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A Desire for the Dark Side: An Examination of Individual Personality Characteristics and Their Desire for Adverse Characteristics in Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Powerful and charismatic leaders are often highly desired by organizations and the followers that work within them. However, leaders who are highly skilled at developing relationships and accomplishing what they need to are often those individuals who rate very high on personality traits or characteristics that are considered “dark.” Although much attention has been paid to leaders and dark characteristics, we know much less regarding the dark side of leadership and followers’ susceptibility to these leaders. This article investigates the extent to which follower traits (i.e., the dark triad and the Big Five) predict a follower’s propensity to accept leader behaviors indicative of psychopathy (measured via the Hare P-Scan). Results suggest a follower’s psychopathy leads to the desire for dark leaders. Implications and future research suggest a more in-depth examination of followers and why certain individuals desire dark leadership, as well as examining negative environments.

KEYWORDS

Dark leadership; dark triad; personality; psychopathy; toxic triangle

From the Epic of Gilgamesh down to the present, it would seem that a principal element of almost every human narrative is the conflict between good and evil, usually embodied by individuals, be they king, chief-tain, or dictator. Some leaders operate from a fundamental position of the dark side that is stipulated from the outset. While much of the historical management and leadership literature has emphasized leadership development, there is increasing attention to some of the darker elements of the leadership dynamic and concern with how those elements manifest in day-to-day managerial action. There exists a significant amount of applied research on the negative consequences of dark leadership in the business world, among them psychological distress, work–family conflict, and lower job satisfaction. Additionally, dark leaders have been described as toxic, tyrannical, and destructive (Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Babiak, 2014). Other forms of dark leadership, such as abusive leadership, have been found to increase psychological stress (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000; Tepper, 2000), decrease employee performance (Harris, Kacmar, & Zivnuska, 2007), and increase workplace deviance (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007).

While such research provides evidence that dark leadership may be ineffective for employees, researchers have not been able to pinpoint why dark leaders often end up in

powerful positions within organizations. Part of the reason for this is definitional. Just what exactly is a “dark leader”? One framework for understanding the dynamic of dark leadership is the dark triad, a group of traits that seem to be consistently present in many dark leadership circumstances. The dark triad is defined by three separate but related traits—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). While two of these, narcissism and Machiavellianism, are often assumed to be somewhat common features of leadership (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2002), and dark in their own right, the third, psychopathy, would seem to be perceived as an even darker, albeit somewhat less common, trait. Psychopathy thus seems an appropriate starting point for understanding the characteristics of dark leaders. Recent research has shown that the prevalence of psychopathy in high-level positions is significantly higher (4%) than in the general population (1%) (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010; Coid, Yang, Ullrich, Roberts, & Hare, 2009; Neumann & Hare, 2008). In spite of a psychopath’s negative attributes, such as grandiosity, egocentricity, lack of empathy, irresponsibility, and predisposition to defy social norms, psychopaths are still able to receive promotions, function in high-level positions, and influence followers in decision making for the organization (Hare & Neumann, 2008; Mathieu et al., 2014). Psychopaths are able to charm, manipulate, and deceive others, which in turn allows them to have perceived success

even though they have low performance ratings and are potentially damaging to a corporation (Babiak et al., 2010). With psychopaths' ability to charm and be charismatic, it is no surprise that during initial meetings these individuals appear desirable in the short term (Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011). It would seem that a key objective of the leader selection process would be to identify individuals who exhibit worrisome levels of identified psychopathic traits and exclude them from consideration. Given the overrepresentation of psychopathic traits in high-level positions, however, it is alternatively possible that leaders are selected, at least in part, because of their potentially psychopathic traits, rather than in spite of them.

The evidence provided in the beginning of this article leads to a second key consideration in the present study—that the typical leadership study or leadership conversation routinely takes a leader-centric approach. The leadership literature is constantly focused on the leader to help understand and explain leadership. While this is important, so too is the follower-centric perspective. In this article, we utilize the follower-centric approach to begin to explain why leaders with psychopathic or dark tendencies rise to power. Given this, the purpose of this article is threefold. First, we work to identify the dark characteristics of leaders that are, in fact, viewed as desirable by followers. We attempt to do this by identifying the characteristics of a dark leader, measured by an adapted version of the Hare P-Scan, that employees would accept or perhaps even desire in their leaders. Second, we hypothesize and explore specific relationships between specific follower personality characteristics (i.e., the Big Five: John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) and follower propensity for desiring or selecting leaders who display or possess aspects of dark leadership (measured by the adapted Hare P-Scan). Third, we determine whether there is a relationship between an individual's own dark triad traits (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) and that person's propensity to desire or select leaders who display or possess aspects of dark leadership (measured by the adapted Hare P-Scan). By examining these relationships, this article identifies those followers that may indeed be drawn to, or be more accepting of, leaders with psychopathic tendencies.

Psychopathy

A psychopath is defined by Cleckley (1964) as an individual who has the capacity to outwardly mimic the normality of a functioning person, but in reality, that individual is hiding a fundamental lack of internal personality structure. Despite seeming sincere, intelligent, and charismatic, a true

psychopath does not have the ability to experience genuine emotions (Hare & Neumann, 2008). Psychopathy is prevalent among leaders in corporate and financial industries (Babiak et al., 2010). This should be a concern for practitioners, and as researchers we are interested in why psychopathy is so prevalent in upper level leadership. Research indicates that psychopathy is considered one of the most destructive of the dark personalities, but empirical research has trailed because organizations are reluctant to participate in dark leadership research. Also, without a trained psychologist, many scales cannot be used to accurately measure psychopathy in the workplace (Babiak & Hare, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2014; Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2010).

Additionally, some researchers have postulated that individuals are quick to accept certain negative traits because of a lack of awareness that “psychopaths” exist. It is possible that a dark side interpretation of such traits is discounted because of an assumption that a person with personality disorder would be relatively easy to identify and would thus not be hired in the first place (Greenhalgh, 1973). The clinical profile of the psychopath differs markedly from that of the psychotic. For example, the psychotic individual is prone to episodic delusions, paranoia, and other stereotypical symptoms of mental disorder (Hillon & Tullis, 2007), whereas a psychopath is able to mimic normal behaviors. This distinction is important because many individuals in the workplace believe they have the capacity to identify psychopathic behavior and thus exclude individuals who exhibit overt or obvious dark leadership characteristics or organizationally toxic behaviors, but as the preceding paragraphs indicate, individuals do not have a “sixth sense” about employees. Employees are able to distinguish the psychotics but not the psychopaths.

Psychopathy, leadership, and the dark side

Most theories regarding dark leadership are leader-centric, in which personality explains leader behavior. While leadership scholars acquire increasing knowledge of the followers in the leadership process, less attention has been paid to the dark side of leadership and follower susceptibility to these leaders (Thoroughgood, Padilla, Hunter, & Tate, 2012). When examining dark leadership, it is important to recognize that dark leadership is examined under many different names, such as toxic leaders, tyrannical leaders, and destructive leaders (Ashforth, 1994; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Lipman-Blumen, 2008). Even though each is its own area of study, there is significant overlap between theories. All of the dark leadership theories just referred to, however, provide evidence that dark leaders

are deceptive, and they have a tendency to lie, degrade, and ridicule their followers, blame others for their mistakes, and be aggressive toward their followers (Mathieu et al., 2008). Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) were the first to introduce the concept of destructive leadership as a multidimensional theory that examines both the leader and the follower. The authors explain that leadership is a process and introduce the toxic triangle. These three components of the toxic triangle are destructive leaders, conducive environments, and susceptible followers. The question that is introduced in the toxic triangle is, what makes a follower susceptible to dark leadership? Research suggests that all individuals want safety, security, group membership, and predictability (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Since individuals desire these traits in their leaders, they may in turn follow any leader who provides them with a sense of collective identity (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Also, individuals have a predisposition to emulate higher status individuals (Brody & Stoneman, 1985), obey authority figures (Milgram, 1974) and to conform to group norms (Asch, 1951). This general predisposition provides yet another mechanism for leaders to exploit and encourage followers to latch on to a dark leader. Additionally, Padilla et al. (2007) provide evidence that there are two different types of susceptible individuals, conformers and colluders. Conformers are individuals who comply with a destructive leader out of fear, versus colluders, who actively participate in the leader's negative agenda. Both conformers and colluders are motivated by self-interest, but for different reasons (Higgins, 1997; Kellerman, 2004; Padilla et al., 2007).

Although the destructive leadership literature begins to examine why followers may be susceptible to dark leaders, very little research has examined an individual's propensity to choose a dark leader. In this article, we examine follower traits and preferences, and what could potentially draw followers to individuals with such dark tendencies.

Psychopathy and the Hare P-Scan

Psychopathy is one of the most widely researched constructs in clinical psychology. The clinical definition and existing conceptualizations of psychopathy are derived from Cleckley (1941). Cleckley described psychopathy as a syndrome that included interpersonal (manipulativeness and superficial charm), affective (remorseless and callous), and behavioral (lack of realistic plans and violation of social and acceptable norms) features (Cleckley, 1941). Of course, the present effort does not purport to identify or measure psychopathy at a clinical level. This is why we utilize an instrument adapted from the Hare P-Scan, a screening instrument designed to quickly

identify individuals with substantial psychopathic features. Individuals so identified would typically be referred for further testing and evaluation. The Hare P-Scan can be used in a variety of situations and is beneficial because it does not have to be administered by professionals; it does not give a clinical diagnosis, but allows the individual researcher to investigate the propensity of psychopathic features in an individual (Hare & Herve, 1999).

The Hare-P Scan is divided into three major components: interpersonal, affective, and lifestyle. The *interpersonal* dimension of psychopathy is characterized by glibness, superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, pathologic lying, and manipulateness. The *affective* component of psychopathy is described by lack of remorse, shallow affect, lack of empathy, and failure to accept responsibility. The final dimension of psychopathy is *lifestyle*, defined as a need for stimulation, parasitic lifestyle, lack of realistic long-term goal, impulsivity, and irresponsibility (Mathieu et al., 2014; Neumann, Hare, & Newman, 2007).

As an example of how psychopathy relates to leadership, Babiak et al. (2010) surveyed 203 upper level managers to examine the relationship between psychopathy and leadership in the workplace. This study provided evidence that psychopathy, particularly the interpersonal component, is positively associated with in-house company ratings of charisma/presentation style and negatively associated with ratings on performance and responsibility. From this study, the authors were able to conclude that an individual's ability to charm, manipulate, and deceive others allowed psychopathic leaders to achieve success in the workplace despite exhibiting potentially harmful behaviors within the corporation and negative performance ratings (Babiak et al., 2010).

Another reason for concern is that individuals may be failing to consider that we could have a flawed definition of what is socially desirable in our leaders. To many, statements related to individual traits or behaviors, such as "self-confident, self-assured, seldom embarrassed," "sees self as a leader, others as followers," "has strong sense of entitlement," and finally "no apparent anxiety, nervousness, or distress" seem very desirable. However, these are all, in fact, items on the Hare P-Scan (Hare & Hervé, 1999) that serve as indicators of psychopathic behavior or tendencies (Cleckley, 1964). Such characteristics, as indicators of psychopathy, can be problematic once we consider follower-centric (i.e., followers helping to give rise to increased leader influence and power) theories or approaches to leadership research. One reason this is of concern is that leaders are chosen and encouraged when they have at least some resemblance to followers' prototypical image of a leader

(Howell & Shamir, 2005). The leader's attributes grow by both positive reflections from followers and political support from organizational leadership. Followers typically have an active role in creating their leaders; therefore, if attributes associated with the dark side actually appear in a leader, the followers have some culpability for creating the situation (Howell & Shamir, 2005). Making this situation even more powerful is the notion that, according to Shamir, House, and Arthur (1993), charismatic leaders must match their vision to link to the values of followers. Such values match, coupled with support by followers for leader traits, creates a particularly powerful and perhaps toxic situation. Similarly, Conger and Kanungo (1987) discuss that charisma must always be attributed—by followers. Therefore, the most dynamic and influential leaders (e.g., charismatic ones) are often clearly and explicitly given that status by the very individuals that follow them.

Traits often associated with a charismatic leader, such as high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Howell & Shamir, 2005), are, interestingly, also found on Hare's list of psychopathic traits (Hare, 1993). Perhaps followers, in a desire to associate themselves with charismatic leadership, are inadvertently selecting for several traits that, while often associated with standard perceptions of strong leaders, have darker overtones.

The big five and dark leadership

Personality and its relationship to leadership have garnered much attention in recent years. The Big Five traits include *extroversion* (social, gregarious, assertive, active, exciting, and cheerful), *agreeableness* (trusting, honest, altruistic, compliant, and modest), *conscientiousness* (competent, orderly, dutiful, achievement-oriented, and disciplined), *emotional stability* (calm, friendly, happy, future thinking, and not self-conscious), and *openness to experiences* (imaginative, artistic, experimental, curious, and diverse).

When examining the Big Five traits, numerous researchers have found small positive correlations between psychopathy and extraversion and openness to experience and negative or zero correlations between psychopathy and neuroticism (Mathieu et al., 2014; Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Also, psychopathy has also been found to be associated with low levels of conscientiousness (Mathieu et al., 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008). Furthermore, Jakobwitz and Egan (2006) examined the dark triad as it relates to personality in the general population. The authors examined the relationship between the constructs of the dark triad and how these constructs fit into the five factors of personality; they provided evidence of correlations of high neuroticism and

low agreeableness and the dark triad. This research is crucial in the study of the dark triad and personality because the sample was the general population, providing evidence that these dark traits exist in normal-functioning individuals (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). To date, most of the research conducted has been focused on the Big Five personality traits as they relate to the dark triad. Based on previous research regarding the dark triad and its relationship to the Big Five personality traits, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a. Agreeableness, a dimension of the Big Five, will be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors.

Hypothesis 1b. Conscientiousness, a dimension of the Big Five, will be negatively related to desired dark leader behaviors.

Hypothesis 1c. The Big Five will predict, above and beyond the dark triad, desired dark leader behaviors.

Dark triad and leadership

Over the past two decades there has been increased research regarding dark leadership. This research has been essential for organizations in order to understand leaders and followers who engage in deviant behaviors, who have poor work performance, and who have the potential for “derailment” (Khoo & Burch, 2008). The dark triad of personality consists of three overlapping constructs, which are narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). All three components of the dark triad have strong positive intercorrelations, but are considered conceptually independent (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Johnson, Luthans, & Hennessey, 1984).

The first component of the dark triad, narcissism, is described as the belief one is superior, an individual who is highly self-absorbed, feels entitled, lacks empathy, and is vain (Furtner, Rauthmann, & Sachse, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissists believe they are superior to others and can treat others as substandard by being insensitive, hostile, and altering conversations or interpretations toward their own well-being (Judge, Piccolo, & Kosalka, 2009). Narcissism is positively correlated with aggression and extraversion and negatively correlated with empathy, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Douglas, Bore, & Munro, 2012).

The second component of the dark triad is Machiavellianism, a trait in which individuals are calculating and feel others can be manipulated (Christie &

Geis, 1970; Shea & Beatty, 1983). Leaders who are Machiavellian need control over their workers, have strong political motivations, and are willing to abuse power for personal gain (Judge et al., 2009). Machiavellianism is positively correlated with aggression and neuroticism, yet negatively correlated with empathy, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Douglas et al., 2012).

The final component of the dark triad is psychopathy. Psychopathy is a combination of high impulsivity, and low empathy and anxiety, coupled with antisocial behaviors (Bishopp & Hare, 2008; Cleckley, 1955; Douglas et al., 2012). Psychopathy consists of two factors. The first factor of psychopathy is characterized by selfishness, being unapologetic, having superficial charisma, and having the ability to exploit others. The second factor is characterized by high impulsivity and emotional instability, coupled with a self-defeating lifestyle (Douglas et al., 2012). Psychopathy is positively correlated with aggression and negatively correlated with empathy, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Douglas et al., 2012). After examining the literature regarding the dark triad, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a. Psychopathy, a dimension of the dark triad, will be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors.

Hypothesis 2b. Machiavellianism, a dimension of the dark triad, will be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors.

Hypothesis 2c. Narcissism, a dimension of the dark triad, will be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors.

Hypothesis 2d. The dark triad will predict desired dark leader behaviors.

It is interesting to note that all three of the dark triad constructs are related to the five factor model (FFM) of personality. The most notable is a negative correlation between the dark triad and agreeableness and conscientiousness (Douglas et al., 2012; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). This is very significant, and one of the reasons further investigation is needed when examining a follower's desire for dark leadership. Studies indicate that we have dark leaders and they are somewhat successful in an organization, but the question is, why (Coid et al., 2009; Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Paul, 2014; Neumann & Hare, 2008)? Are employees beginning to expect some of these behaviors? Similarly, if individuals rate high on the

dark triad, do they desire dark leadership? These questions proposed are somewhat exploratory in nature, as there is very little research conducted examining an individual's score of dark leadership and personality and their most desirable leadership style. This is why this study proposes the preceding hypotheses to explore these relationships.

Methods

Participants

An online survey was used to collect data on individuals' personality characteristics and the relationship between those characteristics and desired leadership behaviors. Demographic information collected included the participant's age, gender, classification in the university, employment status, and experience as a manager in a business setting. Participants were recruited by advertising the survey to students in management and human resource management courses at a large, Southwestern university. Participants were offered some form of course extra credit in exchange for participation. Overall, 216 individuals began the survey. Forty-nine participants (23%) failed to complete the survey in its entirety, leaving a final usable sample of $N = 167$. Of these, 57% were Caucasian, 51% were female, 64% were currently working, and 48% ranged in age from 18 to 24 and 37% between 25 and 34 years of age.

Procedures

Participants were invited via an e-mail that contained a link to a Web-based survey. Once they arrived at the website, they were asked to read the informed consent and electronically confirm their willingness to participate; after confirming, participants began the survey. First, participants completed a modified version of the 90-item Hare-P-Scan (Hare & Hervé, 1999) that required them to identify behaviors or traits participants may desire or not desire a leader to engage in or display. Second, each participant completed the 27-item SD3 scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) measuring Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (i.e., the dark triad). Third, participants completed the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991). Finally, participants provided demographic information, including age, gender, nationality, and work experience. Complete participation lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Measures

Modified Hare-P Scan

The Hare P-Scan (Hare & Hervé, 1999) is a 90-item measure intended to identify personality characteristics

that serve as markers of psychopathic potential in individuals. For the present study, participants indicated the extent to which they would desire an individual who was leading them in an organization to display the traits or behaviors mentioned. Participants selected a response on a 4-point Likert-type scale, where 4 was *highly desirable* and 1 was *highly undesirable*. Participants could also mark 0 to indicate the behavior was irrelevant to performance. The measure includes three subscales. The first subscale, *Interpersonal Behaviors*, includes items such as “Attempts to portray self in good light” and “Attitude towards others is cold or harsh.” Reliability for this subscale was sound ($\alpha = .93$). The second subscale, *Affective Behaviors*, includes items such as “Often physically or emotionally abusive” and “Emotional outbursts usually shortlived.” Reliability for this subscale was sound ($\alpha = .96$). The third subscale, *Lifestyle Behaviors*, includes items such as “Behavior is unpredictable” and “Has only casual friends and followers.” Reliability for this subscale was sound ($\alpha = .95$).

Dark triad

The dark triad was measured using the SD3 (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). This 27-item measure contains 9-item measures of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements presented. All items were completed using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 5, *strongly agree*, to 1, *strongly disagree*. Items for Machiavellianism included “Avoid direct conflict with others because they may be useful in the future,” and reliability was sound ($\alpha = .81$). Items for narcissism included “People see me as a natural leader,” and reliability was minimally acceptable for research purposes ($\alpha = .62$; cf. Nunnally, 1978). Items for psychopathy included “I like to pick on losers” and “It’s true that I can be mean to others,” and reliability was sound ($\alpha = .76$).

Big five personality inventory

John, Donahue, and Kentle’s (1991) 44-item Big Five Inventory was utilized as the assessment of personality. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that presented statements described them. All items were completed using a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 5, *agree strongly*, to 1, *disagree strongly*. Items for agreeableness ($\alpha = .80$) included “Is generally trusting” and “Likes to cooperate with others.” Items for extraversion ($\alpha = .76$) included “Is talkative” and “Is full of energy.” Items for conscientiousness ($\alpha = .74$)

included “Is a reliable worker” and “Does things efficiently.” Items for neuroticism ($\alpha = .73$) included “Worries a lot” and “Gets nervous easily.” Items for openness ($\alpha = .76$) included “Likes to reflect, play with ideas” and “Is inventive.”

Analysis

The purpose of this study is to explore whether followers’ personality characteristics are related to their desire, in a leader, for specific types of leader traits or behaviors deemed as “dark.” Although it is counterintuitive to think of a desirable leader with dark traits, we may be subconsciously selecting these individuals because those particular traits indeed make these individuals more suitable and successful in leadership positions. Specifically, we examined whether a participant’s (i.e., follower) dark triad score (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) coupled with that person’s Big Five Personality Inventory (extraversion, conscientiousness, open to experiences, agreeableness, and neuroticism) would predict the participant’s desires for leaders displaying dark leadership behaviors—using the modified Hare P-Scan as the measure of such behaviors or tendencies.

Since this study is exploratory in nature, we proceeded with a basic analysis. First, we examined the intercorrelations table to identify relationships that presented interesting or notable implications for how followers may select dark traits in leaders. Next, we utilized follower personality characteristics, their dark triad score and personality inventory, to predict selected dark traits (as measured by the Hare P-Scan). It was important to examine all facets of these relationships since this is an area that has very little empirical data.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables in the present study can be found in Table 1. In viewing this table, the first thing to note is the very high correlations between the dimensions of the Hare P-Scan. Because of these high interrelationships, and because the dimensions are all intended to provide an indication of potential psychopathy in individuals, we summed the scale into one overall composite score.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables utilized moving forward, including the composite Hare P-Scan score (12-point scale).

Table 1. Correlations between Hare P-Scan dimensions, SD3, and Big Five Inventory.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. HP—Interpersonal	1.68	0.52	.93										
2. HP—Affective	1.36	0.51	.81**	.96									
3. HP—Lifestyle	1.31	0.52	.77**	.90**	.95								
4. Narcissism	2.96	0.50	.19*	.06	-.02	.62							
5. Machiavellianism	2.94	0.66	.18*	.11	.10	.32**	.81						
6. Psychopathy	2.17	0.60	.43**	.45**	.39**	.42**	.19*	.76					
7. Agreeableness	3.73	0.65	-.30**	-.35**	-.29**	-.28**	-.10	-.63**	.80				
8. Extraversion	3.18	0.66	-.06	-.09	-.11	.01	.46**	-.04	.13	.76			
9. Conscientiousness	3.70	0.61	-.32**	-.36**	-.34**	-.08	.10	-.53**	.53**	.26**	.74		
10. Neuroticism	2.79	0.65	.04	.08	.06	.19*	-.18*	.23**	-.41**	-.26**	-.38**	.73	
11. Openness	3.41	0.61	-.09	-.17*	-.12	-.02	.12	-.22**	.34**	.24**	.25**	-.13	.76

Note. Total $N = 167$. Reliabilities along the diagonal, in italics.

*Significant at $p < .05$. **Significant at $p < .01$.

Table 2. Correlations utilizing composite Hare P-Scan.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Composite Hare P-Scan	4.35	1.45	.98								
2. Narcissism	2.96	0.50	.08	.62							
3. Machiavellianism	2.94	0.66	.14	.32**	.81						
4. Psychopathy	2.17	0.60	.45**	.42**	.19*	.76					
5. Agreeableness	3.73	0.65	-.34**	-.28**	-.10	-.63**	.80				
6. Extraversion	3.18	0.66	-.09	.01	.46**	-.04	.13	.76			
7. Conscientiousness	3.70	0.61	-.36**	-.08	.10	-.53**	.53**	.26**	.74		
8. Neuroticism	2.79	0.65	.06	.19*	-.18*	.23**	-.41**	-.26**	-.38**	.73	
9. Openness	3.41	0.61	-.13	-.02	.12	-.22**	.34**	.24**	.25**	-.13	.76

Note. Total $N = 167$. Reliabilities along the diagonal, in italics.

*Significant at $p < .05$. **Significant at $p < .01$.

Hypotheses 1a through 1c and 2d

The first set of hypotheses examined the extent to which follower personality characteristics, measured via the FFM, relate to an individual desire to be led by an individual possessing or displaying dark leader behaviors (as measured by the modified Hare P-Scan).

Hypothesis 1a suggested that agreeableness would be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors. In fact, level of agreeableness was negatively related ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$) to desired dark leader behaviors (see Table 2). Thus, hypothesis 1a was strongly rejected. Similarly, we suggested in hypothesis 1b that conscientiousness would be negatively related to desired dark leader behaviors. In fact, level of conscientiousness was negatively related ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$) to desired dark leader behaviors (see Table 2). Thus, hypothesis 1b was strongly rejected. These findings are further explored in the discussion section.

Hypothesis 1c suggested that the FFM would predict, above and beyond the dark triad, desired dark leader behaviors. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a hierarchical regression. Step 1 included age, gender, and employment status; step 2 included the dark triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy); step 3 included the Big Five (agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism). The dependent variable in this case was desired dark leader behaviors (i.e., modified Hare P-Scan). This analysis provided evidence that the dark triad traits help to predict desired dark leader behaviors above and beyond age, gender, and employment status

($\Delta R^2 = .21$, $\Delta F(3, 158) = 16.32$, $p < .00$). This particular result confirms hypothesis 2d, which suggested that the dark triad would in fact predict desired dark leader behaviors or traits (see Table 3).

Furthermore, the results yielded evidence that the Big Five did not predict desired dark leader behaviors above and beyond age, gender, employment status, and the dark triad ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $\Delta F(5, 153) = 0.96$, $p = .45$). This result confirms the rejection of hypothesis 1c.

Hypotheses 2a through 2c

The second set of hypotheses examined the extent to which follower psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism—measured via the SD3 (Jones & Paulhus, 2014)—related to a follower's desire to be led by an individual possessing or displaying dark leader behaviors (as measured by the modified Hare P-Scan).

Specifically, hypothesis 2a suggested psychopathy would be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors as measured by the Hare P-Scan. Hypothesis 2a was supported, as follower psychopathy related positively and significantly ($r = .45$; $p < .01$) to desired dark leader behaviors. Similarly, hypothesis 2b suggested Machiavellianism, a dimension of the dark triad, would be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors as measured by the Hare P-Scan. Machiavellianism was not significantly

Table 3. Hierarchical regression utilizing composite Hare P-Scan as DV.

Predictor and step	β	R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF
Hare P-Scan composite				
Step 1				
Age	-.10			
Employment status	.22**			
Gender	-.15	.329	.094	5.57
Step 2				
Age	-.08			
Employment status	.16*			
Gender	.00			
Machiavellianism	-.04			
Narcissism	.11			
Psychopathy	.48**	.308	.214	16.32
Step 3				
Age	-.07			
Employment status	.15*			
Gender	.03			
Machiavellianism	-.05			
Narcissism	.17*			
Psychopathy	.46**			
Agreeableness	.00			
Extraversion	-.13			
Conscientiousness	-.09			
Neuroticism	-.04			
Openness	.08	.329	.021	.956

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

related to desired dark traits in leaders ($r = .14$, $p > .05$). Along these lines, hypothesis 2c suggested narcissism would be positively related to desired dark leader behaviors. Again, the positive relationship ($r = .08$, $p > .05$) was not significant. Thus, hypotheses 2b and 2c were not supported.

Exploring overlap between the dark triad and the Big Five

To explore whether the dark triad measure is indeed capturing variance that is unique, we adjusted the order of entry for both variable sets in the hierarchical regression. Hence, step 1 included age, gender, and employment status; step 2 included the Big Five (agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism); and step 3 included the dark triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy). The dependent variable in this case was desired dark leader behaviors (i.e., modified Hare P-Scan). Results indicated that the second step (Big Five) was significant in predicting desired dark leader behaviors ($\Delta R^2 = .20$, $\Delta F(5, 156) = 4.22$, $p < .01$). The third step, including the SD3, also showed significant change in predicting desired dark leaders' behaviors ($\Delta R^2 = .33$, $\Delta F(3, 153) = 9.69$, $p < .00$). This significant increase of explanatory power suggests that while the Big Five do contribute to explaining preferences for desired dark leader behaviors, elements of the dark triad are capturing unique variance—hence, overlap between the measurement instruments is not what caused the insignificant

step 3 of the testing of hypothesis 1c. This is explored more in the discussion section.

Discussion

Limitations

Prior to broaching the broader conclusions of the present study, it is important to note a few limitations. First, the Hare P-Scan is targeted for nonclinical use, and is not intended to be diagnostic of psychopathy. In addition, it is suggested that individuals have some prior knowledge of psychopathy when using the scale. Despite this, our use of the scale was to help individuals identify behaviors or traits they would like their leader to display. While this may not match the intended purpose of the Hare P-Scan, it does not create a situation in which users are rating items when they should not be (i.e., without prior knowledge) or applying the tool in any sort of diagnostic manner. Merely asking for preferences should not invalidate our conclusions as a result of using a modified version of the tool. In fact, we simply applied the tool for individuals to “screen” the behaviors they would prefer to see from others—behaviors that just happened to be indicators of psychopathy—rather than having a clinician screen a client.

A second limitation of the present study is a potential lack of generalizability based on the sample and the context provided. That is, one could argue that our sample was too young (85% under age 34 years) to have enough experience in understanding or dealing with leaders such that they could identify desirable or undesirable behaviors. However, since the millennial generation is large and beginning to permeate the workforce (Howe & Strauss, 2009), one could also argue that determining the preferences of this generation is perhaps more essential than surveying older workers. In addition, it is possible that individuals were unclear on context—or perhaps hold different opinions on the behaviors and traits they would desire from a leader depending on the context. We would point parties concerned in this regard to discussions of implicit leadership theory (ILT; cf. Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984). In sum, we would suggest that, congruent with ILT investigations, individuals hold prototypical leader behaviors in mind, and apply them in such cases where they are tasked to identify “leaders” or “leader behaviors” or “traits of a leader”—as was the case in the present study. In essence, this generalized task leaves context as irrelevant to some degree, and relies on individual perceptions of acceptable leader characteristics, which is what the present study targeted.

Third, we realize the threat of common method bias: specifically, that the participants completed the surveys in the same order, and we recognized there could be some order effect. However, we randomized items within the surveys, and avoided prompting or instruction sets that would have clearly indicated that the independent variable measurements were indeed expected to be related to the Hare P-Scan selections. We also recognize that future studies along these lines should utilize greater time delays and measurements from different respondents.

Finally, it is important to note that the selected behaviors within the Hare P-Scan were generally rated on the low end of the scale (i.e., as not highly desirable). Thus, we do have significant range restriction. However, as range restriction typically reduces the relationships of variables, we would expect that if a sample could be drawn that included more individuals (i.e., followers) who desired behaviors that were seen as “dark” or “psychopathic,” then the correlations observed would be even stronger.

Despite the limitations just noted, the present study provides several interesting implications that could illuminate how leaders with subtle—or perhaps quite dramatic—psychopathic behaviors come to power based on their followers.

Implications

As researchers, we should not assume that rational actors are making decisions about leadership. Therefore, our research provides evidence that individuals, in fact, desire some dark leadership traits and do not see these traits as adverse characteristics. Perhaps the most compelling results from the present study are those among the dark triad. Psychopathy is the strongest predictor, on the follower side, of desiring or accepting behaviors that are indicative of leader psychopathy. While this may not sound surprising, consider a few of the occupations that Dutton (2012) suggested contain more psychopathic individuals: media, sales, surgeons, journalists, police officers, and clergy. While others existed in his top 10—when a confluence of followers high on a nonclinical (i.e., the SD3) measure of psychopathy exists within an organization, perhaps the local television station or hospital—then it is perhaps more likely a leader who shows similar traits will rise to power. Clearly, our results suggest that psychopathy is a much more powerful predictor of accepting dark behaviors than Machiavellianism and narcissism, two other traits often discussed in the leadership literature (Brunell et al., 2008; Campbell et al., 2011).

The aforementioned conclusion provides a second key implication of the present study. The Big Five Personality Inventory does not provide any additional

predictive power beyond the dark triad. This finding was completely counter to our prediction. To explore this further, we reversed the entry of the Big Five in our regression analysis to find that it did provide predictive power, and that the dark triad helped to explain even more variance in a third step. Thus, perhaps there are dimensions of the Big Five that are relevant to this equation—a point borne out by findings that conscientiousness and agreeableness were significantly correlated (albeit negatively) to desired dark leader behaviors.

Regarding these predictions, perhaps the conscientious person deems an individual displaying “unpredictable behavior” with “mostly casual friends” to be a generally undesirable leader. This would, of course, make sense—as the conscientious person prefers predictability and dependability. As far as agreeableness, we made the assumption that someone less argumentative and prone to “go along to get along” would simply avoid identifying many of the statements or traits as “undesirable” or something they wouldn’t prefer. Here, perhaps the solidarity of the task allowed for enough independence (and complete lack of socially desirable behavior expectations) for those individuals high on agreeableness to reject such traits and behaviors. On the other side, those who were low on agreeableness could perhaps see the merit in less agreeable actions from a leader as more like them—which is in line with implicit leadership theories and social psychological explanations of group member selection (i.e., homogeneous selections).

Still, the preceding explanations would then, ideally, hold for both narcissism and Machiavellianism—when individuals with such tendencies would prefer behaviors (à la an ILT explanation) similar to those they would employ. However, it is also possible that those narcissistic or Machiavellian individuals would prefer not to be led by one with those traits, because those leaders would seek the attention and manipulate others to the extent that the follower would not be able to do either.

Overall, it is clear that more research must be conducted on this topic. Strong relationships between follower psychopathy (as an SD3 dimension), low conscientiousness, low agreeableness, and desired dark leader behaviors exist. Two of these could perhaps be captured by follower selection, as many organizations still utilize personality instruments in their selection process. Therefore, hiring people based on conscientiousness, which is one of the greatest predictors of job performance (Hunter & Hunter, 1984), would help to eliminate hiring individuals who find dark leader behaviors acceptable. On the other hand, low agreeableness is a trait of creative individuals, and not many

organizations utilize the SD3 to determine levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, or psychopathy. Hence, the door remains open for organizations to have individuals who, while they may not select their leaders, will find behaviors of darker leaders to be acceptable. Indeed, examples of this phenomenon may not lie too far outside the realm of reality for many. Or, they may simply turn on the TV.

Future research

Clearly, the present study leaves several questions to be answered. First and foremost, a more appropriate measure of psychopathic leader behavior must be developed. While the example items provided earlier do clearly relate to typical leader behaviors, some items, such as “deals drugs” or “is cruel to animals,” are not likely to ever be identified as behaviors a follower would accept in a leader. Even more importantly, the high number of items (90) in the Hare and the high correlations between dimensions suggest that a more concise measure would be appropriate.

Second, while surveys are essential to gathering information from organizations, other methods, such as a low-fidelity simulation (Motowidlo, Dunnette, & Carter, 1990), provide much greater substantive validity. Low-fidelity simulations could include written scenarios that provide descriptions of the leader, the context for different situations in which leaders operate (e.g., interacting with followers, interacting with other stakeholders), and descriptions of specific instances in which the leader displays behavior related to psychopathy. Providing such context for leader actions could enhance researchers’ abilities to predict not only which behaviors that relate to psychopathy are acceptable but also understand why they are acceptable to followers. Moreover, the low-fidelity simulation allows followers to visualize such situations in a common manner (i.e., as described).

Third, it would be interesting to provide an even deeper look into the process of selection, rise to power, and maintenance of power as it relates to dark leader behaviors. For example, while specific traits or behaviors are identified as desired by followers at the outset, at what point do those same traits or behaviors raise red flags? And, when such flags are raised, what, if anything, is actually done by followers to help remove the leader? In organizations, such reactions could range from passive (e.g., turnover) to active (e.g., whistleblowing). Identifying such processes, perhaps through historiometric analyses, could lead to the development of a selection instrument that would help organizations

identify these hidden, dark leaders much earlier—before damage (e.g., massive turnover, ethical scandals) occurs.

Conclusion

This study examined leadership from the follower’s side. The study provided evidence on which traits are predictive of accepting leader behaviors deemed as markers of psychopathy. We discovered that while those interested in the dark triad have established relationships among those traits and the Big Five taxonomy, such relationships are limiting when viewed with results of the present study. Specifically, the Big Five does not provide predictive power beyond the dark triad, specifically the psychopathic component. Overall, those followers who have higher psychopathy scores on the SD3 are more accepting of leader behaviors that are markers of potential psychopathy. We have suggested that future research should refine how psychopathic leader behaviors are measured in order to help create a model that could help identify environments that would be particularly conducive to “raising” a psychopathic leader to power.

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