Mate Poaching and the Dark Triad

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Abstract

 The Dark Triad is a collective term used to describe the malevolent personality dimensions of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. These constructs of the Dark Triad have been associated with many undesirable behaviors such as the exploitation of others for personal gain. This study investigated the Dark Triad in the context of mate poaching—the act of stealing a mate away from an already established, and presumably, monogamous relationship. Past research has correlated the constructs of the Dark Triad with self-reported acts of mate poaching, but this is the first study to assess mate poaching in relation to the Dark Triad using quasi-experimental methodology. College students ($N = 142$) participated in what they believed to be a test of a new dating service geared towards college students. Students filled out personality questionnaires that measured Dark Triad traits. Afterwards, they were ostensibly *matched* with an opposite-sex target whom they were led to believe was a student on campus who shared similar personality traits. The target's image and profile were held constant with the exception that the relationship status was randomly assigned to be either single or in a relationship. The results indicated that only the construct of psychopathy was related to mate poaching. This effect was only found for those individuals who also reported being in a relationship. For the other constructs, no desire to mate poach was detected. This is contrasted with self-report studies that have indicated that those high in dimensions of the Dark Triad report engaging in mate poaching.

Mate Poaching and the Dark Triad

The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad is comprised of three closely related, but unique constructs (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) –grandiose narcissism, Machiavellianism, and subclinical psychopathy. Narcissism, specifically grandiose narcissism, entails an exaggerated sense of agency, high self-esteem, entitlement, willingness to exploit others, and high levels of exhibitionism (Raskin & Hall, 1979; Brunell & Campbell, 2011). Machiavellianism is characterized by duplicity, a lack of empathy, and a "do whatever it takes to get ahead" mentality (Christie & Geis, 1970). Psychopathy comprises attributes of impulsivity, thrill seeking, low empathy, and low levels of anxiety (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits have been associated with malevolent, impulsive, and self-centered behavior, which in turn has been linked to poor societal and personal outcomes (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Jonason, Li & Buss, 2010). Some scholars (e.g., Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) distinguish between two forms of psychopathy: Primary psychopathy and secondary psychopathy. Primary psychopathy is related to the emotional coldness, exploitativeness, and a lack of empathy associated with psychopathic individuals. Secondary psychopathy captures the risk-taking, impulsivity, and poor decision making aspects of psychopathy.

Due to collective underpinning characteristics, such as low or nonexistent empathy (Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2012), disagreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and a willingness to exploit others for personal gain (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009), the constructs of the Dark Triad have been shown to be *toxic* in the workplace. Employees who

score higher in the three dimensions of the Dark Triad have self-reported to using hard tactics,

such as force, aggression, threats, and manipulation in the work environment more so than

employees with lower scores on measures of these constructs (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka,

2011). At least one construct—psychopathy—has been associated with having "dark hobbies"

coalesced around violence (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody & Scrutton, 2014). This

coincides with other research that has implicated psychopathy as a reliable predictor for

increased aggression in response to a physical provocation, whereas narcissists tend to be more

aggressive in response to an ego-threat (Jones & Paulhus, 2010).

Ironically, these same traits that typically result in poor outcomes can also prove to be

advantageous. For example, narcissism and psychopathy have been linked to higher levels of

extraversion, meaning these individuals appear to be more outgoing and personable (Paulhus &

Williams, 2002). In the short term, narcissists *appear* to have desirable leadership qualities, such

as confidence, dominance, and competitiveness, which often help them emerge to leadership

positions (Brunell et al., 2008; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012). Another possible adaptive outcome

for individuals high in the dimensions of the Dark Triad is the number of short-term mates they

tend to acquire, thus improving their reproductive fitness. This is not that surprising considering

they tend to be socially charming and physically attractive (Holtzman & Strube, 2012). These

seemingly admirable traits mask their arsenal of exploitive mating strategies employed to acquire

short-term mates (Jonason et al., 2009). This study investigates one exploitive mating strategy

called mate poaching.

Mate Poaching

Mate poaching is an attempt to steal away the romantic partner from his/her already established, and presumably, monogamous relationship. Mate poaching involves three parties: the poacher—the one who attempted to steal the mate away; the poached—the mate who was stolen away, and the poachee—the partner left behind (Buss & Schmitt, 2001). Mate poaching seems to be a relatively frequent strategy (Buss & Schmitt, 2001) that has been documented around the world (Schmitt, 2004). Mate poaching can be used as a short-term strategy or as a long-term strategy. Short-term strategies would involve the poacher wooing the poached away from his/her current partner for a one-night stand (i.e., a hookup). Used as a long-term strategy, the poacher attempts to establish a new relationship with the poached or establish a "friends-with-benefits" relationship. Both strategies require time, energy, and resources. The poacher also runs the risk of retaliation from the partner who lost his/her mate (Davies & Shackelford, 2007). With such high stakes, a reasonable question to ask is why anyone would pursue this tactic? It would stand to reason that most individuals would choose the path of least resistance and pursue a single mate. One possible explanation and advantage of mate poaching is that individuals who use this strategy open their number of potential mates to include not only single targets but targets that are considered "off-the-market."

Another idea is that mate poachers may view taken mates as being qualitatively better than single mates. To test this, Parker and Burkley (2009) ostensibly *matched* participants to an opposite sex target and told the participant that the target was either single or in a relationship. Next, participants were asked to answer questions that gauged how likely they would be to interact with the individual with whom they were *matched*. Results found that although men

rated female targets as more attractive than women rated male targets, women found the target in

a relationship to be significantly more attractive than the single male target. Parker and Burkley

postulated that this may be attributed to women following the notion of their peers and assuming

a man in a committed relationship clearly has something of "value" if he has already been taken.

These findings may provide a useful explanation for why both genders might engage in mate

poaching: they perceive a taken mate as being qualitatively better than a single mate.

      Only one study has assessed a possible link between the Dark Triad and mate poaching.

Jonason, Li, and Buss (2010) revealed that those high in all three constructs of the Dark Triad, on

average, reported having more partners, poaching more mates, being poached away from

existing relationships, and having had more mates poached away from them than those who

scored lower on the Dark Triad. Although these findings are interesting, the data was derived

through self-report and causation cannot be inferred.

      To examine the extent to which narcissists preferred a target who was already in a

relationship to one who was single, Brunell, Robinson, Okdie and Deems (2015) conducted a

quasi-experiment. They borrowed the paradigm used by Parker and Burkely (2009) to match

participants with another student on campus. After viewing the profile, the participant answered

a series of questions which were aggregated as a measure of pursuit. The results of this

experiment found that men were more interested in pursuing the target more than women were,

but narcissism was not a significant predictor of mate poaching. Thus, it appeared that narcissists

do not prefer mate poaching over pursuing a single person.

The Dark Triad and Mate Poaching

      The correlational findings of Jonason, Li, and Buss (2010) do provide potential insight

into how each of the constructs of the Dark Trait relate to mate poaching. Both narcissism and

psychopathy were significantly correlated with self-reported acts of mate poaching and being

relatively successful in their pursuits. However, a problem with self-report is that people may

respond with bias when answering questions. For instance, Alexander and Fisher (2003) found

that when measuring participants' self-reported attitudes and behaviors towards sex, males

scored significantly higher when they believed someone else would see their answers. Other

researchers extended this paradigm to assess grandiose narcissism and found that participants

scoring higher on measures of grandiose narcissism self-reported higher levels of self-esteem and

entitlement when they thought someone else might see their responses (Brunell & Fisher, 2014).

Further evidence suggests that narcissists tend to exaggerate their talents and achievements (John

& Robbins, 1994). The implication of these studies is that narcissists, being the braggadocio

individuals that they are, may openly report that they engage in more sex and risky behaviors

(Buelow & Brunell, 2014), but when it comes to committing the behavior, narcissists perform no

differently than others (e.g., Brunell & Buelow, in press). For example, grandiose narcissistic

constructs, such as grandiosity and exploitativeness, have been demonstrated to be reliable

predictors for self-reported engagement of risk-taking behaviors (Buelow & Brunell, 2014), but

when asked to engage in risky decision making games in a laboratory setting, narcissism was not

found to be a significant predictor of risk taking (Brunell & Buelow, in press). Although

Jonason, Li, and Buss (2010) concluded that narcissists self-report higher rates of mate poaching

than non-narcissists, this effect may be driven by narcissist's habit of answering questions in a

socially desirable way; therefore, I hypothesized that narcissism would not be associated with

mate poaching because of the associated risk and the additional effort that is involved.

There is research documenting Machiavellians as individuals with a likelihood to cheat

and engage in mate poaching (Brewer & Abell, 2015; Brewer, Hunt, James, and Abell, 2015;

Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010). However, again, these studies relied on self-report. Interestingly,

Brewer et. al (2015) found that participants who scored higher on Machiavellianism indicated a

tendency to engage in infidelity in the future, but they did not report past incidents of infidelity.

This is as much interesting as it is puzzling. Why would Machiavellian individuals who are

unlikely to have cheated in the past say that they would be more likely to cheat in the future?

Perhaps it is due to a willingness to cheat, but the opportunity has yet to present itself. In regards

to mate poaching, Jonason, Li, and Buss (2010) found no correlations between Machiavellianism

and overall experiences of mate poaching. The constructs of narcissism and psychopathy are

what accounted for the relationship between the Dark Triad and mate poaching—not

Machiavellianism; based on the results of the research, I hypothesized that Machiavellianism

would not be associated with mate poaching.

      After a careful review of the first two components of the Dark Triad—narcissism and

Machiavellianism—it seems that neither of them would be implicated in mate poaching;

however, psychopathy, shows correlational promise. Past work has associated psychopathy as a

construct correlated with mate poaching (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010; Kardum, Hudek-Khezevic,

Schmitt & Grundler, 2015). Psychopathy has also been demonstrated to be a significant predictor

of mate poaching attempts above and beyond gender and the other two constructs of the Dark

Triad (Kardum et al., 2015). Research using Levenson's Self-Report Psychopathy Scale

demonstrated an association between primary psychopathy (e.g., emotional coldness and

exploitativeness) and secondary psychopathy (impulsivity, risky behavior and poor decision

making), in relation to infidelity (Brewer et al., 2015). Both primary and secondary psychopathy

were correlated with past infidelity and intentions to engage in infidelity in the future (Abell et

al., 2015).

I hypothesized that participants scoring high on either primary or secondary psychopathy, or both, would pursue a single target and a target in a relationship, but psychopathy would be a better predictor for pursuing the attached target than narcissism and Machiavellianism.

It should be noted that many researchers studying the Dark Triad opt for the brief measure of the Dark Triad known as the "Dirty Dozen" (Jonason & Webster, 2010). This measure has been reported as valid but some scholars have found that it does not cover the array of behavior that characterizes the Dark Triad (Miller et al., 2012). For this reason, I chose to rely on reliable and valid measures for each facet of the Dark Triad.

Gender Differences, the Dark Triad, and Mate Poaching

Typically, men score higher than women on measures of the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, Jonason et al., 2009), and men are the more likely of the two sexes to engage in cheating (Clark & Hatfield, 1989). However, Parker and Burkley (2009) found that although men rated female targets more attractive than women rated male targets, women found the target in a relationship to be significantly more attractive than the single male target. In addition, high Dark Triad scoring women have also been implicated in infidelity using the Dark Triad as a predictor of past infidelity and intentions to engage in infidelity in the future (Brewer et al., 2015). These findings further elucidate the promiscuousness, deceptiveness, and propensity to cheat characterized by the constructs of the Dark Triad (Jonason & Kavanagh, 2010; Brewer & Abell, 2015).

Overview of the Present Study

The potential problem of the existing research is that it is mostly self-report and correlational. Although individuals higher in dimensions of the Dark Triad report that they have mate poach, they may behave in ways that are inconsistent with their self-reports. I hoped to

extend the work done by Parker and Burkley (2009) by using their paradigm but clarifying the difference between finding a target attractive and pursuing a target. I also sought to extend the work of Brunell and collegues (2015) by investigating the Dark Triad, and by assessing mate poaching as a short-term and long-term strategy. To my knowledge, no one has provided gold-standard experimental evidence implicating or exonerating the Dark Triad as mate poachers. The present study would not only extend research on the relationship between the Dark Triad and mate poaching but would do so using a quasi-experimental design. Since personality traits cannot be randomly assigned to participants, a quasi-experiment is the gold standard in personality research.

My predictions were as follows: (1) Those possessing higher levels of narcissism would be unlikely to indicate that they would engage in mate poaching; (2) Participants high in Machiavellianism would not engage in mate poaching; (3) Individuals that score high in primary and secondary psychopathy would tend to mate poach; (4) Men would find both the attached target and the unattached target more attractive than women (Brunell, Robinson, Okdie & Deems, 2015; Parker & Burkely, 2009); (5) Women would find the attached target more attractive than the single target (Parker & Burkely, 2009).

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of 142 undergraduate students enrolled in Introduction to Psychology courses at a regional campus of the Ohio State University in exchange for partial course credit. Out of these 142 students, 81 self-identified as female and 61 self-identified as male. The average age of the students was 18.86 ($SD = 2.77$).

Measurements of the Dark Triad

Narcissism: To assess the component of grandiose narcissism, I use the Narcissistic

Personality Inventory (Raskin & Terry, 1988). This scale consists of 40 items with two

contrasting statements in which the subject selects the statement that is most self-descriptive.

One option of an item states: "I get upset when people don't notice how I look when I go out in

public;" the other option to this question states: "I don't mind blending into the crowd when I go

out in public." Narcissistic answers were scored as a 1 and non-narcissistic answers were scored

as a 0; all total scores were out of 40.

Machiavellianism: Measurements of Machiavellianism were made using the 20-item

Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970). With each statement participants indicate their agreement (*1*=

strongly disagree and *5* = strongly agree) with statements, such as: "the biggest difference

between criminals and other people is that criminals are stupid enough to get caught." The

highest score possible is 100.

Psychopathy: The 26-item psychopathy scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) was

used to assess primary and secondary psychopathy. The first 16 questions measure the

unscrupulous emotional coldness that is associated with primary psychopathy. An example of

these questions includes "For me, what's right is whatever I can get away with." The remaining

10 questions capture the impulsivity characterized by secondary psychopathy: for example, "I

am often bored." Participants would then express their agreement or disagreement on a 4-point

scale (*1* = disagree strongly and *4* = agree strongly) with a score of 104 being the highest score.

Procedure

To create a naturalistic condition in a controlled setting, I used the guise of assisting a

dating website to collect data on a web platform geared toward college students on the Ohio

State University campuses. This "web platform" was simply a web page designed to look like an

authentic OSU endorsed dating webpage. Two web pages were designed to represent one female

target and one male target that were pretested as being equal in physical attractiveness. The

webpage of the targets consisted of a picture, interests (conversation, friends and family),

hobbies (cooking, reading, and binge watching Netflix), and an "about me" blurb which stated,

"Hi! I'll try to describe myself without giving away too many spoilers. :) I'm a pretty outgoing

person who can get along with just about anyone, I like to surround myself with people who have

similar outlooks on life and who can make me laugh hysterically!" The demographic information

served as the primary manipulation. Along with a first name, age, hair and eye color, and

occupation as a student, a relationship status was provided. Participants were randomly assigned

for the relationship status to say "single" or "in a relationship." In all other ways both webpages

of the targets were identical.

Following Parker and Burkley's (2009) procedure, participants were instructed that they

would answer several questionnaires—a demographic questionnaire (e.g., sex, age, and

relationship status: single or in a relationship) and personality questionnaires, like those found on

Eharmony.com, that would measure their interests, ideals, likes, and dislikes. Participants were

told that these personality questionnaires would be used to pair them with another student on

campus who shared similar interests and ideals. Unbeknown to the participants, this last part of

the study was rigged so that all male participants viewed the same female profile (except for the

manipulation of the target's relationship status) and all female participants viewed the same male

profile (except for the manipulation of the target's relationship status). After filling out all

necessary questionnaires and viewing the profile page of the target, the participants were then

asked to answer a series of 11 questions about their interest in the target. Four of these items

served as dependent variables. *Attractiveness* was measured with the item, "how physically attractive is this individual?" To measure *short-term mating*, participants were asked "how likely would you be to hook up with the individual?" To create the dependent variable of *long-term pursuit*, I combined the questions of "how likely would you be to meet up for a date with this individual?" and "how likely would you be to pursue a relationship with this individual?" Participants answered these questions using 5-point scales (*1*= not at all likely, *5*= very likely).

Prior to debriefing, participants were given a manipulation check that asked them to indicate the sex of the person with whom they were matched and the target's relationship status.

Results

The manipulation check revealed that 82% of the participants correctly identified the relationship status of the target with whom they were matched, suggesting that not everyone paid attention to this detail prior to making their judgments. All but one participant correctly identified the sex of the target, which likely occurred in error. In the analyses below, all data were included for analysis.

Means and standard deviations for both genders on all personality measures are presented in Table 1. Briefly, men scored significantly higher than women on measures of primary psychopathy. There was a marginally significant difference for Machiavellianism with men scoring higher than women. No significant gender differences were detected for narcissism and secondary psychopathy.

For the analyses, the single condition was coded as -.5 and the attached condition was coded as .5. Participant relationship status was coded as -.5 for participants in a relationship and .5 for single participants. Gender was coded as -.5 for women and .5 for men. Narcissism,

Machiavellianism, and both primary psychopathy and secondary psychopathy were mean-

centered prior to computing the analyses. For each dependent variable, a series of stepwise

multiple regression analyses for each personality dimension were computed with gender,

condition, participants' relationship status, and the personality dimension entered in Step 1, two-

way interactions in Step 2, three-way interactions in Step 3, and four-way interactions in Step 4.

Tables 2-5 summarize Step 4 findings for primary psychopathy, secondary psychopathy,

Machiavellianism, and narcissism, respectively, for the dependent variables of finding the target

attractive, showing interest in pursuing a short-term relationship, and pursuing a long-term

relationship with target.

Some of the prior research on the Dark Triad has analyzed data by grouping all three of

the related, yet unique, constructs of the Dark Triad into one personality dimension and

generalizing based on this conglomeration. This approach to analysis undercuts the variance that

each component is contributing to the study. For example, Machiavellianism may play no role in

mate poaching, but when researchers glob Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism into

one dimension and find a significant effect, then researchers can mistakenly conclude that

Machiavellianism is involved in mate poaching tendencies when psychopathy and narcissism

may be driving the effect. For my analyses, I analyzed each component separate from the other

components.

Primary Psychopathy

Analyses are summarized in Table 2. A main effect for primary psychopathy was not

significant for predicting attractiveness ratings, but it was trumped by a marginally significant

two-way (primary psychopathy X condition; $p=0.07$) and four-way (gender X participant

relationship status X condition X primary psychopathy; $p=0.06$) interaction. For single women

answering questions about a single male target, there was no relationship between primary

psychopathy and attractiveness ratings ($r = -.01, p = .97, n = 25$). For single men being asked

about a single target, the correlation between primary psychopathy and attractiveness ratings was

moderate $r = .48$ ($p = .11, n = 12$). For single women rating a target in a relationship, there was

no significant association between primary psychopathy and finding the target attractive ($r = .075, p = .73, n = 24$). Single men viewing a target in a relationship revealed no significant

correlation between primary psychopathy and finding the target attractive ($r = -.14, p = .74, n = 8$). For women in a relationship viewing a single target, there was a correlation of $.37$ ($p = .17, n = 15$). For men in a relationship rating a single target, the correlation was $.22$ ($p = .38, n = 18$).

For women in a relationship looking at a man in relationship, there was a correlation of $-.34$ ($p = .18, n = 17$). For men in a relationship looking at a woman in a relationship there was no

association ($r = .06, p = .79, n = 22$).

For pursuing a short-term relationship, a three-way interaction was found between

primary psychopathy, condition, and status. No significant association was found for participants

in a relationship matched with a single target ($r = .16, p = .34, n = 37$) or for single participants

paired with a target in a relationship ($r = .003, p = .99, n = 39$). However, a moderate

association between primary psychopathy and pursuing a short-term relationship was detected

for single participants when matched with a single target ($r = .56, p = .001, n = 33$). The most

interesting finding was revealed for participants in a relationship matched with a target who was

also in a relationship; a marginally significant association between primary psychopathy and

pursuing a short-term relationship was detected for these participants ($r = .38, p = .06, n = 32$).

Primary psychopathy did not serve as a significant predictor of mate poaching to

establish a new long-term relationship.

Secondary Psychopathy

Secondary psychopathy played no significant role in predicting participants'

attractiveness ratings of the target, nor was it a predictor of how likely the participant would be

to pursue a short or long term relationship with the target. (See Table 3).

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism analyses are summarized in Table 4. Machiavellianism was not a

significant predictor for rating the target as physically attractive. For pursuing a short-term

relationship, three two-way interactions were found: one for Machiavellianism X gender, another

for Machiavellianism X relationship status, and one for Machiavellianism X condition. Teasing

apart these interactions with correlational analyses revealed that there were no significant

correlations for Machiavellianism X gender for both men ($r = -.10, p = .45, n = 60$) and women

($r = .04, p = .70, n = 81$). There were also no significant correlations for Machiavellianism and

single participants ($r = .16, p = .18, n = 72$) and participants in a relationship ($r = -.14, p = .27,$

$n = 69$). For Machiavellianism X condition there was a marginally significant correlation for the

single condition ($r = .23, p = .06, n = 70)$ and a non-significant finding for the attached

condition ($r = -.12, p = .32, n = 71).$

For pursuing a long-term relationship, one significant two-way interaction was revealed

between Machiavellianism and gender. For this interaction, men scoring higher on measures of

Machiavellianism were less likely to pursue the target ($r = -.28, p = .03, n = 60$). There was no

significant finding for women ($r = .07, p = .52, n = 81$).

Narcissism

Narcissism analyses are summarized in Table 5. Narcissism failed to be a significant

predictor of participant attractiveness ratings; however, a significant main effect for narcissism

and pursuing a short-term relationship was detected. A three-way interaction between participant

relationship status, narcissism, and condition was also present for pursuing a short-term

relationship. Correlational analyses were used to break apart this three-way interaction. For

participants in a relationship matched with a single target, there was no significant association

between narcissism and pursuing a short-term relationship ($r = .01, p = .96, n = 37$). For single

participants matched with a single target, there was a moderate correlation between narcissism

and expressing interest in pursuing a short-term relationship with the target ($r = .46, p = .01, n = 33$). However, there was no association between pursuing a short-term relationship and

narcissism if the participant was single and paired with a target that was in a relationship ($r = .06, p = .73, n = 39$). For participants in a relationship matched to targets in a relationship, there

was also no significant association for pursuing a short-term relationship and narcissism ($r = .22, p = .22, n = 32$).

For pursuing a long-term relationship, another three-way interaction was revealed for

gender, status, and narcissism. Teasing this interaction apart revealed a negative association

between narcissism and pursuing the target for female participants already in a relationship ($r = -.25, p = .09, n = 49$). No significant associations were found between narcissism and pursuing

the target for single women ($r = .28, p = .12, n = 32$) and men in a relationship ($r = .02, p = .92, n = 20$). For single men, a negative association was found for narcissism and pursuing a

relationship ($r = -.30, p = .06, n = 40$).

Discussion

Many of my results suggested that those who score higher on the constructs of the Dark

Triad do not prefer to pursue someone who is already in a relationship; however, one three-way

interaction between primary psychopathy, condition, and relationship status did predict

participant interest in pursuing a short-term relationship with the target who was in a

relationship, but only if the participant was also in a relationship. I speculate this is due to the

equal risk that is assumed by the poacher and the poached, both have current partners that they

could lose if the current partners were to find out about the infidelity.

Aside from the novel finding for primary psychopathy, some of my findings were counter

to mate poaching. For instance, male participants already in a relationship were significantly

unlikely to indicate interest in a short-term relationship with the target, and Machiavellianism

was negatively associated with the pursuit of a short-term relationship for male participants

matched with a target who was in a relationship.

Although there was a small, yet significant, main effect for narcissism on pursuing a

short-term relationship, the findings were predicted by results of previous studies. For example, a

three-way interaction between narcissism, condition, and relationship status revealed that single

participants paired with a single target were more likely to indicate pursuing a short-term

relationship with the target—highlighting the short-term sexual strategies of narcissists (Jonason

& Buss, 2012). Another three-way interaction for narcissism with participant gender and

participant relationship status showed that female participants already in a relationship were less

likely to indicate pursuing a long-term relationship with the target, and that single men were also

unlikely to pursue a long-term relationship with the target.

I suspect that individuals high in the constructs of the Dark Triad have no specific

preference for targets already in a relationship but instead would pursue the path of least

resistance (i.e., pursuing a short-term relationship with the single target). However, this

speculation only holds true for narcissism and Machiavellianism; as stated previously, primary

psychopathy was my only hint of mate poaching. Thus, although individuals who were higher on

the Dark Triad constructs *reported* experiences with mate poaching (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010),

it does not appear in this study that they prefer to mate poach.

As discussed earlier in this paper, a problem with self-report is that participants may

answer in ways the respondent believes is desirable, such as a narcissist exaggerating his/her

number of sexual partners. Participants may also be poor at introspection and monitoring their

own behaviors. These factors can all result in data that do not reflect a real-world scenario.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Direction

One important consideration to note is that this study lacked statistical power due to a

smaller sample size. Future data collection is needed to better analyze these tentative findings.

Although this study had an insufficient sample size, its methodology was a novel solution to the

current standard of correlating personality traits with self-reported acts of mate poaching. The

paradigm was borrowed from Parker and Burkley (2009) but used a more convincing format to

assess mate poaching by leading participants to believe that they were truly on a college dating

website. This was also the first study to apply this paradigm to the Dark Triad. However, this

paradigm is not without limitations: the target's profile had a lot of information on it and it is

hard to say for certain whether the participants saw the relationship status of the target or simply

saw it and did not care.

For future directions, researchers should investigate other facets related to the Dark Triad,

such as the personality constructs of exploitation and entitlement. It may be that mate poaching is

a result of these specific traits rather than the collective traits of the Dark Triad. Although the

components of the Dark Triad are all characterized by a propensity for exploiting, these

components predict an array of behaviors, such as impulsivity, aggression, and grandiosity, that

are seemingly unrelated to mate poaching and that could detract from uncovering the *true*

personality dimensions of the poacher. Not only should future researchers study these specific

personality constructs, but they should also do so under a quasi-experimental design such as this

one.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that past research investigating the Dark Triad in relation to

mate poaching, may be constrained by its methodology and statistical limitations. Out of the

three constructs of the Dark Triad—narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism—only the

facet of primary psychopathy was linked to mate poaching, and this effect was only found if the

participant was also in a relationship. It may be that most people, regardless of their own

relationship status, find other people attractive but would never actively pursue the individual or

find out if the individual was in a relationship. When mate poaching does occur, it may be due to

the poacher's strong interest in the partner rather than to receive an ego boost or to intentionally

hurt the poachee.

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Tables

Table 1

Gender Differences

Categories	Male	Std. Dev.	Female	Std. Dev.	t-test	p-value
Machiavellianism	54.25	8.74	51.81	6.59	-1.81	.07
Primary Psychopathy	33.53	6.41	28.96	6.55	-4.13	.001***
Secondary Psychopathy	21.87	3.92	21.87	3.91	-1.26	.21
Narcissism	16.32	5.85	14.65	6.11	-1.63	.11

Note:

* *p* < .05

** *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001

Primary Psychopathy Predicting the Outcome Variables

Variables	Attractiveness		STM		LTP	
	β	(*t, p*)	β	(*t, p*)	β	(*t, p*)
Gender	.66	(4.09,.001)***	1.42	(7.16,.001)***	.97	(5.09, .001)***
Condition (Cond)	-.09	(-.56, .57)	-.08	(-.41, .68)	.06	(.31, .76)
Relationship Status (RS)	.20	(1.24, .22)	.43	(2.16, .03)*	.76	(3.96, .001)***
Primary Psychopathy (PP)	.01	(.76, .45)	.02	(1.51, .13)	-.01	(-.53, .60)
Condition X Gender	.28	(.86, .39)	.08	(-.20, .84)	-.37	(-.96, .34)
Condition X RS	.11	(.34, .74)	-.21	(-.52, .60)	-.13	(-.35, .73)
Gender X RS	-.22	(-.68, .50)	-.01	(-.03, .98)	-.16	(-.42, .68)
PP X Condition	-.04	(-1.8, .07)	-.02	(-.71, .48)	.01	(.29, .77)
PP X Gender	.02	(.76, .45)	.03	(.90, .37)	.02	(.60, .55)
PP X RS	-.01	(-.54, .59)	-.01	(-.32, .75)	-.03	(-1.21, .23)
Condition X Gender X RS	-.67	(-1.05, .30)	-.51	(-.64, .52)	-1.43	(-1.88, .06)
Condition X Gender X PP	.003	(.07, .94)	.01	(.21, .84)	.04	(.72, .47)
Condition X RS X PP	-.03	(-.58, .56)	-.15	(-2.52, .01)**	-.08	(-1.37, .17)
Gender X RS X PP	-.003	(-.06, .96)	.01	(.18, .86)	-.07	(-1.21, .23)
Gender X RS X Cond X PP	.18	(1.89, .06)	-.10	(-.82, .42)	.08	(.69, .49)

Note: PP, primary psychopathy, RS, relationship status, Cond, condition

*   *p* < .05

**   *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001

Table 3

Secondary Psychopathy Predicting the Outcome Variables

Variables	Attractiveness		STM		LTP	
	β	(*t, p*)	β	(*t, p*)	β	(*t, p*)
Gender	.80	(5.03, .001)***	1.61	(7.95, .001)***	.95	(5.02, .001)***
Condition (Cond)	-.06	(-.34, .73)	-.08	(-.38, .71)	.04	(.19, .85)
Relationship Status (RS)	.14	(.87, .39)	.40	(1.93, .06)	.67	(3.54, .001)***
Secondary Psychopathy (SP)	.03	(-1.35, .18)	.02	(-.64, .53)	-.03	(-1.10, .27)
Condition X Gender	.29	(.92, .36)	.01	(-.02, .99)	-.28	(-.73, .34)
Condition X RS	.13	(.42, .68)	-.46	(-1.14, .26)	-.11	(-.30, .78)
Gender X RS	-.31	(-.98, .33)	-.05	(-.12, .90)	-.29	(-.78, .44)
SP X Condition	.01	(.24, .81)	-.02	(-.32, .75)	.02	(.46, .65)
SP X Gender	-.03	(-.75, .46)	-.05	(-.85, .40)	.04	(.70, .49)
SP X RS	.06	(1.44, .15)	-.01	(-.09, .93)	-.03	(-.64, .53)
Condition X Gender X RS	-1.00	(-1.57, .12)	-1.33	(-1.65, .10)	-1.65	(-2.18, .03)*
Condition X Gender X SP	-.06	(.71, .48)	-.07	(-.66, .51)	-.13	(-1.20, .23)
Condition X RS X SP	.10	(1.14, .26)	-.11	(.98, .33)	-. 11	(-1.04, .30)
Gender X RS X SP	.01	(.01, .99)	-.07	(-.64, .52)	-.04	(-.38, .70)
Gender X RS X Cond X SP	-.14	(-.80, .43)	.157	(.70, .48)	-.16	(-.76, .45)

Note: SP, secondary psychopathy, RS, relationship status, Cond, condition

*   *p* < .05

**   *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001

Table 4

Machiavellianism Predicting the Outcome Variables

Variables	Attractiveness		STM		LTP	
	β	(t, p)	β	(t, p)	β	(t, p)
Gender	.74	(4.77,.001)***	1.51	(8.22, .001)***	.96	(5.32, .001)***
Condition (Cond)	-.11	(-.70, .48)	-.06	(-.32, .75)	.04	(.24, .81)
Relationship Status (RS)	.17	(1.09, .28)	.43	(2.37, .02)*	.69	(3.81, .001)***
Machiavellianism (M)	-.01	(-.168, .87)	-.02	(-1.64, .11)	-.02	(-1.66, .10)
Condition X Gender	.13	(.42, .68)	.10	(.28, .78)	-.25	(-.70, .49)
Condition X RS	.20	(.65, .52)	-.25	(-.69, .49)	-.09	(-.24, .81)
Gender X RS	-.22	(-.71, .48)	.01	(.01, .99)	-.15	(-.41, .68)
M X Condition	-.02	(-.90, .37)	-.06	(-2.28, .03)*	-.04	(-1.57, .12)
M X Gender	-.01	(-08, .93)	-.06	(-2.15, .03)*	-.06	(-2.34, .02)*
M X RS	.02	(1.01, .31)	.06	(2.32, .02)*	.02	(.68, .50)
Condition X Gender X RS	-.70	(-1.13, .26)	-.80	(-1.01, .27)	-1.64	(-2.28, .02)*
Condition X Gender X M	-.03	(-.73, .47)	-.05	(-1.00, .32)	-.01	(-.01, .99)
Condition X RS X M	.04	(.86, .40)	-.06	(-1.02, .31)	-.01	(-.19, .85)
Gender X RS X M	-.01	(-.21, .83)	.08	(1.5, .13)	.03	(.61, .54)
Gender X RS X Cond X M	-.14	(1.53, .13)	.02	(.14, .89)	.09	(.82, .42)

Note: M, Machiavellianism, RS, relationship status, Cond, condition

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

Table 5

Narcissism Predicting the Outcome Variables

Variables	Attractiveness		STM		LTP	
	β	(*t, p*)	β	(*t, p*)	β	(*t, p*)
Gender	.74	(4.76, .001)***	1.55	(8.27, .001)***	1.02	(5.68, .001)***
Condition (Cond)	-.06	(-.42, .68)	-.04	(-.22, .82)	.08	(.46, .65)
Relationship Status (RS)	.16	(1.03, .30)	.39	(2.09, .04)*	.68	(3.79, .001)***
Narcissism (N)	.02	(1.69, .09)	.04	(2.54, .01)*	-.01	(-.30, .77)
Condition X Gender	.18	(.57, .57)	.05	(.13, .90)	-.33	(-.91, .37)
Condition X RS	.11	(.35, .73)	-.43	(-1.15, .25)	-.18	(-.50, .62)
Gender X RS	-.19	(-.62, .54)	-.10	(-.27, .79)	-.31	(-.85, .40)
N X Condition	.04	(1.31, .19)	.02	(.65, .52)	-.04	(-1.57, .12)
N X Gender	.02	(.73, .47)	.05	(1.42, .16)	-.01	(-.38, .70)*
N X RS	-.02	(-.62, .54)	.01	(.21, .84)	-.01	(-.02, .98)
Condition X Gender X RS	-.80	(-1.30, .20)	-.98	(-1.30, .20)	-1.51	(-2.09, .04)*
Condition X Gender X N	-.01	(-.10, .92)	.01	(.07, .94)	.04	(.59, .56)
Condition X RS X N	-.03	(-.61, .54)	-.17	(-2.67, .01)**	-.11	(-1.75, .08)
Gender X RS X N	-.05	(-.90, .37)	-.09	(-1.36, .18)	-.16.	(-2.57, .01)**
Gender X RS X Cond X N	.06	(.58, .56)	-.17	(-1.3, .20)	-.01	(-.06, .95)

Note: N, narcissism, RS, relationship status, Cond, condition

*   *p* < .05

**   *p* < .01

*** *p* < .001