

THE SELF-LOVING SELF-LEADER: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-LEADERSHIP AND THE DARK TRIAD

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Self-leadership should be integrated within a nomological network, and its associations with the Dark Triad of personality comprising narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, explored. In this self-report study, participants completed measures of self-leadership and the Dark Triad. Narcissism was positively associated with self-leadership scales, whereas Machiavellianism and psychopathy were not. Findings are discussed with respect to narcissism's role in self-leadership, and future lines of research are proposed.

Keywords: self-leadership, Dark Triad, narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy.

The relatively new and rarely empirically investigated construct of self-leadership (SL; see e.g., Neck & Houghton, 2006) lacks integration within a nomological network. It is not clear how SL is associated with different personality traits (Furtner & Rauthmann, 2010; Houghton, Bonham, Neck, & Singh, 2004). Generally, SL comprises socially desirable traits such as evaluating one's assumptions, visualizing productive behavior patterns, and pursuing one's goals. However, there could also be undesirable sides to SL, and thus associations with dark traits are of interest. In this study, SL is linked for the first time to the dark triad of personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) in order to investigate whether there are adaptive/functional and maladaptive/dysfunctional patterns of SL.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

SELF-LEADERSHIP

SL's roots lie in self-management (Manz, 1986) and clinical self-control theory (e.g., Cautela, 1969), and it was inspired by Kerr and Jermier's (1978) notion of substitutes for leadership. In contrast to self-management, SL is much more focused on the aspect of self-influence. It thus combines behavior-focused strategies of self-management and self-control with concepts of intrinsic motivation and constructive thinking, so that it can be conceptualized as a trait domain dealing with self-influencing processes.

SL strategies are divided into three primary categories: behavior-focused strategies, natural reward strategies, and constructive thought pattern strategies (e.g., Neck & Houghton, 2006). *Behavior-focused strategies* entail the enhancement of self-awareness for one's own actions, especially those that are deemed undesirable. Behavior-focused strategies encompass self-observation, self-goal setting, self-reward, self-punishment, and self-cueing. *Natural reward strategies* are divided into two subcategories: The first strategy incorporates pleasant and enjoyable features into a given action or behavior so that a task may seem naturally rewarding. The second strategy focuses attention away from unpleasant cues of a given task to natural (i.e., inherent) rewarding ones of the task. Both categories relate to two primary mechanisms of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). *Constructive thought patterns* focus on the positive influence of habitual thinking patterns. These patterns comprise the identification and elimination of dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions as well as mental imagery and positive self-talk. In general, as SL should facilitate the elimination of undesirable and dysfunctional cognitive and behavioral habits, this would suggest an overall negative correlation with dark traits, for example, psychopathy.

THE DARK TRIAD

Of the abundance of socially undesirable, aversive, and offensive traits, the three traits narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy have been repeatedly found to be moderately intercorrelated (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002) thus triggering the term *Dark Triad of Personality*. Even though these traits seem to be linked by low agreeableness, impulsivity, which is associated with low conscientiousness, and interpersonal manipulation, they need to be distinguished from one another (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Narcissism connects several different but interrelated traits such as persistent attention seeking; exhibitionism; extreme vanity; arrogance; exploitation and manipulation in interpersonal relationships; and excessive self-focus with self-absorption and self-admiration, as well as perceived feelings of superiority,

entitlement, leadership, and authority (e.g., Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Raskin & Terry, 1988). Although most narcissism facets differ in social desirability and adaptivity, many are indeed adaptive for the individual, for example, self-enhancement, vanity, and manipulation, and some, for example, leadership, may even be socially desirable in Western countries.

Machiavellianism, based on Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, is an attitudinal domain dealing with pragmatic, cynical, and immoral world views; self-interest and self-beneficial behaviors; cold, long-term, strategic calculation and tactics to pursue one's own (agentic) goals; and cold heartedness and lack of empathy, as well as deception and interpersonal manipulation (Christie & Geis, 1970; see also Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006).

Psychopathy, which was conceptualized by Cleckley (1988) and Hare (2003), comprises a primary (e.g., selfishness, deficiencies in interpersonal affect, remorselessness, superficial charm, exploitation) and secondary form (antisocial lifestyle and behaviors). This concept has been extended (see also Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2003), with (a) arrogant and deceitful behavior (i.e., interpersonal manipulation), (b) lack of affective experiences (i.e., cold affect), (c) impulsive or irresponsible behavior (i.e., impulsive thrill seeking), and (d) antisocial lifestyle and behaviors as hallmarks of the subclinical psychopathy trait continuum.

SELF-LEADERSHIP AND THE DARK TRIAD

To the best of our knowledge, in no study to date have the associations between SL and the Dark Triad been examined. Thus, these first steps are being made to integrate the construct of SL within a nomological network (see also Furtner, Rauthmann, & Sachse, 2010). SL does not only need to be linked to normal personality traits but also to dark, possibly socially aversive traits in order to obtain a larger picture on SL's standing within different constructs. It is usually described as a genuinely socially desirable trait with positive patterns of thinking and acting.

According to Neck and Houghton (2006), SL is associated with extraversion and conscientiousness. Thus, people highly skilled in SL should be active, energetic, and dynamic (extraversion) as well as controlled, goal-focused, and systematic (conscientiousness). This suggests that SL is not correlated with psychopathy, or at best negatively, as it has been found that psychopathy is strongly associated with impulsivity (Vazire & Funder, 2006) and a lack of conscientiousness (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Further, Machiavellianism has also been shown to correlate negatively with conscientiousness and extraversion (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). Thus, it should also not be correlated with SL, or at best, negatively. Narcissism, on the other hand, as the trait comprising the most desirable and adaptive subcomponents (e.g., charming behavior and leadership),

should be positively associated with SL. Also, the motivation to exceed others should lead to higher levels of SL in narcissists. In general, associations between the dark triad and SL should be low to moderate. Specific relationships with SL facets were not hypothesized, although the general pattern of positive correlations with narcissism and no, or at best negative, correlations with Machiavellianism and psychopathy were expected.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Participants comprised 168 students (psychology freshmen), mostly from Austria and Germany, who interacted for a brief time and then provided different ratings on several dimensions. Only self-reports of the Dark Triad and SL were analyzed. There were 123 females (73.20%) and 45 males (26.80%) with a mean age of 22.49 years (median = 22 years; $SD = 2.79$ years; range = 19-34 years). Students obtained credit points in exchange for participating.

INSTRUMENTS

Narcissism was measured with a 17-item inventory based on Raskin and Terry's (1988) scale (von Collani, 2008)¹. Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (between 0 = *not like me at all* and 4 = *totally like me*), and sum scores were computed. Machiavellianism was measured with an 18-item scale based on Christie and Geis' (1970) Machiavellianism conceptualization (Henning & Six, 2008). Answers were given on a 6-point Likert scale (between 0 = *not like me at all* and 5 = *totally like me*), and sum scores were computed. Psychopathy was measured with the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale-III (Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2003). Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (between 0 = *not like me at all* to 4 = *totally like me*), and means were computed.

Self-leadership was measured with a 27-item version of Houghton and Neck's (2002) SL scale (Andressen & Konradt, 2007). Answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale (between 1 = *totally disagree* and 5 = *totally agree*), and means were computed. SL domains are behavior-focused strategies (self-goal setting, self-reward, self-punishment, self-observation, self-cueing), natural reward strategies, and constructive thought patterns (visualizing successful performance, self-talk, evaluating beliefs, and assumptions).

Means and standard deviations for all scales are shown in Table 1. Internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) were sufficient for research purposes (global narcissism, $\alpha = .84$; Machiavellianism, $\alpha = .85$; global psychopathy, $\alpha =$

¹ In von Collani's (2008) scale, the facet "self-sufficiency" is not included.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND BIVARIATE ZERO ORDER PEARSON CORRELATIONS OF THE DARK TRIAD AND SELF-LEADERSHIP AND THEIR RESPECTIVE SUBFACETS

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SL (g)</i>	1	1a	1b	1c	1d	1e	2	3	3a	3b	3c
Narcissism (global)	47.39	9.65	.21***	.14	.25***	.02	-.06	.27**	.05	.19*	.23**	.24**	.12	.19*
Authority	8.68	2.34	.18*	.15†	.26***	.07	-.03	.20**	.03	.14	.18*	.22**	.09	.11
Vanity	8.71	2.26	.18*	.10	.23**	-.01	-.09	.24**	.02	.23**	.21**	.19*	.10	.22**
Superiority	8.74	2.53	.20***	.13†	.16*	.05	-.10	.28***	.11	.28***	.21**	.16*	.11	.22**
Exhibitionism	4.60	1.60	-.05	-.07	-.03	-.06	-.11	.00	-.02	-.07	.01	.11	-.07	-.04
Exploitativeness	5.88	1.64	-.13	.03	.16*	-.05	-.08	.17*	-.04	.14†	.23**	.19*	.16*	.18*
Entitlement	10.74	2.87	.19*	.18*	.24**	.03	.08	.21**	.06	.07	.16*	.16*	.11	.10
Machiavellianism	43.26	11.58	-.04	-.07	.06	-.17*	.06	-.06	-.10	-.18*	.08	.13	.07	.03
Psychopathy (global)	2.55	0.36	.01	-.09	-.02	-.02	-.03	-.01	-.18*	.07	.13†	.06	.11	.15†
Impulsive thrill seeking	2.80	0.61	.06	-.03	-.06	.01	.04	.07	-.12	.15†	.14†	.06	.07	.21***
Interpersonal manipulation	2.33	0.56	-.06	-.15	.02	-.04	-.16*	-.06	-.19*	-.01	.08	.06	.07	.06
Cold affect	2.50	0.26	.02	.02	-.00	.15	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.05	.04	-.04	.15	-.03
<i>M</i>	3.65	3.70	3.75	3.99	3.65	3.74	3.39	3.99	3.44	3.18	3.46	3.69		
<i>SD</i>	0.52	0.59	0.84	0.98	0.97	0.71	1.07	0.58	0.66	0.89	0.87	0.75		

Note: *SL (g)* = global self-leadership, 1 = behavior-focused strategies, 1a = self-goal setting, 1b = self-reward, 1c = self-punishment, 1d = self-observation, 1e = self-cueing, 2 = natural reward strategies, 3 = constructive thought patterns, 3a = visualizing successful performance, 3b = self-talk, 3c = evaluating beliefs and assumptions.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$.

.72; global SL, $\alpha = .89$; behavior-focused strategies, $\alpha = .84$; natural reward strategies, $\alpha = .40$; constructive thought patterns, $\alpha = .82$) except for natural reward strategies².

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSES

The relationships between the Dark Triad (narcissism + facets, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy + facets) and SL (global + facets) were explored by bivariate zero order Pearson correlations. Further, domain and facet level joint factor analyses were performed to see whether SL and the Dark Triad mix and share common factor space.

RESULTS

The results of the correlational analyses are shown in Table 1. As expected, narcissism was positively associated with SL and subfacets (7 out of a possible 12 times, $rs = .19-.25$, $ps < .05$). In addition, Machiavellianism showed only two significantly negative correlations with self-reward ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$) and natural reward strategies ($r = -.18$, $p < .05$), and psychopathy one significantly negative correlation with self-cueing ($r = -.18$, $p < .05$).

Self-reward, self-punishment, and self-cueing were not associated with any subfacet of narcissism. Most associations (5 out of 6) were found for self-goal setting, self-observation, natural reward strategies, and visualizing successful performance. Narcissistic exhibitionism did not correlate with any SL factor.

Regarding the subfacets of psychopathy, evaluating beliefs and assumptions correlated positively with impulsive thrill seeking ($r = .21$, $p < .01$), and self-cueing correlated significantly negatively with interpersonal manipulation ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$). Cold affect showed no association with SL and subfacets.

A joint exploratory factor analysis (principal components analysis; promax rotation with $\kappa = 4$) on narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and SL was performed. The Dark Triad clustered on one factor, whereas SL constituted a separate factor (see Table 2). A second factor analysis (principal components analysis; promax rotation with $\kappa = 4$), using only the facets of each construct, further corroborated the finding that SL and the Dark Triad did not mix by sharing factor space (see Table 2).

² All correlations reported for natural reward strategies are underestimated in their magnitude owing to the unreliability of the scale.

TABLE 2
JOINT FACTOR ANALYSES OF SELF-LEADERSHIP AND THE DARK TRIAD

Scales	Factors				
	I	II	III	IV	V
Domain level analysis					
Psychopathy	.79	-.06			
Machiavellianism	.75	-.22			
Narcissism	.70	.35			
Self-leadership (global)	-.08	.96			
Facet level analyses					
N Entitlement	.87	-.02	-.13	-.02	.25
N Authority	.79	.02	-.03	-.01	.04
N Superiority	.75	-.09	.19	.04	-.07
N Vanity	.70	-.01	.09	.19	-.07
N Exhibitionism	.57	.02	-.34	.01	-.04
SL Self-talk	-.22	.83	-.00	.25	.06
SL Visualizing successful performance	.06	.82	-.04	-.01	-.10
SL Self-goal setting	.11	.80	.05	-.10	.03
SL Self-cueing	-.02	.64	.10	-.27	.07
SL Natural reward strategies	-.01	-.02	.85	-.02	-.21
SL Self-reward	-.12	-.04	.65	-.01	.13
SL Evaluating beliefs and assumptions	-.10	.18	.61	.26	.08
SL Self-observation	.27	.21	.47	-.17	.16
P Impulsive thrill seeking	.02	-.25	.31	.70	.13
P Cold affect	-.06	.03	-.17	.69	.40
P Interpersonal manipulation	.10	.07	-.12	.67	-.24
N Exploitativeness	.25	.16	.02	.54	-.21
SL Self-punishment	.09	.03	.03	.06	.91

Notes: Domain level analysis: Principal components analysis, promax with Kaiser normalization ($\kappa = 4$). Facet level analysis: Principal components analysis, promax with Kaiser normalization ($\kappa = 4$). Highest factor loadings are indicated in bold.

N = Narcissism; SL = Self-leadership; P = Psychopathy.

DISCUSSION

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSES

Narcissism was found to have a significant positive correlation with global SL, namely self-goal setting, self-observation, natural reward strategies, constructive thought patterns, visualizing successful performance, and evaluating beliefs and assumptions. The narcissistic self-focus may be related to self-observation (also termed self-focus) as narcissists must maintain some level of self-monitoring to maneuver cunningly in interpersonal situations. Further, narcissists may also be prone to visualizing their successful performance, as success comes with (a) maintaining an inflated self-view, (b) presenting this self-view and success to others, and (c) possibly also degrading others (in order to enhance the self or keep it enhanced).

Narcissistic tendencies may manifest in different domains such as intellectual performance, physical attractiveness, dominance, and communal orientations (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). The SL domain may particularly tap the intellectual performance aspect of narcissism. Self-goal setting and visualizing successful performance may be present especially in narcissists as they actively seek to maintain and enhance their already enhanced self-view, particularly in social situations when their performance gets them attention.

The associations between SL and narcissism, unlike Machiavellianism and psychopathy, can be explained by self-regulation theory (SRT). The commonalities between SL and self-regulation are emphasized in SL literature (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Neck & Houghton, 2006). SRT also serves as a crucial theoretical underpinning for SL. SRT describes a monitoring system that constantly compares the current performance status with a certain set of standards. According to Neck and Houghton, the SL subfacets self-observation, self-goal setting, and evaluating dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions have a positive effect on self-regulation. Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) emphasize in their dynamic self-regulatory processing model of narcissism the important role of intrapersonal and interpersonal self-regulation processes in narcissists. People actively structure their social environments, and also seek to adjust them to their standards and goals. In certain situations or tasks, cognitive, affective, and behavior-focused adaptations are intraindividually pursued in order to accomplish goal achievement. Besides the self-regulation serving goal achievement, self-observation is important for social referencing. Morf, Weir, and Davidov (2000) showed that narcissists persevered for longer and with more motivation to a task in a competitive situation. The interpersonal situation in competitions helps narcissists show off their talents and performance. Also, the motivation to solve the task may be related to the SL strategy of natural reward strategies which is linked to intrinsic motivation. Whether this intrinsic motivation lies in the assigned task itself or rather in the narcissistic motivation to prove one's own superiority and skills remains debatable, however.

SL strategies and particularly the subfacet self-goal setting show strong associations with a need for achievement (e.g., McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Neck, Nouri, & Godwin, 2003). According to Morf and Rhodewalt (2001), narcissists are high in need for achievement and low in need for affiliation (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2001). Need for achievement describes the motive to set and accept challenges as well as to exceed others in pursuing these, and successfully accomplishing tasks (e.g., Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Narcissists are especially high in the competitiveness dimension of need for achievement (Raskin & Terry, 1988), and the need for achievement in competitive interpersonal contexts may also drive SL strategies in narcissists.

In conclusion, narcissists and self-leaders are similar in certain dimensions such as self-goal setting being driven by a need for achievement, self-observation, with a focus on the self, and the utilization of self-regulation strategies for the pursuit and achievement of goals, whichever they may be. That goal achievement is an important factor in both constructs is probably due to different underlying motives. Self-leaders allocate and focus their cognitive and behavioral resources towards a specific goal mostly for an intrinsic value in the goal or the process of pursuing it. Narcissists, however, focus on the outcomes of goal-achievement rather than the process of achieving it, for reasons of attention, admiration, and enhancement from others so that their inflated self-view can either be maintained or further enhanced. The intrinsic motivation thus would differ between narcissists and self-leaders although both are high in goal-achievement and both use similar phenotypic strategies in goal pursuit, for example, heightened self-focus, self-goal setting, self-rewards.

No associations were found between SL and Machiavellianism and psychopathy. Impulsivity and a lack of reflection are associated with psychopathy so that dysfunctional self-talk and behavioral strategies may not be perceived and analyzed properly. This would consequently lead to low levels of SL. For Machiavellists it may often not be necessary to be overly self-leading in the sense of needing to achieve certain goals, as they may be able to use others to achieve the goals for them.

FACTOR ANALYSIS

Although there were low to moderate associations with narcissism, SL and the Dark Triad are conceptually distinct constructs which mostly do not mix. This is reflected not only in the correlational analyses, but also in the exploratory joint factor analysis. However, narcissism showed a substantial secondary loading on the separate SL factor in the joint factor analysis. This finding may suggest that dark personalities do usually not have SL strategies, or that SL strategies cannot be used for the socially aversive interpersonal strategies that the Dark Triad entails. Further, the Dark Triad can be linked to impulsivity (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002), and an essential component of SL is the control of momentary impulses in order to pursue long-term goals.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

For the first time, the relatively new construct of SL has been linked to the Dark Triad traits that are usually deemed aversive and maladaptive. The association between SL and narcissism sheds further light on the nature of SL. However, future researchers may ask whether we should assume a narcissistic self-leader or a self-leading narcissist if we were to draw conclusions on causal relationships between the variables.

Moreover, further evidence is provided for the need to distinguish the Dark Triad traits from one another as narcissism consistently produced a different pattern of findings from Machiavellianism and psychopathy. The three traits may be moderately intercorrelated and share several core themes, that is, manipulation, disagreeableness, and impulsivity, but they also need to be differentiated as they manifest differentially and produce different patterns of associations.

A limitation of this self-report study is that people's subjective views make it particularly difficult to study narcissism with its self-enhancing tendencies. Further, no causal relationships between the variables can be inferred from the cross-sectional design. Future researchers should carefully take into account the different underlying motives of narcissists and self-leaders, and also conduct field studies and studies under controlled laboratory settings.

Moreover, the possible mediating role of the need for achievement in the SL-narcissism association should be explored systematically in future research. Relationships between SL and the Dark Triad were examined for the first time in this study, with the finding that narcissists and self-leaders may have characteristics such as goal striving, self-focus, and self-regulation in common. Self-loving self-leaders or self-leading self-lovers intrinsically pursue their goals.

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