



## A protean approach to social influence: Dark Triad personalities and social influence tactics <sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

To avoid detection, those high on Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) may adopt a protean approach to interpersonal influence. We show the Dark Triad traits correlate with a number of unique tactics of influence (Study 1;  $N = 259$ ). We show this protean approach was insensitive to differences in targets of manipulation (Study 2;  $N = 296$ ). When forced to choose one tactic to solve different adaptive problems, the Dark Triad traits were correlated with unique tactical choices (Study 3;  $N = 268$ ). We show these associations are generally robust to controlling for the Big Five and participants' sex (Study 1 and 2). We discuss the theoretical implications of these findings for both life history and cheater-detection theories.

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### 1. Introduction

How do people like Bernie Madoff and characters like James Bond influence others? How are they able to be successful when they embody the Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism; Paulhus & Williams, 2002)? Most research has treated these traits as bad for individuals and society (Kowalski, 2001). Indeed, these traits are linked to antisocial tendencies like dishonesty (Lee & Ashton, 2005), aggressiveness (Jones & Paulhus, 2010), disagreeableness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and alcohol, cigarette, drug use (Jonason, Koenig, & Tost, 2010). Despite these apparently antisocial correlates, evolutionary psychologists suggest that even undesirable personality traits can be adaptive (i.e., providing solutions to problems like mating or survival), but may be so only on a shorter timescale (Buss, 2009). In the present study, we attempt to understand how those high on the Dark Triad traits may enact a successful fast life strategy.

Life history theory proposes that individual differences are emergent solutions to adaptive problems that are activated by key social and environmental events (Kaplan & Gangestad, 2005). Natural selection may have shaped individuals to adopt mutualistic or antagonistic social strategies in response to differing socioecological conditions (Figueredo et al., 2006). Unfortunately, little is known about the tactical ways individuals enact an antagonistic life

strategy. Narcissism is linked to a number of tactics of social influence (Buss & Chiodo, 1991), those high on the Dark Triad are selfish, competitive, and strategic (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010; Jones & Paulhus, 2010), and Machiavellianism is characterized by interpersonal manipulation (Christie & Geis, 1970). This suggests to us that these traits might be part of a “cheater strategy” (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; Mealey, 1995).

Taking an evolutionary perspective, we ask, “What is the primary adaptive challenge of anyone enacting a cheater strategy?” The cheater is successful in as much as he/she wins in a co-evolutionary arms race with cheater-detection mechanisms (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992; Cummins, 1999). Most research on cheater-detection is focused on those who would be cheated, not on those who are doing the cheating. The challenge for cheaters may be to avoid detection over repeated exchanges. We would argue that a powerful way to avoid detection is to use a “whatever-it-takes” attitude towards social influence (Gunnthorsdottir, McCabe, & Smith, 2002). By not relying on any one strategy, cheaters may be able to avoid detection. If we assume that people are looking for—and are overly attentive to—patterns in the world, then being protean in the manipulation tactics they deploy may be adaptive. There is considerable advantage noted in the biological literature on the adaptive value of protean behavior or being unpredictable (Driver & Humphries, 1988). Thus, the Dark Triad traits are expected to correlate positively with multiple manipulation tactics.

In particular, we expect each trait to provide a unique approach to social influence, adding to the protean approach to social influence we described above. We expect tactics that are “colder” to be isolated to psychopathy because of the selfish, impulsive, and

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aggressive nature of those who embody this trait (Hare, 1996; Jones & Paulhus, 2010). The psychopath may use *seduction*, *coercion*, and *hardball* as means of getting her/his way, but these tactics alone likely come with considerable risk. These risks may be offset by other parts of the Dark Triad. Machiavellianism may provide for one important tactic that may have considerable efficacy and limited adverse effects. The tactic of *charm* may be characteristic of those high on Machiavellianism (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Similar to Machiavellianism, the narcissistic approach to social influence may provide more benefits than costs. Narcissism has been described as an approach-orientation (Foster & Trimm, 2008) and these individuals may be interested in pleasing others to gain external validation (Bogart, Benotsch, & Pavlovic, 2004). That is, they may do things in hopes of others viewing them favorably. In so doing, they may use tactics like *social comparison* and *reciprocity*.

In three studies, we examine how individuals characterized by the Dark Triad traits enact their life history strategy at the tactical level. Study 1 assesses the basic correlations between the Dark Triad and tactics of influence. Study 2 assesses the tactics people use when trying to influence four types of individuals. Study 3 examines the tactics people use when trying to influence four types of individuals in efforts of succeeding at four adaptive goals.

## 2. Study 1

As a manifestation of this protean approach to social influence, we expect the Dark Triad traits to be correlated with the use of numerous social influence tactics. As a composite, the Dark Triad should be correlated with a large number of tactical approaches. As individual traits, the Dark Triad should be associated with different tactics of manipulation.

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 259 psychology students (28% male, 72% female) aged 18–55 years ( $M = 21.12$ ,  $SD = 5.65$ ) from the Southeastern US who received partial course credit for completing the surveys described below. Survey packets were completed in a series of four mass-testing sessions in a large lecture hall. Once participants completed the measures, they were debriefed and thanked for participating.

#### 2.1.2. Measures

We used the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen, a 12-item measure of the Dark Triad with four items per subscale (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Participants were asked how much they agreed (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*) with statements such as: “I tend to want others to admire me” (narcissism), “I tend to lack remorse” (psychopathy), and “I have used deceit or lied to get my way” (Machiavellianism). Items were averaged together to create an index of narcissism (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ), Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = .69$ ), psychopathy ( $\alpha = .65$ ), and a single Dark Triad index of all three ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The three Dark Triad traits were positively intercorrelated ( $r_s = .34$ – $.60$ ,  $p_s < .01$ ).

Participants were asked a series of questions which we modified to be gender-neutral (Buss, 1992). They were asked how much they used a given tactic (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*) to influence others in general. For instance, the tactic of the *silent treatment* was assessed with items like, “Ignore her/him until he/she agrees to do it.” The tactic of *charm* was assessed with items like, “Act charming so he/she will do it.” The assessed tactics were *coercion* ( $\alpha = .80$ ), *regression* ( $\alpha = .90$ ), *reciprocity-reward* ( $\alpha = .84$ ), *debasement* ( $\alpha = .60$ ), *hardball* ( $\alpha = .75$ ), *charm* ( $\alpha = .76$ ), *reason* ( $\alpha = .88$ ), the *silent treatment* ( $\alpha = .91$ ), *pleasure induction* ( $\alpha = .81$ ), *social*

**Table 1**

Zero-order correlations (and standardized regression coefficients) for the three Dark Triad traits predicting the use of 13 different influence tactics.

Variable	$r(\beta)$		
	Narcissism	Machiavellianism	Psychopathy
Coercion	.24 <sup>*</sup> (.19)	.19 <sup>*</sup> (−.03)	.28 <sup>*</sup> (.21 <sup>*</sup> )
Responsibility Invocation	.17(.18)	.08(−.10)	.15(.12)
Hardball	.31 <sup>*</sup> (.09)	.42 <sup>*</sup> (.28 <sup>*</sup> )	.35 <sup>*</sup> (.17)
Charm	.42 <sup>*</sup> (.24 <sup>*</sup> )	.45 <sup>*</sup> (.33 <sup>*</sup> )	.20 <sup>*</sup> (−.06)
Silent Treatment	.22 <sup>*</sup> (.14)	.22 <sup>*</sup> (.14)	.14(−.01)
Regression	.11(.10)	.08(−.01)	.12(.07)
Reciprocity	.26 <sup>*</sup> (.22 <sup>*</sup> )	.19 <sup>*</sup> (.02)	.19 <sup>*</sup> (.08)
Pleasure Induction	−.14(.12)	.11(.05)	.01(−.04)
Debasement	.30 <sup>*</sup> (.23 <sup>*</sup> )	.25 <sup>*</sup> (.05)	.24 <sup>*</sup> (.10)
Reason	.11(.12)	.06(.05)	−.05(−.12)
Social Comparison	.34 <sup>*</sup> (.30 <sup>*</sup> )	.25 <sup>*</sup> (.04)	.17(.04)
Monetary Reward	.22 <sup>*</sup> (.13)	.23 <sup>*</sup> (.10)	.18(.08)
Seduction	.19(.02)	.29 <sup>*</sup> (.24 <sup>*</sup> )	.21 <sup>*</sup> (.08)

<sup>\*</sup>  $p < .001$ .

*comparison* ( $\alpha = .83$ ), *monetary reward* ( $\alpha = .75$ ), and *responsibility invocation* ( $\alpha = .72$ ). *Seduction* was included as an additional manipulation tactic. Participants were asked how much they tried to “seduce the person”, “flirt with the person”, and “suggest I might have sex with the person if he/she does what I want”. These items were averaged to create an index of seduction as an influence tactic ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

### 2.2. Results

Table 1 contains correlations, Bonferroni-corrected for the increased Type 1 error ( $p < .001$ ), between the Dark Triad traits and the use of different manipulation tactics. The Dark Triad measures were not correlated with the use of tactics like *pleasure induction*, *responsibility invocation*, *reason*, and *regression*. The remaining tactics, like *hardball* and *charm*, were positively correlated with the Dark Triad composite ( $r_s = .15$ – $.44$ ,  $p_s < .05$ ). Using multiple regression to control for shared variability among the Dark Triad traits, we isolated the correlations to individual traits. Confirming our predictions, *charm* was correlated to Machiavellianism and psychopathy, *coercion* was correlated to psychopathy, and *social comparison* was positively related to narcissism. Additionally, psychopathy was positively related to *hardball*, Machiavellianism was positively related to *seduction* and *hardball*, and narcissism was positively related to *debasement*, *charm*, *responsibility invocation*, and *coercion*.

The above relationships persisted even after controlling for participants' sex using partial correlations. The Dark Triad traits were correlated with virtually every tactic of influence ( $p_r_s = .12$ – $.40$ ,  $p_s < .05$ ). In the interest of space constraints, we report only the cases where the Dark Triad traits were not correlated with the use of tactics of influence. None of the traits were correlated with the use of *regression*. Psychopathy was not correlated with the use of the *silent treatment* and *pleasure induction*. Machiavellianism was not correlated with the use of *pleasure of induction* or *responsibility invocation*. A full correlation matrix can be obtained by contacting the first author.

## 3. Study 2

Because social influence does not occur in a vacuum, we sought to determine if those high on the Dark Triad traits varied their tactics of influence based on the target. We present individuals with four targets who they are told they need to get help from and assess the correlations between the Dark Triad and tactics of influence across these four targets.

### 3.1. Method

#### 3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 296 psychology students (45% male, 55% female) aged 18–59 years ( $M = 23.02$ ,  $SD = 5.84$ ) from the Southeastern US who received extra credit for completing the surveys described below. Participants were directed to a website via e-mail that described the study. If they consented to participate, they progressed through the measures discussed below. Upon completion, participants were thanked and debriefed.

#### 3.1.2. Measures

We again used the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen and scored it in the same way as Study 1. Items were averaged together to create indexes of narcissism ( $\alpha = .84$ ), Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = .78$ ), psychopathy ( $\alpha = .79$ ), and a single Dark Triad index of all three ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The three Dark Triad traits were positively intercorrelated ( $r_s = .34$ – $.67$ ,  $ps < .01$ ).

In addition to the Dark Triad, we used a brief measure of the Big Five—the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). It asks two questions for each trait. Participants were asked, for instance, how much (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*) they think of themselves as “extraverted, enthusiastic” and “quiet, reserved” (reverse scored) as measures of extraversion. Internal consistency was low, but respectable for two-item measures (Kline, 2000): extraversion ( $\alpha = .60$ ), agreeableness ( $\alpha = .41$ ), conscientiousness ( $\alpha = .43$ ), neuroticism ( $\alpha = .62$ ), and openness ( $\alpha = .27$ ).

Participants were asked what types of manipulation tactics they used when attempting to get help from four different types of individuals: *family member*, *opposite-sex friend*, *same-sex friend*, and a *stranger*. Before all but the stranger, participants were asked to type in the name of the person to enhance the manipulation's salience.

Tactics of social influence were measured and scored as in Study 1. Items were averaged within each section of the assessment of the manipulation tactics. Analyses returned good levels of internal consistency across the four target individuals to be manipulated ( $\alpha_s > .83$ ).

### 3.2. Results

Table 2 contains the correlations, Bonferroni-corrected for the increased Type 1 error ( $p < .0003$ ), between the Dark Triad and the use of manipulation tactics across each target. Two findings stood out. First, the correlations between the Dark Triad traits and social influence tactics were relatively insensitive to the target of manipulation. For instance, the Dark Triad composite was correlated with the adoption of all tactics of influence across all targets ( $r_s = .15$ – $.44$ ,  $ps < .05$ ). Second, it appears that when we control for shared variability among the traits, it is primarily Machiavellianism that accounted for variability in the adoption of numerous tactics of social influence, perhaps because Machiavellianism is characterized by an exploitive interpersonal style (Christie & Geis, 1970).

When we examined the correlations between the Dark Triad traits and the use of tactics of influence directed toward the four targets while controlling for both the Big Five traits and participants' sex, almost every correlation remained significant ( $pr_s = .12$ – $.43$ ,  $ps < .05$ ). Machiavellianism was significantly correlated with all forms of social influence for all targets ( $pr_s = .12$ – $.43$ ,  $ps < .05$ ). In the interest of space constraints, we list only those correlations that were not significant. In the context of family members, psychopathy was uncorrelated with the use of *coercion*, *responsibility invocation*, *the silent treatment*, *regression*, *debasement*, and *seduction*. Narcissism was uncorrelated with the use of *coercion*, *monetary reward*,

**Table 2**

Zero-order correlations (and standardized regression coefficients) for the three Dark Triad traits in predicting the use of 13 different influence tactics to influence four different target individuals.

Variable by target	$r(\beta)$		
	Psychopathy	Machiavellianism	Narcissism
<i>Coercion</i>			
Family member	.22*(.02)	.30*(.27 <sup>+</sup> )	.20(.04)
Opposite-sex friend	.20(.01)	.30*(.27 <sup>+</sup> )	.18(.03)
Same-sex friend	.21*(-.01)	.31*(.25 <sup>+</sup> )	.28*(.15 <sup>+</sup> )
Stranger	.22*(.08)	.27*(.21 <sup>+</sup> )	.13(-.01)
<i>Responsibility invocation</i>			
Family member	.12(-.09)	.26*(.24 <sup>+</sup> )	.25*(.15)
Opposite-sex friend	.01(-.13)	.19(.17)	.25*(.20 <sup>+</sup> )
Same-sex friend	.09(-.15)	.27*(.20)	.37*(.32 <sup>+</sup> )
Stranger	.14(.00)	.22*(.10)	.26*(.21 <sup>+</sup> )
<i>Hardball</i>			
Family member	.34*(.04)	.48*(.44 <sup>+</sup> )	.27*(.02)
Opposite-sex friend	.35*(.04)	.48*(.48 <sup>+</sup> )	.22*(-.05)
Same-sex friend	.29*(-.03)	.45*(.45 <sup>+</sup> )	.25*(.03)
Stranger	.33*(.12)	.40*(.28 <sup>+</sup> )	.26*(.07)
<i>Charm</i>			
Family member	.12(-.21 <sup>+</sup> )	.38*(.42 <sup>+</sup> )	.33*(.17)
Opposite-sex friend	.13(-.16)	.33*(.33 <sup>+</sup> )	.34*(.21 <sup>+</sup> )
Same-sex friend	.03(-.20)	.22(.25)	.25(.19)
Stranger	.14(-.14)	.32*(.27 <sup>+</sup> )	.37*(.28 <sup>+</sup> )
<i>Silent treatment</i>			
Family member	.18(-.09)	.35*(.40 <sup>+</sup> )	.20(.00)
Opposite-sex friend	.21*(.04)	.29*(.32 <sup>+</sup> )	.07(-.11)
Same-sex friend	.14(-.11)	.30*(.39 <sup>+</sup> )	.14(-.04)
Stranger	.24*(.10)	.28*(.20)	.15(.10)
<i>Regression</i>			
Family member	.16(-.17)	.37*(.42 <sup>+</sup> )	.28*(.10)
Opposite-sex friend	.06(-.17)	.24*(.29 <sup>+</sup> )	.22*(.13)
Same-sex friend	.18(.05)	.23*(.17)	.16(.05)
Stranger	.14(.10)	.22*(.17)	.15(.05)
<i>Reciprocity</i>			
Family member	.11(-.15)	.29*(.28 <sup>+</sup> )	.31*(.20)
Opposite-sex friend	.11(-.15)	.29*(.28 <sup>+</sup> )	.31*(.20)
Same-sex friend	.13(-.14)	.33*(.30 <sup>+</sup> )	.36*(.25 <sup>+</sup> )
Stranger	.17(-.05)	.31*(.28 <sup>+</sup> )	.24*(.11)
<i>Pleasure induction</i>			
Family member	.04(-.22 <sup>+</sup> )	.24*(.38 <sup>+</sup> )	.17(.04)
Opposite-sex friend	.04(-.22 <sup>+</sup> )	.24*(.38 <sup>+</sup> )	.17(.04)
Same-sex friend	.01(-.25 <sup>+</sup> )	.23*(.32 <sup>+</sup> )	.23*(.14)
Stranger	.08(-.16)	.26*(.23 <sup>+</sup> )	.31*(.25 <sup>+</sup> )
<i>Debasement</i>			
Family member	.16*(-.17)	.37*(.42 <sup>+</sup> )	.28*(.10)
Opposite-sex friend	.23*(-.05)	.39*(.44 <sup>+</sup> )	.17(-.05)
Same-sex friend	.15(.03)	.19(.21)	.05(-.08)
Stranger	.25*(.08)	.31*(.25 <sup>+</sup> )	.17(.01)
<i>Reason</i>			
Family member	-.00(-.20)	.17(.18)	.25*(.23 <sup>+</sup> )
Opposite-sex friend	.00(-.17)	.14(.16)	.20(.17)
Same-sex friend	.00(-.18)	.14(.15)	.24*(.23 <sup>+</sup> )
Stranger	.04(-.17)	.20(.16)	.29*(.11)
<i>Social comparison</i>			
Family member	.20(-.12)	.41*(.42 <sup>+</sup> )	.30*(.11)
Opposite-sex friend	.17(-.12)	.36*(.35 <sup>+</sup> )	.31*(.17)
Same-sex friend	.20(-.12)	.40*(.41 <sup>+</sup> )	.31*(.13)
Stranger	.16(-.08)	.32*(.31 <sup>+</sup> )	.25*(.11)
<i>Monetary reward</i>			
Family member	.14(-.07)	.27*(.33 <sup>+</sup> )	.11(-.05)
Opposite-sex friend	.09(-.13)	.25*(.24 <sup>+</sup> )	.18(.18)
Same-sex friend	.13(.04)	.23*(.31 <sup>+</sup> )	.05(-.10)
Stranger	.16(.04)	.22*(.22 <sup>+</sup> )	.07(-.06)
<i>Seduction</i>			
Family member	.15(.04)	.21*(.22 <sup>+</sup> )	.07(-.07)
Opposite-sex friend	.17(-.05)	.29*(.24 <sup>+</sup> )	.28*(.18)
Same-sex friend	.18*(-.01)	.27*(.26 <sup>+</sup> )	.17(.05)
Stranger	.22*(-.01)	.34*(.25 <sup>+</sup> )	.30*(.18)

\*  $p < .003$ .

and *seduction*. In the context of opposite-sex others, psychopathy was uncorrelated with the use of *coercion*, *responsibility invocation*, *the silent treatment*, *regression*, *social comparison*, and *monetary reward*. Narcissism was uncorrelated with use of *the silent treatment*. In the context of same-sex others, psychopathy was uncorrelated with the use of *coercion*, *responsibility invocation*, *charm*, *the silent treatment*, *regression*, *pleasure induction*, *debasement*, *social comparison*, *monetary reward*, and *seduction*. Narcissism was uncorrelated with the use of *regression*, *debasement*, and *monetary reward*. In the context of strangers, psychopathy was uncorrelated with the use of *the silent treatment*, *regression*, *pleasure induction*, *debasement*, *social comparison*, and *monetary reward*. Narcissism was uncorrelated with the use of *monetary reward*. Importantly, this suggests the social influence tactics correlations for Machiavellianism were robust to controlling for sex and personality, for narcissism less so, and for psychopathy even less so. One might conclude that Machiavellianism is particularly strongly correlated with tactics of social influence, whereas psychopathy is not. Again, a full correlation matrix can be obtained by contacting the first author.

#### 4. Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 suggest that people with high scores on the Dark Triad might use a range of social influence tactics to manipulate others. Nevertheless, social influence is a goal-oriented behavior and those who score high on the Dark Triad traits may have different goals. In Study 3, after completing the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen, participants were asked to choose one tactic of influence when attempting to solve some adaptive problems. By forcing individuals to make choices, we hoped to reveal default tactics for different adaptive tasks across targets.

##### 4.1. Method

###### 4.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 268 psychology students (45% male, 55% female) aged 18–58 years ( $M = 21.19$ ,  $SD = 5.41$ ) from the Southeastern US who received partial course credit for their participation. Participants were directed to a website through an online research participation management system that described the study. If they consented to participate, they progressed through the measures discussed below. Participants completed the Dark Triad measure, read definitions of the manipulation tactics, and then reported their pick of 13 tactics of manipulation to achieve four adaptive goals. After completing demographic items, participants were thanked and debriefed.

###### 4.1.2. Measures

The Dark Triad Dirty Dozen was used and scored in the same manner as Studies 1 and 2. Items were averaged together to create indexes of narcissism (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ), Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = .85$ ), psychopathy ( $\alpha = .75$ ), and a single Dark Triad index of all three ( $\alpha = .91$ ). The three Dark Triad traits were positively inter-correlated ( $r_s = .55-.72$ ,  $p_s < .01$ ).

Participants chose one tactic—in a forced-choice manner—from 13 social influence tactics and were provided with a definition of each tactic (Buss, 1992). They made their choices in relation to the question of solving one of four adaptive goals (Kenrick et al., 2002): *coalition formation*, *self-protection*, *status-seeking*, and *mate-acquisition/retention*.<sup>1</sup> The definitions used are available upon request but were based on those used by Kenrick et al. (2002). Both tactics and goals were presented in a random order. Participants

read the description of a goal and then had to choose a tactic of social influence. Participants responded as if they were dealing with the same four targets as in Study 2. For instance, participants were given the instructions: “In order to achieve each goal below you have to enlist the help of a STRANGER. Select the manipulation<sup>2</sup> tactic you would use to get that person to help you”.

##### 4.2. Results

We first determined which of the 13 tactics was chosen most frequently (nearly 50% of the time or above) for each target for each goal, recoding them with a “1” and all other choices with a “0”. This was done to streamline analyses from having 13 categorical levels to just two for our dependent variable. Thus, we conducted a series of 16 binary logistic multiple regressions, one for each of four adaptive goals for each of four types of interpersonal relationships. In Table 3, we summarize the results of these regressions along with point-biserial correlations. First, those high on Machiavellianism used *charm* to build coalitions among same-sex friends. Second, those high on narcissism used *reason* to build social status among same-sex friends. Third, those high on psychopathy used *seduction* to get opposite-sex friends to help them find mates and *charm* to get same-sex friends to help them find mates.

#### 5. General discussion

If we treat the Dark Triad traits as part of a cheater strategy (Jonason et al., 2009; Mealey, 1995), then we are forced to deal with the question, how does one successfully implement such a strategy? That is, in the face of sophisticated cheater-detection mechanisms, how can one characterized by high levels of these traits successfully navigate a world looking to punish them? Most research on cheater-detection focuses on how individuals detect cheaters as opposed to how cheaters avoid detection. In three studies, we provided considerable empirical evidence to answer this question.

We showed the manner in which those high on the Dark Triad traits might be characterized as protean (Driver & Humphries, 1988). By being unpredictable through having a variety of tactics at one's disposal, repeated efforts of social influence may be less detectable by those being influenced. Importantly, we found that each trait provides for a variety of tactics of social influence, creating a veritable toolbox of means to manipulate others. If individuals seek out patterns in the environment to predict events, having multiple tactics may reduce predictability. However, this protean approach has its limits. While individuals high on these traits may modulate their choice of tactics of influence, their choice of tactic seems insensitive to the relationship with the target. This may be because those high on the Dark Triad are unable to understand others (Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009) and thus use a “whatever-it-takes” approach to social influence (Gunthorsdottir et al., 2002). That is, those high on the Dark Triad traits may have a standard-yet-varied toolkit for social influence they deploy on everyone.

There were some limitations with our measures. All our measures were brief, self-report personality inventories completed by American undergraduates. We may have relied too heavily on the Dirty Dozen measure, but did so to provide consistency across our studies. In contrast, the TIPI had questionable internal consistency, but because our goal was to control for variance associated with the Big Five (vs. being interested in the Big Five per se), low levels of internal consistency are tolerable (Jonason, Valentine, Li,

<sup>1</sup> We did not include the goal of offspring care because we assumed a student population would have few parents.

<sup>2</sup> In the Informed Consent, participants were told to treat “manipulation” to be a synonym of “social influence”.

**Table 3**

Zero-order point-biserial correlations (and logistic multiple regression odds ratios) for the three Dark Triad traits predicting the use of the most frequently selected influence tactic for each of four adaptive behaviors for each of four target individuals.

Coalition formation	Most frequent tactic used	$r_{pb}$ (odds ratio)		
		Psychopathy	Machiavellianism	Narcissism
Family member	Charm	-.15*(0.62)	-.03(0.59)	-.01(1.31)
Opposite-sex friend	Charm	-.09(0.65)	.01(0.99)	.09(1.46)
Same-sex friend	Charm	-.15*(0.32)	.07(2.58**)	.07(0.89)
Stranger	Charm	-.03(0.79)	-.01(0.93)	.04(1.41)
<i>Self-protection</i>				
Family member	Reason	-.02(1.26)	-.10(0.65)	-.07(1.00)
Opposite-sex friend	Reason	-.00(1.05)	-.02(0.31)	.03(1.25)
Same-sex friend	Reason	-.01(1.01)	-.10(0.81)	-.09(0.94)
Stranger	Hardball	-.04(0.77)	.01(0.97)	.04(1.31)
<i>Status-seeking</i>				
Family member	Charm	-.01(0.87)	.05(1.10)	.05(1.17)
Opposite-sex friend	Charm	.04(1.08)	.08(1.19)	.05(0.99)
Same-sex friend	Reason	-.03(1.49)	-.11(1.26)	-.03(0.45*)
Stranger	Charm	.08(-1.23)	.09(0.99)	.07(1.31)
<i>Mate-acquisition/retention</i>				
Family member	Seduction	-.14*(0.55)	.07(0.83)	.01(1.32)
Opposite-sex friend	Seduction	-.07(0.51**)	.06(1.28)	.08(1.41)
Same-sex friend	Charm	-.12*(0.43**)	-.07(1.04)	-.02(1.29)
Stranger	Seduction	-.05(0.76)	-.03(1.17)	.01(0.99)

\*  $p < .05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

& Harbeson, 2011). Nevertheless, our results need to be verified with longer, more exhaustive measures of both the Big Five and the Dark Triad.

All three studies utilized college students which, although customary in personality research, might have been a W.E.I.R.D. (i.e., Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) population. Rates of the Dark Triad might be higher in some professions (e.g., used car salesmen, politicians) as well as in academic programs that might thrive on having individuals who are high on these traits (e.g., MBA or law school students). The use of college students may lead to conclusions that more accurately reflect the general population. Therefore, assessing special populations may reveal stronger context specific correlations between the Dark Triad and numerous interpersonal and intrapersonal outcomes.

In the spirit of recent efforts to revitalize behavioral measures in personality and social psychology (Baumeister, Vohs, & Funder, 2007), we *did* manage to include a “behavioroid” measure in that we asked participants to make a forced-choice regarding which social influence tactic might best accomplish a specific adaptive goal (Study 3). However, the choice made may be a function of the attractiveness of the option and may not necessarily reflect a real-world choice. The self-report nature of the data is not the primary problem here but, instead, the hypothetical scenarios. In the absence of *en vivo* interactions, asking people what behavior they would do in hypothetical scenarios should be sufficient.

We drew upon tactics reported in past work (Buss, 1992). These tactics were uncovered through a series of act-frequency studies and therefore, can, be more trusted as tactics of influence than the one we generated on our own (i.e., *seduction*). Results in Studies 1 and 3 seem completely reasonable in terms of *seduction*; those high on Machiavellianism used this tactic to manipulate others in general, whereas those high on psychopathy appeared to use this tactic to manipulate opposite-sex friends. In Study 2, it appears individuals might use seduction to influence family members; however, we do not place much confidence in this correlation because it was the smallest correlation that we observed for this tactic.

The current studies assessed how individual differences in the Dark Triad traits may facilitate people's exploitive social styles—or “cheater strategies”—across multiple targets and adaptive goals. The present research combines personality and social psychology

to better understand how Dark Triad individuals enact their fast life history strategy. For example, although Bernard Madoff may spend the rest of his life in prison, one could argue that the lavish lifestyle he enjoyed by exploiting others may have been well worth it to him at the time permitting him to have children and grandchildren.

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