**Dark Triad Traits and Romantic Relationship Attachment, Accommodation, and Control**

The current studies investigated the influence of Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) on women’s romantic relationships. For Study 1, women (*N* = 122) completed the Mach IV, Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale, NPI-16, and Experiences in Close Relationships Revised Questionnaire. High secondary psychopathy and low narcissism predicted higher levels of attachment anxiety. High Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, and secondary psychopathy each predicted higher attachment avoidance. For Study 2, women (*N* = 265) completed Dark Triad trait measures and the Accommodation Scale. Machiavellianism predicted lower active or passive constructive responses to a partner’s destructive (or potentially destructive) behavior and lower active destructive responses. Primary psychopathy predicted greater active and passive destructive behavior whereas secondary psychopathy predicted lower active constructive responses. For Study 3, women (*N* = 240) completed Dark Triad trait measures and the Interpersonal Violence Control Scale. Secondary psychopathy was associated with increased levels of each form of control (control through surveillance and threats, control over everyday routines and decision making, and control over autonomous behavior). Machiavellianism and primary psychopathy also predicted increased control over autonomous behavior.

Keywords: Dark Triad; Machiavellianism; Psychopathy; Narcissism; Attachment; Accommodation; Control; Relationships

**1.0 Introduction**

Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) are related but distinct traits characterized by a lack of empathy, exploitation, and manipulation. Previous research has documented the extent to which Dark Triad traits influence sexual and romantic relationships. For example, those with higher levels of Dark Triad traits prefer short-term relationships and avoid relationship commitment (Jonason & Buss, 2012; Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012). The current studies further investigate the influence of Dark Triad traits on romantic relationship dynamics. In particular, Dark Triad traits are considered in relation to attachment, accommodation, and partner control, each of which are related to wellbeing and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Lo, Lin, Gagliese, Zimmermann, Mikulincer, & Rodin, 2010).

*Attachment Anxiety and Avoidance*

Early attachments influence the ability to form and maintain successful relationships during adulthood. In particular, internal working models inform perceptions of the self (e.g., deserving of love), others (e.g., likely to be supportive), and relationships between others and the self. Insecure attachments are characterised by anxiety and avoidance. Attachment anxiety is associated with stronger reactions to perceived romantic rejection (Besser & Priel, 2009), overestimation of relationship threats and underestimation of the partner’s commitment (Collins, 1996), and greater distress in response to partner criticism or conflict (Overall, Girme, Lemay, & Hammond, 2014). Attachment avoidance is associated with discomfort when dependent on others. Those with high levels of attachment avoidance prefer emotional and psychological independence (Hazan & Shaver, 1994) and dislike emotional and physical intimacy (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998).

Narcissism is characterised by an elevated sense of self-worth and entitlement (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1981) and overconfidence (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004). Furthermore, those high on narcissism are less likely to doubt their partner’s commitment (Foster & Campbell, 2005). However, those high on narcissism are also sensitive to interpersonal rejection (Besser & Priel, 2010) and more likely to engage in behavior intended to prevent relationship dissolution (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010). Hence, the relationship between narcissism and attachment anxiety remains unclear. Machiavellianism is associated with a lack of faith in humanity and the belief that others are manipulative (Abell, Brewer, Qualter, Austin, 2016); hence those high in Machiavellianism prefer emotionally detached relationships (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010) and low levels of relationship commitment (Jonason & Buss, 2012). Psychopathy is related to reduced relationship exclusivity (Khan, Brewer, Kim, & Munoz Centifanti, 2017) and callous, self-centred behavior (Hare, 1996). Therefore, women high on Machiavellianism and psychopathy were predicted to display attachment avoidance.

*Accommodation*

Destructive or potentially destructive behaviors are a frequent feature of poor quality romantic relationships. The manner in which the partner responds to the potentially destructive behavior is important. Accommodation refers to the tendency to inhibit destructive impulses in response to a partner’s potentially destructive behavior in favour of a constructive response (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). The use of constructive responses is associated with relationship trust (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), intimacy (Overall & Sibley, 2008), satisfaction and commitment (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986) whereas destructive responses may further harm a relationship (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). Constructive responses are particularly beneficial when active rather than passive (Overall, Sibley, Travaglia, 2010). Rubult and Zembrodt (1983) identify four potential responses to a partner’s behaviour, which vary according to two dimensions; destructive versus constructive and active versus passive.

Exit refers to actively harming the relationship (e.g., threatening to leave); voice reflects actively trying to improve the situation (e.g., discussing relationship issues); loyalty is defined as passively but optimistically waiting for the situation to improve (e.g., waiting for conflict to pass); and neglect refers to passively allowing the relationship to deteriorate (e.g., refusing to discuss relationship difficulties). The present study investigated accommodation in romantic relationships which may require self-control and the ability to consider the consequences of constructive or destructive behavior. Women high on psychopathy, characterised by cold callous behavior (Hare, 1996) and the use of criticism and contempt during partner conflict (Horan, Guinn, & Banghart, 2015) were predicted to engage in more destructive behavior. Women high on Machiavellianism, associated with stonewalling (i.e. withdrawal from interaction) during partner conflict (Horan, Guinn, & Banghart, 2015) and the use of avoidance / withdrawal when terminating relationships (Brewer & Abell, 2017), were predicted to be less responsive to their partner.

*Relationship Control*

Intimate partner violence may encompass a range of physically, psychologically, sexually, or financially abusive behaviors (Coker, Smith, McKeown, & King, 2000). Though research and policy often focus on physically abusive acts, psychological abuse negatively impacts on physical and mental health (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000; Straight, Harper, & Arias, 2003; Tiwari et al. 2008). In particular, controlling behavior forms an important aspect of intimate partner violence (Felson & Messner, 2000). The present study investigated women’s desire for control over their partner. Based on the emotionally distant, exploitative, and manipulative interpersonal style which characterises Machiavellianism and psychopathy, the increased anger and acceptance of violent behavior displayed by those high on narcissism (Blinkhorn, Lyons, & Almond, 2016; Papps & O’Carroll, 1998), and previous research indicating a relationship between Dark Triad traits and partner violence (e.g., Brewer & Abell, 2017; Carton & Egan, 2017), we predicted women high on each Dark Triad trait would be more likely to engage in controlling relationship behavior.

Therefore, Study 1 investigated the influence of Dark Triad traits on attachment anxiety and avoidance. Study 2 investigated the extent to which Dark Triad traits predicted exit (active destructive); voice (active constructive); loyalty (passive constructive); neglect (passive destructive) responses to a partner’s destructive (or perceived destructive) behavior. Study 3 investigated the influence of Dark Triad traits on controlling behavior (control through surveillance and threats; control over everyday routines and decision making; and control over autonomous behavior). Dark triad traits, relationship outcomes, and associations between dark triad traits and relationship outcomes display important sex differences (e.g. Jonason, Lyons, Bethell, & Ross, 2013; Jones & Weiser, 2014; Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). In addition, the need for additional research investigating dark triad traits and female relationships has been noted (Carter, Campbell, & Muncer, 2014). Hence, the present studies focused on the manner in which Dark Triad traits influence female relationships only.

**2.0 Study 1 Method**

*2.1 Participants*

Heterosexual women (*N* = 122) aged 20 – 45 years (*M* = 24.06, *SD* = 4.82) were recruited online and from the campus of a British University. All participants were in a romantic relationship of at least 3 months duration at the time of the study. Average relationship length was 3 years and 6 months.

*2.2 Materials and Procedure*

Participants completed initial demographic questions followed by the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), NPI-16 (Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006), and Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995). Questionnaires were completed online (via social networking sites or websites promoting participation in online research) or offline at a British university campus. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and questionnaires were completed anonymously. Participants were not paid for their time.

The Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) is a 20 item measure of Machiavellianism. Items are rated on a 7 point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The scale assesses interactions with others, morality, and cynicism. Example items include “*Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble*”. Ten items are reverse coded. The NPI-16 (Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006) is a 16 item measure of narcissism, comprised of items selected from the larger NPI-40 (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Participants are presented with 16 statement pairs and select the statement which most accurately relates to their own feelings. Example items include “*I prefer to blend in with the crowd*” vs “*I like to be the centre of attention*”. Narcissistic responses are coded as 1 and non-narcissistic responses are coded as 0.

The Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995) contains 26 items (7 reverse coded) and is intended for use with non-institutionalised samples. The scale is separated into the primary psychopathy subscale (16 items) assessing manipulative, selfish, and uncaring traits and the secondary psychopathy subscale (10 items) measuring anti-social behavior. Example items include “*For me, what’s right is whatever I can get away with*” (primary psychopathy) and “*I have been in a lot of shouting matches with other people*” (secondary psychopathy). Items are rated on a 7 point scale (1 = *disagree strongly* to 7 = *agree strongly*). Participants also completed the Experiences in Close Relationships Revised Questionnaire (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The questionnaire is a 36 item measure of attachment related anxiety. The questionnaire contains two subscales; attachment related anxiety and attachment related avoidance. Participants respond to statements on a 5 point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree).* Example items include *“I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love*” (attachment related anxiety) and “*I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners*” (attachment related avoidance).

Dark Triad measure reliabilities were: Machiavellianism: α = .77; narcissism: α = .84; primary psychopathy: α = .94; secondary psychopathy α = .91. Attachment reliabilities were: attachment related anxiety: α = .94; attachment related avoidance: α = .96.

**3.0 Study 1 Results**

Two stage multiple hierarchical regressions were conducted to determine whether the Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, primary psychopathy, secondary psychopathy) predicted attachment anxiety whilst controlling for participant age and relationship length.

The regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length did not contribute significantly to the attachment anxiety regression model, *F* (2,117) = .87, *p* = .423. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained 42.1% of variation in attachment anxiety and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 113) = 21.05, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, secondary psychopathy (*B* = .62, *t* = 6.15, *p* < .001) and narcissism (*B* = -.22, *t* = -2.33, *p* = .021) were the only significant individual predictors of attachment anxiety.

The second regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length did not contribute significantly to the attachment avoidance regression model, *F* (2,117) = .78, *p* = .46. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained 64.4% of variation in attachment avoidance and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 113) = 53.12, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, Machiavellianism (*B* = .17, *t* = 2.29, *p* = .024), primary psychopathy (*B* = .24, *t* = 2.49, *p* = .014), and secondary psychopathy (*B* = .50, *t* = 6.35, *p* < .001) were the only significant individual predictors of attachment avoidance.

**4.0 Study 1 Discussion**

Women high on Machiavellianism were more likely to report attachment avoidance (i.e., a preference for independence and discomfort when dependent on others) than those with low levels of Machiavellianism. Findings are consistent with previous research indicating that Machiavellianism is associated with greater discomfort with emotional closeness or dependence (Inancsi, Lang, & Bereczkei, 2015) and a lower need for affiliation (Brewer, Abell, & Lyons, 2016). Machiavellianism is associated with cynicism and distrust (Christie & Geis, 1970) and women with high levels of Machiavellianism are more likely to report that others use manipulation towards them (Abell, et al., 2016). Hence, rather than a source of comfort or support, relationships are perceived to present a risk of exploitation and are avoided.

Primary psychopathy was also associated with attachment avoidance. Primary psychopathy is characterised by callous, self-centred behavior, and emotional coldness (Hare, 1996). Hence, those with primary psychopathy are less likely to form close personal relationships or find these rewarding and prefer lower levels of relationship exclusivity (Khan, Brewer, Kim, & Munoz Centifanti, 2017). Those with high levels of secondary psychopathy were more likely to report attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance than those with low levels of the trait. Attachment anxiety (associated with overestimation of relationship threats) may reflect the positive relationship between secondary psychopathy and the ability to perceive and experience negative affect (Del Gaizo & Falkenbach, 2008). Avoidance and discomfort with intimacy and dependence may reflect a more impulsive interpersonal style and lower interest in relationship security.

Findings indicate that women with high levels of narcissism were less likely to report attachment anxiety. Though narcissistic entitlement is associated with willingness to seek retribution (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004), and aggression in response to provocation (Rasmussen, 2016) or social rejection (Twenge, & Campbell, 2003), narcissism is characterised by an elevated sense of self-worth and entitlement (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1981). Hence, women with high levels of narcissism may be less likely to perceive relationship threats and underestimate a partner’s commitment which characterise attachment anxiety (Collins, 1996). Findings enhance our understanding of the relationship between Dark Triad traits and perceptions of close personal relationships. Future research should consider the extent to which attachment anxiety and avoidance influence the relationship between Dark Triad traits and important relationship outcomes (e.g. relationship satisfaction or dissolution).

**5.0 Study 2 Method**

*5.1 Participants*

Heterosexual women (*N* = 265) aged 16 – 65 years (*M* = 24.59, *SD* = 8.62) were recruited online and from the campus of a British University. All participants were in a romantic relationship of at least 3 months duration at the time of the study. Average relationship length was 3 years and 8 months.

*5.2 Materials and Procedure*

Participants completed initial demographic questions followed by the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), NPI-16 (Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006), Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995), and Accommodation Scale (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). The Dark Triad measures are described in section 2.2. Questionnaires were completed offline at a British university campus or online via social networking sites or research websites. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation and questionnaires were completed anonymously. Women were not paid for participation.

The Accommodation Scale (Rusbult, et al. 1991) is a 16 item measure of responses to relationship difficulties. Items are rated on a 9 point scale (0 = *never do this* to 8 = *constantly do this*). The scale contains four subscales: exit (active destructive); voice (active constructive); loyalty (passive constructive); neglect (passive destructive). Example items include “*When my partner lies to me about something, I feel so angry I storm out of the room*” (exit) and “*When my partner makes fun of me, I talk to my partner about why this is upsetting*” (voice). Higher scores indicate greater levels of each Dark Triad trait measured (Machiavellianism, narcissism, primary and secondary psychopathy) and response to relationship difficulties (exit, voice, loyalty, neglect).

Dark Triad measure reliabilities were: Machiavellianism: α = .76; narcissism: α = .61; primary psychopathy: α = .85; secondary psychopathy α = .66. Conflict reliabilities were: exit: α = .63; voice: α = .55; loyalty: α = .73; neglect: α = .65.

**6.0 Study 2 Results**

Two stage multiple hierarchical regressions were conducted to determine whether the Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, secondary psychopathy, narcissism) predicted exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect whilst controlling for age and relationship length.

The first regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length contributed significantly to the model, *F* (2,248) = 4.36, *p* = .014, and accounted for 3.4% of the variation in exit behavior. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained a further 13.5% of variation in exit behavior and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 244) = 9.94, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, age (*B* = -.19, *t* = -2.22, *p* = .027), Machiavellianism (*B* = -.50, *t* = -5.59, *p* < .001), and primary psychopathy (*B* = .20, *t* = 2.18, *p* = .030) were the only significant individual predictors of exit behavior.

The second regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length did not contribute significantly to voice, *F* (2,246) = 1.41, *p* = .245. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained 26.3% of variation in voice and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 242) = 21.96, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, Machiavellianism (*B* = -.36, *t* = -4.22, *p* < .001) and secondary psychopathy (*B* = -.23, *t* = -3.24, *p* = .001) were the only significant individual predictors of voice.

The third regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length did not contribute significantly to loyalty, *F* (2,248) = 2.99, *p* = .052. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained 14.1% of variation in loyalty and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 244) = 10.27, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, age (*B* = -.22, *t* = 2.67, *p* = .008) and Machiavellianism (*B* = -.34, *t* = -3.72, *p* < .001) were the only significant individual predictors of loyalty.

The fourth regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length contributed significantly to the model, *F* (2,246) = 5.53, *p* = .004, and accounted for 4.3% of the variation in neglect. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained a further 18.1% of variation in neglect and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 242) = 14.14, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, primary psychopathy (*B* = .48, *t* = 5.41, *p* < .001) was the only significant individual predictors of neglect behavior.

**7.0 Study 2 Discussion**

Study 2 indicates that Dark Triad traits influence both constructive and destructive responses to a partner’s potentially destructive behavior. Specifically, those with high levels of Machiavellianism were less likely to respond to their partner’s potentially destructive behavior with active constructive (voice), passive constructive (loyalty), or active destructive (exit) behavior. Machiavellianism is characterised by a willingness to manipulate and exploit others (Christie & Geis, 1970). Therefore, women may choose to remain in the relationship (lower exit), but distance themselves from the partner (lower loyalty) in order to increase opportunities for exploitation and manipulation. In this context, active constructive responses (voice) would be counterproductive and could alert the partner to their lack of satisfaction and commitment. Indeed, as those with high levels of Machiavellianism exploit others in order to achieve their goals, they may be particularly dependent on the extent to which they appear trustworthy or genuine which may result in a reluctance to engage in confrontation or conflict

Women high on primary psychopathy were more likely to report active destructive (exit) or passive destructive (neglect) behavior. Findings are consistent with previous research indicating that primary psychopathy predicts defection in low-value relationships (Gervais, Kline, Ludmer, George, & Manson, 2013) and is associated with experiencing positive affect from sad stimuli (Ali, Amorim, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2009). Those with high levels of secondary psychopathy were less likely to respond in an active constructive (voice) manner to a partner’s potentially destructive behavior. Voicing dissatisfaction in a constructive manner implies self-control and restraint, inconsistent with the impulsivity which characterises secondary psychopathy (Dean et al. 2013).

Narcissism did not influence the tendency to respond to a partner with constructive or destructive behavior, consistent with previous research indicating that Machiavellianism and psychopathy are better predictors of the intensity and hostility of romantic partner conflict than narcissism (Horan, Guinn, & Banghart, 2015). In part, this may reflect the inflated self-worth which characterises narcissism, and a belief that their partner should be the person to apologise or make adjustments. Future research may consider different forms of narcissism such as hypersensitive narcissism which may be more responsive to a partner’s destructive behavior (e.g., Hendin & Cheek, 1997).

**8.0 Study 3 Method**

*8.1 Participants*

Heterosexual women (*N* = 240) aged 18 – 62 years (*M* = 29.99, *SD* = 10.81) were recruited online and from the campus of a British University. All participants were in a romantic relationship of at least 3 months duration at the time of the study. Average relationship length was 5 years and 7 months.

*8.2 Materials and Procedure*

Participants completed initial demographic questions followed by the Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970), NPI-16 (Ames, Rose & Anderson, 2006), and Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995). Dark Triad measures are described in section 2.2. Questionnaires were completed either offline at a British university campus or online via research websites or social networking sites. Women provided informed consent prior to participation and questionnaires were completed anonymously. Women were not paid for participation.

Participants also completed the Interpersonal Violence Control Scale (Bledsoe & Sar, 2011). The scale is a 16 item measure of desired control. The measure contains three subscales: control through surveillance and threats; control over everyday routines and decision making; and control over autonomous behavior. Participants respond to statements such as “*I wish I had more control of how my partner spends the day*” on a five point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). In the present study one item (“*I wish sometimes that I could take the children away from my partner to get her to go along with things*”) was removed from the control through surveillance and threats subscale, as not all participants were expected to be parents.

Dark Triad measure reliabilities were: Machiavellianism: α = .75; narcissism: α = .72; primary psychopathy: α = .85; secondary psychopathy α = .74. Relationship control reliabilities were: control through surveillance and threats: α = .81; control over everyday routines and decision making: α = .66; control over autonomous behavior: α = .68.

**9.0 Study 3 Results**

Two stage multiple hierarchical regressions were conducted to determine whether the Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, secondary psychopathy, narcissism) predicted relationship control whilst controlling for age and relationship length.

The first regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length contributed significantly to the model, *F* (2,214) = 4.69, *p* = .010, and accounted for 4.2% of the variation in use of surveillance and threats. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained a further 17.4% of variation in surveillance and threat behavior and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (2, 210) = 11.64, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model secondary psychopathy (*B* = .33, *t* = 4.50, *p* < .001) was the only significant individual predictor of surveillance and threat behavior.

The second regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length contributed significantly to the model, *F* (2,214) = 4.75, *p* = .010, and accounted for 4.3% of the variation in desired control over everyday routines and decision making. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained a further 13.8% of variation in everyday routines and decision making and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 210) = 8.87, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, age (*B* = -.20, *t* = -2.22, *p* < .028), relationship length (*B* = .26, *t* = 2.96, *p* = .003), and secondary psychopathy (*B* = .30, *t* = 4.03, *p* < .001) were the only significant individual predictors of desired control over everyday routines and decision making.

The third regression revealed that at stage one, age and relationship length did not contribute significantly to the autonomous behavior regression model, *F* (2,214) = 1.20, *p* = .305. Inclusion of the Dark Triad trait variables at stage two explained 10.9% of variation in control over autonomous behavior and this change in R2 was significant, *F* (4, 210) = 6.49, *p* < .001. When all six predictor variables (age, relationship length, and Dark Triad traits) were entered in stage two of the regression model, Machiavellianism (*B* = .24, *t* = 2.56, *p* = .011), primary psychopathy (*B* = .32, *t* = 3.31, *p* = .001), and secondary psychopathy (*B* = .23, *t* = -2.99, *p* = .003) were the only significant individual predictors of desired control over autonomous behavior.

**10.0 Study 3 Discussion**

Women with high levels of secondary psychopathy were more likely to engage in each form of partner control investigated (surveillance and threats, everyday decision making, autonomous behavior). Secondary psychopathy is positively associated with the ability to perceive and experience negative affect (Del Gaizo & Falkenbach, 2008) and the propensity to act in an impulsive manner in order to lower negative affect (Anestis, Anestis, & Joiner, 2009). Women with high levels of secondary psychopathy may therefore be more likely to engage in controlling behavior in response to perceived relationship difficulties without considering the negative consequences of relationship control. Indeed previous research indicates a relationship between secondary psychopathy and partner violence (Bates, Archer, & Graham-Kevan, 2017). Willingness to behave in this manner may be exacerbated by the low future time orientation (Bjornebekk & Gjesme, 2009) and empathy deficits (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010) associated with secondary psychopathy.

Women with high levels of Machiavellianism and primary psychopathy were also more likely to report a desire for control over a partner’s autonomous behavior. Findings are consistent with previous research relating Machiavellianism to emotional abuse and control over a partner’s autonomous behavior (Brewer & Abell, 2017). Previous research has also demonstrated a relationship between primary psychopathy and partner violence (Mager, Bresin, & Verona, 2014). Indeed psychopathy is associated with lower levels of conciliatory behavior after partner violence perpetration (LaMotte, Remington, Rezac, & Murphy, 2016). Narcissism did not influence the use of relationship control. This may reflect the overconfidence (Campbell, Goodie, & Foster, 2004) and elevated sense of self-worth and entitlement (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1981) which characterise narcissism. Furthermore, when feeling threatened, those high on narcissism may attempt to induce jealousy rather than seek to control their partner (Tortoriello, Hart, Richardson, & Tullett, 2017). Findings contribute to the relative paucity of research investigating female perpetration of partner violence though additional research should be conducted to investigate the behavior of each member of the relationship dyad.

**11.0 General Discussion**

The present studies indicate that Dark Triad traits influence relationship attachment, accommodation, and control. Women with high levels of Machiavellianism displayed increased attachment avoidance, lower active destructive (exit), active constructive (voice), passive constructive (loyalty) responses to a partner’s perceived destructive behavior, and greater control over autonomous behavior. Machiavellianism is characterised by cynicism, distrust, and emotional detachment (Christie & Geis, 1970). Indeed, women high on Machiavellianism perceive others to manipulate them (Abell, et al., 2016) and are less committed to relationship partners (Brewer & Abell, 2017). Close personal attachments may therefore be viewed with suspicion, as women high on Machiavellianism expect others to exploit and manipulate them. Attachment avoidance and emotional detachment may influence other relationship dynamics. The lack of responsiveness to their partner’s destructive behavior reported by women high on Machiavellianism is consistent with previous research indicating that avoidant spouses perceive themselves to be less responsive during conflict (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeVito, Powers, & Boyle, 2014). Machiavellianism predicted desired control over a partner’s autonomous behavior, consistent with previous research indicating a relationship between Machiavellianism and controlling behavior (Brewer & Abell, 2017). Machiavellianism is characterised by manipulation and a willingness to exploit others in order to achieve a goal. Control may facilitate this form of exploitation though additional research is required to establish the manner in which control facilitates this behavior.

Women with high levels of primary psychopathy reported increased attachment avoidance, increased active (exit) and passive (neglect) destructive responses to a partner’s destructive behavior, and increased control over autonomous behavior. The preference for emotional and psychological independence (Hazan & Shaver, 1994) and dislike of emotional and physical intimacy (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) which characterise attachment avoidance are consistent with the emotional detachment and self-centred behavior displayed by those high on primary psychopathy. Findings are not in agreement with previous research indicating that primary psychopathy influences the attachment of men only (Savard, Brassard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2015) and future research should consider the relationship between women’s primary psychopathy and attachment further. Engagement in active or passive destructive behavior in response to a partner’s destructive behavior is consistent with previous research demonstrating that psychopathy is associated with a lack of empathy and schadenfreude (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody, & Scrutton, 2014; Lee & Lee, 2016). These may also contribute to the desire for control over a partner’s autonomous behavior.

Secondary psychopathy is associated with increased attachment anxiety and avoidance, lower active constructive (voice) responses to a partner’s destructive behavior, and increased relationship control (surveillance and threats, everyday routines and decision making, and autonomous behavior). Findings are consistent with previous research indicating that secondary psychopathy influences the attachment anxiety and avoidance in women (Savard, Brassard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2015). Reluctance to engage in active constructive behavior may reflect the impulsivity, antisocial behavior, and risky decision making which characterise secondary psychopathy (Dean et al. 2013). These traits may impede a controlled or constructive response during conflict. Of the relationship behaviors considered, secondary psychopathy was most closely associated with controlling behavior. Previous research has demonstrated the relationship between psychopathy and partner violence (e.g., Carton & Egan, 2017; Kiire, 2017). The present findings indicate that secondary psychopathy has a greater impact than primary psychopathy on partner control and suggest that future research should differentiate between each form of psychopathy.

Women high on narcissism were less likely to report attachment anxiety. This may reflect an inflated self-worth and belief that they are able to attract alternative partners if required (Emmons, 1984; Raskin & Hall, 1981). Narcissism did not predict responses to a partner’s destructive behavior. This may appear inconsistent with previous research demonstrating greater willingness to seek retribution and lower forgiveness (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). Responses may however depend on the type of conflict, with greater responsiveness to perceived disrespect rather than general conflict. Narcissism was not related to partner control. Women high on narcissism may believe that their partner would not wish to become unfaithful or terminate the relationship and hence not feel the need to control their partner’s behavior. Indeed those high on narcissism find it relatively easy to identify the reasons for their partner’s commitment but difficult to report why their partner might be less committed (Foster & Campbell, 2005). Further, those high on narcissism are less likely to remain faithful to their partner (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Hunyady, Josephs, & Jost, 2008) and may believe that they are able to replace the partner with relative ease, thus reducing reliance on the current mate (Campbell, Foster, & Finkel, 2002). Future research may further differentiate between specific aspects of narcissism or employ context specific measures of narcissism (e.g., McNulty & Widman, 2014).

***Limitations and Future Research***

Data were limited to heterosexual women with age and relationship length controlled in statistical analyses. Dark Triad traits display age, sex, and cultural variation (e.g., Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003). Similarly age, sex, sexual orientation, and relationship length influence relationship dynamics (e.g., Ahmetoglu, Swami, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Goldberg & Meyer, 2013; Okutan, Buyuksahin Sunal, & Sakalli Ugurlu, 2017), and Dark Triad traits may relate differently to the behavior of men and women (Savard, Brassard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 2015). Future research should consider the extent to which findings may be extrapolated to other populations or relationship types. Subsequent studies may also employ domain specific measures or those which consider more complex aspects of each trait, for example measures of hypersensitive narcissism (e.g., Hendin & Cheek, 1997). Consistent with previous research in the area, the present studies were reliant on self-report questionnaire data from one member of the relationship only. Hence future research may obtain data from each partner. To reduce the impact of bias or poor recall, all participants were in an established relationship at the time of the study and answered questions in relation to their current partner. Future research may benefit from the inclusion of objective relationship measures and observational data.

To conclude, three studies were conducted to investigate the influence of Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism) on romantic relationship attachment, accommodation, and control. Study 1, revealed that high secondary psychopathy and low narcissism predicted higher levels of attachment anxiety whereas women high on Machiavellianism, primary psychopathy, and secondary psychopathy reported higher attachment avoidance. Study 2, indicated that women high on Machiavellianism displayed lower active or passive constructive responses to a partner’s destructive behavior and lower active destructive responses. Primary psychopathy predicted greater active and passive destructive behavior whereas secondary psychopathy predicted lower active constructive responses. Study 3, demonstrated that women with high levels of secondary psychopathy engage in greater controlling behavior (control through surveillance and threats; control over everyday routines and decision making; and control over autonomous behavior). Machiavellianism and primary psychopathy also predicted increased control over autonomous behavior. Future research should consider these issues further, employing domain specific measures, objective markers of relationship quality, and obtaining information from each member of the relationship dyad.

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