dark” personality traits can perhaps best be explained by certain pop culture references and a-priori

assumptions about the personalities of lawyers in general. Friedman (1989) mentioned the stereotypical lawyer jokes and common negative impressions held by the layperson regarding the personalities of lawyers. Furthermore, he re-iterated the notion that most people deal with lawyers during negative life-events, something which may skew their perception of the personalities of these lawyers. In general, it seems that the job requirements of a lawyer, namely to argue from the view of whomever enters their door, plays a pivotal role in determining the perceptions of lawyers’ personalities. Although their work may place them in unpleasant, even “darker” circumstances, it is a logical fallacy to equate job responsibilities with personality traits. An appropriate analogy may be to assess the job roles of teachers. Although they would likely score similarly to the population norms on the “Dark Triad,” just as law students did, their work revolves around a much more positive and optimistic setting such that one may be considered treacherous to categorize all teachers into a “Dark Triad” personality type. In reality however, it would be fallacious to claim that all teachers are delightful people simply because they pursued work in such a positive setting.

Paulhus’ (2002) research on the “Dark Triad” of personality traits helps to explain the results pertaining to the SD3 scores for each gender. He suggested that it was unnecessary to discriminate between sexes in the measurement of the constructs as scores on each of the “Dark Triad” traits had similar correlational patterns within gender. Consistent with his research, it was confirmed that this was indeed the case. Furthermore, Daicoff’s (1997) review suggesting that the social acceptability differences in career motives between men and women in our society seems to play a pivotal role in the current research. Although it is more socially acceptable for men to admit financial motives, a seemingly “darker” intention for entering the field of law than the altruistic reasons women might provide, the present research controlled for social desirability

by providing full anonymity in participant responses. Accordingly, it seems that social desirability concerns aside, male and female law students are more alike than the literature may suggest. This pattern is evidenced by the lack of significant differences between sexes on each of the three “dark” traits.

In assessment of one’s current year of law school in relation to their SD3 scores, results become interpretable in light of Daicoff’s (1997) review of literature by Katz and Denbeaux (1976) who indicated that law students’ cynicism increased and idealism decreased as a result of law school. Kernberg (1967, 1989) described individuals high on the narcissism trait as “vacillating extremes of idealization and devaluation of others” (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006, p. 618). Kernberg’s research supports the present finding that narcissism decreased as a student progressed through law school. If idealism is decreasing as a result of law school, and narcissism correlates significantly with idealism, it is fair to suggest that this may be the reasoning behind the decrease in narcissism as law students progressed from their 1L year to their upper-years. Furthermore, the present research study allows for the review of contradicting research regarding the effects of law school on homogenizing the attitudes and attributes of law students. Daicoff reviewed research by authors claiming that progressing through law school encourages conformity to a homogenous norm, however in her own research she determines that this assertion is unsupported. As evidenced by the lack of any significant differences between 2L and 3L students for each of the “Dark Triad” traits, it can at the very least be suggested that law school does not lead to heterogeneous attitudes and attributes for these traits.

A macroscopic consideration of the roles of different types of lawyers seems to explain the different personalities found between participants aspiring to enter different fields of law. It is plainly clear that a criminal lawyer would need to manipulate, within the law of course, their

client’s perceived position in order to present their client in the best possible light. In contrast, the tax lawyer crucially needs to present their client with the utmost transparency in their course of work. As previously suggested by Tett, Jackson and Rothstein (1991) it seems reasonable to suggest that those predisposed to either of these traits, and therefore higher and lower in Machiavellianism respectively, would lead to a correlation in their field choice.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Certain inherent limitations exist in the current research. As with any study, the results can be more accurately interpreted with a larger sample size. Although adequate for the present purposes, it is suggested that those seeking to replicate the above results utilize a sample size greater than the one used.

Next, the present sample exclusively looks at law students, and not at lawyers. Therefore, the results are only interpretable in light of law student personalities and should not be taken as a description of lawyer personalities. Although a significant portion of the literature concerns law students, it is suggested that future researchers attempt to measure lawyers on each of the “Dark Triad” traits to combat the literature pertaining exclusively to lawyers.

Another limitation involves the obvious variance between different participant’s personalities in such a small sample size. For the present purposes, it was assumed that each of the law students was controlled on other extraneous variables affecting their personalities. Although impossible due to the imposed time-frames for the present research, it is strongly suggested that those seeking to replicate its findings utilize a longitudinal study method and measure the personality traits of the same law students as they progress through law school.

Next, although the SD3 was shown to correlate reliably with each of the larger tests used to measure the “Dark Triad” traits individually, it is suggested that one use each of the individual measures alone to assess the law students’ personalities. Such that sample sizes can always be increased to improve interpretation, the more items assessing a certain trait will likely lead to more reliable results concerning the participants.

Another limitation in the present study concerns social desirability issues in participant responses. Although the current study added measures from the “Big 5” questionnaire to control for social desirability, feedback from participants suggested that the purposes of the study were transparent to those completing the survey. It would clearly be of interest to law students for them to answer questions in an attempt for them to be viewed in a more positive light as a whole, whether consciously or not. Therefore, adding further measures from the “Big 5” will likely aid in reducing the prevalence of “faking” in participant responses.

In consideration of this author’s experience with the Canadian law school application process, it can be confidently postulated that different Canadian law schools attempt to build their classes in accordance with different standards. Accordingly, it is suggested that future researchers consider differentiating between law schools and attempt to measure whether some are significantly “darker” than others. Publications in each school’s application literature involving this topic would be instrumental in attracting the preferred homogenized group of students each law school attempts to entice.

Lastly, although Machiavellianism is a reviewed trait included in all of the “Dark Triad” research, it is actually not included in the most recent edition of the DSM. For this reason, it is

suggested that future researchers consider using a different trait that would allow for extensive cross-referencing with other published research.

### **Conclusion**

Lastly, the general implications that can be derived from the current study are that the literature classifying law students as psychopathic, narcissistic, and high in Machiavellianism attitudes are imprudent. Although these traits exist along a continuum in law students, the previous literature shapes their analyses as though these traits exist at higher rates than the general population. This present study suggests that this is untrue. Therefore, there seems to be a stereotyped view that law students in general have “darker” personalities than those seeking to enter other professions, for obvious reasons it is important to contest this stereotype. It is hoped that this study is the beginning of a paradigm shift in the perception of law students’ personalities.



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## Appendix A

### Demographic Questionnaire

*Instructions:*

*None of the questions are mandatory; participants may skip any question he/she does not wish to answer.*

Gender (circle): Male    Female

Year (circle): 1L    2L    3L

Field of law wishing to enter:

Business/Corporate [ ]

Criminal [ ]

Tax [ ]

Other [ ]