

Dark Triad Psychopathy

Subjects: **Criminology & Penology**

Contributor: Pedro Pechorro , , Matt Delisi , João Marôco , Cristina Nunes

Dark Triad traits and self-control are considered viable causal precursors to antisocial and criminal outcomes in youth.

aggression

conduct disorder

dark triad

1. Introduction

Delinquent behaviors often manifest prior to adulthood. These behaviors are generally limited to adolescence, but a minority of delinquent youth persist in antisocial or criminal behaviors throughout the life span ^{[1][2][3]}. Thus, many researchers aim to understand the social factors and personality traits that differentially predict persistent engagement in antisocial behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi's ^[4] general theory of crime proposes that a lack of self-control predisposes people towards antisocial and criminal behaviors. Other perspectives move beyond self-control disposition and articulate that specific personality features increase involvement in conduct problems. For example, personality features such as psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism have also been associated with antisocial behaviors, to varying degrees ^{[5][6][7]}. In particular, psychopathy is one of the best clinical predictors of violent-crime recidivism ^{[8][9]}. Although low self-control and Dark Triad ^[7] features overlap, they are distinct individual difference markers ^{[10][11]} that independently predict antisocial or criminal outcomes ^[12]. In this study, the researchers investigate the relative strength of the causal associations between self-control, Dark Triad traits, and assorted antisocial outcomes.

In their general theory of crime, Gottfredson and Hirschi ^[4] argue that self-control can explain all delinquent and criminal behavior, and that all other associations with such behavior are spurious and are just other outcomes of low self-control. This theory postulates that self-control reflects a hedonic orientation to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. Popular theories of self-control suggest that there are four primary domains that control thoughts, emotions, impulses, and performance ^{[13][14]}. High self-control can be perceived of as the ability to adapt and fit the self with the environment, and to refrain from behaving in socially undesirable ways ^[15]. Therefore, low self-control, particularly in the performance domain, should be associated with engagement in socially undesirable behaviors, which would include criminal activity.

Studies on the relationship between self-control and crime have indeed found consistent significant associations ^{[16][17][18][19]}. The meta-analysis by Pratt and Cullen ^[17] suggests effect sizes of 0.26–0.28 in low self-control predicting crime. However, this effect size decreased when studies were longitudinal, which suggests that self-control might not be as effective in predicting persistent crime. This suggests that the link between self-control and

general antisocial behavior could be attributable to conceptually similar but distinct constructs. For instance, Friehe and Schildberg-Hörisch [20] found evidence to suggest that the link between self-control and crime is due primarily to increased risk taking, rather than to engagement in antisocial behavior. However, longitudinal research on adolescents suggests that low self-control is associated with higher levels of aggressive and delinquent behavior [21]. Thus, other constructs appear to coexist with self-control in the etiology of conduct problems.

2. Interrelations between Self-Control and the Dark Triad

Despite Gottfredson and Hirschi's [4] claim that other associations with crime beyond self-control are spurious, other researchers have found evidence to challenge their general theory. In particular, the Dark Triad of personality has been long associated with antisocial behavior and criminal activity [6][7]. The Dark Triad, which consists of traits that share a common core of callous manipulation, is comprised of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy [7]. Each of these traits have been individually associated with criminal outcomes. Narcissism is characterized by increased grandiosity, a sense of entitlement, and a sensitivity to ego threat [22]. Machiavellianism is characterized by a cynical worldview, a long-term focus, and strategic flexibility [23]. Psychopathy is characterized by high dysfunctional impulsivity, behavioral disinhibition, and aggression [10][24][25][26]. With respect to criminal behavior, narcissism and Machiavellianism have been studied most often for instances of white-collar and financial crime [27][28], whereas psychopathy is highly predictive of generalized criminal behavior [29][30][31], and especially of violent crime [8][32][33][34]. All three are related to distinct types of aggression and antisocial behavior in adolescents [35], and to bullying behaviors in adults [5].

In adolescents, all three Dark Triad traits are differentially associated with antisocial behaviors. Whereas Machiavellianism was strongly associated with emotional dysregulation, it was not uniquely predictive of delinquency [35]. In the same study, both psychopathy and narcissism predicted overt aggression and delinquency. In a study on cyber-aggression in adolescents, Pabian and colleagues [36] found that only psychopathy was significantly predictive of cyber-aggression. Other research also finds support for Dark Triad traits, and especially psychopathy, in predicting delinquent behaviors and adolescent aggression [37][38][39]. Therefore, these traits present an alternate perspective on the causal precursors to antisocial and criminal behavior.

Both the Dark Triad traits and self-control are viable causal precursors to antisocial and criminal outcomes in adolescents. However, this may be due, in part, to overlap between the constructs. Psychopathy, in particular, is consistently related to low self-control and high levels of dysfunctional impulsivity [10][11]. When correlated with the Big Five traits of personality, both sets of constructs have similar associations with low conscientiousness, high extraversion, and low agreeableness [40][41].

Some research on self-control, the Dark Triad, and crime suggests that they are additively predictive. Narcissism and low self-control were both independently and interactively predictive of violence in an adult sample [42], as were psychopathy and low self-control in adolescents [43]. In a study on both substance use and criminal offending, the Dark Triad and self-control were both additively predictive of offending, but only self-control independently predicted substance use [44]. DeLisi and colleagues [45] found that, in a head-to-head test, low self-control was

associated with more forms of delinquency than psychopathy and was a stronger independent predictor of chronic self-control. However, Wright and colleagues [12] found that the Dark Triad outperformed self-control in predicting violent delinquency, and that the variables significantly interacted. Thus, there is mixed evidence as to the nature of the relationship between self-control, the Dark Triad, and criminal outcomes. Dark Triad of personality might be an equally strong, if not stronger, predictor of antisocial and criminal outcomes.

3. Conclusions

One of the important aims of criminology is to influence the capacity to deter future delinquent and antisocial behavior on the basis of scientific findings that can guide the design of preventive and early intervention strategies among youth. It will be fine if the present study contributes to the incentivization of further research on the self-control and the Dark Triad construct among Southern European youth to deter the development of conduct problems and other related psychosocial problems.

References

1. Moffitt, T.E. Adolescence-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychol. Rev.* 1993, 100, 674–701.
2. Moffitt, T.E.; Caspi, A. Childhood predictors differentiate life-course persistent and adolescence-limited antisocial pathways among males and females. *Dev. Psychopathol.* 2001, 13, 355–375.
3. Vaughn, M.G.; Salas-Wright, C.P.; DeLisi, M.; Maynard, B.R. Violence and externalizing behavior among youth in the United States: Is there a severe 5%? *Youth Violence Juv. Justice* 2014, 12, 3–21.
4. Gottfredson, M.; Hirschi, T. *A General Theory of Crime*; Stanford University Press: Palo Alto, CA, USA, 1990.
5. Baughman, H.M.; Dearing, S.; Giammarco, E.; Vernon, P.A. Relationships between bullying behaviours and the Dark Triad: A study with adults. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 2012, 52, 571–575.
6. Furnham, A.; Richards, S.C.; Paulhus, D.L. The Dark Triad of personality: A 10 year review. *Soc. Pers. Psychol. Compass* 2013, 7, 199–216.
7. Paulhus, D.L.; Williams, K.M. The dark triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *J. Res. Pers.* 2002, 36, 556–563.
8. Harris, G.T.; Rice, M.E.; Cormier, C.A. Psychopathy and violent recidivism. *Law Hum. Behav.* 1991, 15, 625–637.
9. Hemphill, J.F.; Templeman, R.; Wong, S.; Hare, R.D. Psychopathy and crime: Recidivism and criminal careers. In *Psychopathy: Theory, Research and Implications for Society*; Springer:

Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1998; pp. 375–399.

10. Jonason, P.K.; Tost, J. I just cannot control myself: The Dark Triad and self-control. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 2010, 49, 611–615.
11. Jones, D.N.; Paulhus, D.L. The role of impulsivity in the Dark Triad of personality. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 2011, 51, 679–682.
12. Wright, J.P.; Morgan, M.A.; Almeida, P.R.; Almosaed, N.F.; Moghrabi, S.S.; Bashatah, F.S. Malevolent forces: Self-control, the Dark Triad, and crime. *Youth Violence Juv. Justice* 2017, 15, 191–215.
13. Baumeister, R.F.; Heatherton, T.F.; Tice, D.M. *Losing Control: How and Why People Fail at Self-Regulation*; Academic Press, Inc.: San Diego, CA, USA, 1994.
14. Tangney, J.P.; Baumeister, R.F.; Boone, A.L. High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success. *J. Pers.* 2004, 72, 271–324.
15. Rothbaum, F.; Weisz, J.R.; Snyder, S.S. Changing the world and changing the self: A two-process model of perceived control. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 1982, 4, 5–37.
16. De Ridder, D.T.; Lensvelt-Mulders, G.; Finkenauer, C.; Stok, F.M.; Baumeister, R.F. Taking stock of self-control: A meta-analysis of how trait self-control relates to a wide range of behaviors. *Pers. Soc. Psychol. Rev.* 2012, 16, 76–99.
17. Pratt, T.C.; Cullen, F.T. The empirical status of Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime: A meta-analysis. *Criminology* 2000, 38, 931–964.
18. Tehrani, H.D.; Yamini, S. Parenting practices, self-control and anti-social behaviors: Meta-analytic structural equation modeling. *J. Crim. Justice* 2020, 68, 101687.
19. Vazsonyi, A.T.; Mikuška, J.; Kelley, E.L. It's time: A meta-analysis on the self-control-deviance link. *J. Crim. Justice* 2017, 48, 48–63.
20. Friehe, T.; Schildberg-Hörisch, H. Self-control and crime revisited: Disentangling the effect of self-control on risk taking and antisocial behavior. *Int. Rev. Law Econ.* 2017, 49, 23–32.
21. De Kemp, R.A.; Vermulst, A.A.; Finkenauer, C.; Scholte, R.H.; Overbeek, G.; Rommes, E.W.; Engels, R.C. Self-control and early adolescent antisocial behavior: A longitudinal analysis. *J. Early Adolesc.* 2009, 29, 497–517.
22. Jones, D.N.; Paulhus, D.L. Differentiating the Dark Triad within the interpersonal circumplex. In *Handbook of Interpersonal Psychology: Theory, Research, Assessment, and Therapeutic Interventions*; Horowitz, L.M., Strack, S., Eds.; Wiley & Sons: New York, NY, USA, 2011; pp. 249–269.

23. Bereczkei, T. The manipulative skill: Cognitive devices and their neural correlates underlying Machiavellian's decision making. *Brain Cogn.* 2015, 99, 24–31.
24. Hare, R.D. *Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths among Us*; The Guilford Press: New York, NY, USA, 1999.
25. Hare, R.D.; Neumann, C.S. Psychopathy as a clinical and empirical construct. *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.* 2008, 4, 217–246.
26. Pailing, A.; Boon, J.; Egan, V. Personality, the Dark Triad and violence. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 2014, 67, 81–86.
27. Blickle, G.; Schlegel, A.; Fassbender, P.; Klein, U. Some personality correlates of business white-collar crime. *Appl. Psychol.* 2006, 55, 220–233.
28. Murphy, P.R. Attitude, Machiavellianism and the rationalization of misreporting. *Account. Organ. Soc.* 2012, 37, 242–259.
29. DeLisi, M. *Psychopathy as Unified Theory of Crime*; Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY, USA, 2016.
30. Geerlings, Y.; Asscher, J.J.; Stams, G.J.J.; Assink, M. The association between psychopathy and delinquency in juveniles: A three-level meta-analysis. *Aggress. Violent Behav.* 2020, 50, 101342.
31. Vaughn, M.G.; DeLisi, M. Were Wolfgang's chronic offenders psychopaths? On the convergent validity between psychopathy and career criminality. *J. Crim. Justice* 2008, 36, 33–42.
32. Fox, B.; DeLisi, M. Psychopathic killers: A meta-analytic review of the psychopathy-homicide nexus. *Aggress. Violent Behav.* 2019, 44, 67–79.
33. Hawes, S.W.; Boccaccini, M.T.; Murrie, D.C. Psychopathy and the combination of psychopathy and sexual deviance as predictors of sexual recidivism: Meta-analytic findings using the Psychopathy Checklist—Revised. *Psychol. Assess.* 2013, 25, 233–243.
34. Krstic, S.; Neumann, C.S.; Roy, S.; Robertson, C.A.; Knight, R.A.; Hare, R.D. Using latent variable- and person-centered approaches to examine the role of psychopathic traits in sex offenders. *Pers. Disord.* 2018, 9, 207–216.
35. Lau, K.S.; Marsee, M.A. Exploring narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism in youth: Examination of associations with antisocial behavior and aggression. *J. Child Fam. Stud.* 2013, 22, 355–367.
36. Pabian, S.; de Backer, C.J.; Vandebosch, H. Dark Triad personality traits and adolescent cyber-aggression. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 2015, 75, 41–46.
37. Chabrol, H.; van Leeuwen, N.; Rodgers, R.; Séjourné, N. Contributions of psychopathic, narcissistic, Machiavellian, and sadistic personality traits to juvenile delinquency. *Pers. Individ.*

Differ. 2009, 47, 734–739.

38. Klimstra, T.A.; Sijtsema, J.J.; Henrichs, J.; Cima, M. The dark triad of personality in adolescence: Psychometric properties of a concise measure and associations with adolescent adjustment from a multi-informant perspective. *J. Res. Pers.* 2014, 53, 84–92.
39. Muris, P.; Meesters, C.; Timmermans, A. Some youths have a gloomy side: Correlates of the dark triad personality traits in non-clinical adolescents. *Child Psychiatry Hum. Dev.* 2013, 44, 658–665.
40. Jakobwitz, S.; Egan, V. The dark triad and normal personality traits. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 2006, 40, 331–339.
41. Romero, E.; Gómez-Fraguela, A.; Luengo, A.N.; Sobral, J. The self-control construct in the general theory of crime: An investigation in terms of personality psychology. *Psychol. Crime Law* 2003, 9, 61–86.
42. Larson, M.; Vaughn, M.G.; Salas-Wright, C.P.; DeLisi, M. Narcissism, low self-control, and violence among a nationally representative sample. *Crim. Justice Behav.* 2015, 42, 644–661.
43. Flexon, J.L.; Meldrum, R.C. Adolescent psychopathic traits and violent delinquency: Additive and nonadditive effects with key criminological variables. *Youth Violence Juv. Justice* 2013, 11, 349–369.
44. Flexon, J.L.; Meldrum, R.C.; Young, J.T.N.; Lehmann, P.S. Low self-control and the dark triad: Disentangling the predictive power of personality traits on young adult substance use, offending, and victimization. *J. Crim. Justice* 2016, 46, 159–169.
45. DeLisi, M.; Tostlebe, J.; Burgason, K.; Heirigs, M.; Vaughn, M. Self-control versus psychopathy: A head-to-head test of general theories of antisociality. *Youth Violence Juv. Justice* 2018, 16, 53–76.

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/58331>