

THE “DARK” PERSONALITY AND COUPLE SATISFACTION

Gîrneț Andreea Alina*

Department of Psychology, West University of Timisoara, Timisoara, Romania

*andreea.girnet97@e-uvt.ro

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the relation between some aspects of personality, like narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy and relationship satisfaction. This research started from the idea that some faces of personality can have an impact on the wellbeing, more exactly on the couples relationship satisfaction. The study presents a non-experimental correlational design. The participants (N = 371) were recruited online, representing persons between 18 and 35 years old, which were in a relationship at the moment of participation. The subjects completed an online questionnaire which consisted of a personality inventory and a scale of couple satisfaction. The results of the research showed that there is a relation between machiavellianism, psychopathy and couple satisfaction. There was no relation revealed between narcissism and couple satisfaction.

Keywords: narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy, couple satisfaction

Introduction

The human personality became an interesting study concept since the beginning of the conceptualization of the domain of psychology. It was scientifically proved that the personality can have different faces. Therefore, we notice a personality pattern that is “dark”, specific to the humans. If we are to talk about some kind of personality pattern in relation to the satisfaction that is felt in couple relationship, there is no impetuous research on this subject. That's why this research tries to highlight this kind of relation, between the personality and relationship satisfaction. The dark personality is represented by variables like narcissism, machiavellianism and psychopathy, measured by the Dark Triad (Daniel N. Jones & Delroy L. Paulhus, 2014). The narcissism is characterized by manipulation and insensitivity. For example, the grandiose drives the narcissistic individuals in an endless search to find himself (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), often resulting auto destructive behavior (Vazire & Funder, 2006). This grandiose face of the narcissism is also represented in the Dark Triad (Daniel N. Jones & Delroy L. Paulhus, 2014). The machiavellianism includes the cynical vision of the world, the lack of morality and the call for

manipulation. This kind of people avoid the manipulation of their family members, such as other behaviors that could affect their reputation, for example showing some kind of weakness (Gavrila, 2008, Gavrila-Ardelean, 2018).). Therefore, the key elements of the machiavellianism seems to be the manipulation, lack of affection and the strategic and calculate orientation (Daniel N. Jones & Delroy L. Paulhus, 2014). On the other side, the psychopaths manifest their insensitive behavior on a short term. This type of person lies for quick rewards, even if the lie can compromise his own interests, on a long-term. This kind of insensitive manipulation combined with other elements, such as neglecting or seeking sensations, in order to create a strong and bold behavioral pattern, similar to criminal behavior. It should be noted that impulsivity is the essential element in the differentiation of psychopathy from machiavellianism (Daniel N. Jones & Delroy L. Paulhus, 2014).

The dependent variable of this research is so called the couple satisfaction, referring to a subjective evaluation of the relationship, which involves both positive and negative feelings towards a partner and implicitly, a general attraction to the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). The variable was measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Røysamb & Vittersø & Tambs, 2014).

Of course, the topics discussed have been addressed more or less in previous researches. A first study, conducted by C. Veronica Smith (2014) and co-workers, highlights aspects of the Dark Triad in relation to the satisfaction of the couple's partners. The results showed that there is a significant negative and marginal correlation between psychopathy and couple satisfaction. Keeping a similar theme, Brewer & Abell's (2017) study wants to investigate how machiavellianism can influence the satisfaction and quality of the couple's relationship. The results showed that women with high machiavellianism scores showed a lower level of satisfaction in the relationship. All the previously studied research culminated in the accomplishment of the present research paper. In the present study, we examined the relation between Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy and Satisfaction felt in the couple, within a sample of subjects between the ages of 18 and 35 and who were in a couple relationship at the time of the evaluation. Based on the results obtained in previous researches, we formulated the following research hypotheses:

1. There is a relation between narcissism and couple satisfaction.
2. There is a relation between machiavellianism and couple satisfaction.
3. There is a relation between psychopathy and couple satisfaction.

Methodology

Design

The present study presents a non-experimental correlational design. It is also a cross-sectional study because we collected data from a single sample of subjects, once, through the application of questionnaires.

Participants

The participants ($N = 371$) in the study were represented by the general population, between the ages of 18 and 35 and who were currently engaged in a love relationship. The percentage of female participants was 90% and 10% for the male participants. Thus, there is a considerable difference between the two genders. Regarding the environment of the participants, 70.9% come from urban areas and 29.1% from rural areas. We also notice a considerable majority of people in the urban area. Also, 66% of the participants graduated high school, 25.9% higher education, 7.8% graduated postgraduate studies and the rest, other studies. All participants were recruited online, using a questionnaire to apply the measuring instruments.

Research instruments

The Dark Triad (Daniel N. Jones & Delroy L. Paulhus, 2014), more precisely its short version, is one of the tools used in this research, having the role of measuring both narcissism, machiavellianism and psychopathy. The instrument has three subscales (narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy) of 9 items each, where it is used a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = Strong disagreement and 5 = Strong agreement. Following the statistical analyses, carried out within the validation article of this instrument, it has been shown that Machiavellianism correlates positively with Psychopathy ($r = .50$, $p < .001$), as well as with Narcissism ($r = .18$, $p < .001$). Psychopathy also correlated with Narcissism ($r = .34$, $p < .001$). The three subscales showed a modest but acceptable internal consistency (Machiavellianism $\alpha = .71$, Psychiatry $\alpha = .77$, Narcissism $\alpha = .74$). Within the present study, all three subscales also correlated significantly and positively (Narcissism and Machiavellianism $r = .35$, $p < .000$; Narcissism and Psychiatry $r = .32$, $p < .000$; Machiavellianism and Psychiatry $r = .54$, $p < .000$). And in the case of Machiavellianism, a modest internal consistency of $\alpha = .77$ was obtained. In the case of Narcissism, we obtained a value of $\alpha = .74$ of internal consistency and in the case of Psychopathy, an internal consistency of $\alpha = .71$ was obtained (Daniel N. Jones & Delroy L. Paulhus, 2014).

Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Røysamb & Vittersø & Tambs, 2014) was used to measure satisfaction. The instrument contains 10 items that have been translated from English into Romanian, not being validated in the Romanian population. A Likert scale from 1 to 6 was also used, where 1 = Strong disagreement and 6 = Strong agreement. Following the statistical measurements resulting from the instrument validation article, a high value of internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = .92$). However, in the case of item 7, a weak internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = .59$). The authors state that it is possible that the item concerned has induced difficulties on the subjects being formulated as a double negation in English and thus leading to possible errors. For example, “disagreeing” in “We often disagree on important decisions” (Røysamb & Vittersø & Tambs, 2014). In the present study, we obtained an internal consistency of $\alpha = .90$ and no item presenting an internal consistency of less than $\alpha = .88$.

Research procedure

The instruments were applied using a questionnaire created in Google Forms and distributed online. Data were collected only once from a single sample of subjects, over whom no observational, randomization or manipulation of variables took place.

Results

Following the statistical analyses applied to the hypotheses of this research the following results were obtained: *Table 1* contains the means and standard deviations of all the variables included in the statistical analyzes of the study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for each study variable

Variabiles	M	MD	SD
Age	21.76		4.59
Gender		2.00	.30
Narcissism	2.82		.69
Machiavellianism	3.22		.71
Psychopathy	2.10		.68
Couple satisfaction	5.03		.93

Hypothesis 1. There is a relation between narcissism and couple satisfaction

Within this hypothesis, we want to verify the existence of a correlation between narcissism and couple satisfaction. Due to the asymmetry of the statistical data, the use of a Spearman type correlation is noted. Thus, using the Spearman correlation, following statistical analyzes, we obtained a positive, but insignificant relation between narcissism and couple satisfaction, $\rho_{(369)}=.065$, $p = .214$ ($p < .05$). The present hypothesis is not, therefore, supported by the results obtained regarding narcissism in relation to couple satisfaction (According to *Table 2*).

Table 2. Correlation between narcissism and couple satisfaction

Correlation	
	Couple satisfaction
Narcissism	.065

Hypothesis 2. There is a relation between machiavellianism and couple satisfaction

The present hypothesis wants to verify the existence of a relation between machiavellianism and couple satisfaction. Following Spearman's statistical correlation analyzes, the results indicate the presence of a negative and significant relation between machiavellianism and couple satisfaction, $\rho_{(369)} = -.162$, $p = .002$ ($p < .05$). The hypothesis is therefore supported by the results obtained, presenting a significant relation between the two variables, and thus, with the increase of machiavellianism, the satisfaction will decrease (According to Table 3). Being a Spearman correlation, we cannot talk about the size of the effect.

Table 3. Correlation between machiavellianism and couple Satisfaction

Correlation		
	Couple satisfaction	Sig.
Machiavellianism	-.162 *	.002

* $p < .05$ (bi-directional)

Hypothesis 3. There is a relation between psychopathy and couple satisfaction

The present hypothesis wants to verify the presence of a relation between psychopathy and couple satisfaction. Applying the Spearman statistical correlation method, the results indicate the presence of a significant and negative relations, $\rho_{(369)} = -.245$, $p = .000$ ($p < .01$) between psychopathy and couple satisfaction. The hypothesis is sustained by the results obtained statistically, noting that with the increase of psychopathy, the satisfaction in the couple decreases (According to Table 4). Being a Spearman correlation, we cannot talk about the size of the effect.

Table 4. Correlation between psychopathy and couple satisfaction

	Correlation	
	Couple satisfaction	Sig.
Psychopathy	-.245 **	.000

** $p < .01$ (bi-directional)

Discussions

The objective of this research paper was to investigate the relation between Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy and Satisfaction felt in couple, within a non-pathological population, between the ages of 18 and 35. The main purpose of this study was represented by the relation between Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy with Couple Satisfaction. Most of the correlational goals were statistically sustained, except for the relation between Narcissism and Couple Satisfaction (Hypothesis 1). Hypotheses 2 and 3 were successfully sustained by statistical results, indicating the presence of a significant but negative relation between the "dark" personality facets and the satisfaction in the couple. The negative relation is explained by the fact that the higher the level of Machiavellianism and Psychopathy, the lower the satisfaction felt in the couple. As in previous studies, a significant and negative relation between two elements of the Dark Triad, namely Machiavellianism and Psychiatry, was found in relation to Couple Satisfaction (C. Veronica Smith, 2014; Uysal Askim Nur, 2016).

Limits

A first limit found in this study is given by a possible presence of social desirability in the subjects' answers. Being a study based on the evaluation of less pleasant aspects of the human personality, the subjects might have been tempted to mask certain thoughts and cognitions by choosing the "correct" answer, but not the real one. Thus, it is worth noting the need to introduce and a scale of measurement of Social Desirability in the case of future research. Second, one of the limits is given by the instrument used to measure the couples satisfaction, not validated on the Romanian population and only translated from English into Romanian. Another limit found is given by the age and gender of the participants, the average age being 21.76. In this case, we cannot say that the results obtained apply to a whole range of persons between the ages of 18 and 35 years, the majority of the participants being represented by persons including the age of 21-22 years. At the same time, the gender of the participants can take the limiting role of the study, being represented by the majority of the female population, with a percentage of only 10% of men. Thus, the need to maintain a balanced sample is noted. We can also fit the boundary position, and the fact that the sample used consisted only of subjects who were in a romantic relationship at the time of the study, but no actual couples of subjects were used, which would have conferred an

additional validity on the results obtained. A final limit found in this study is also the lack of control of foreign variables, as well as the lack of observation of the subjects when completing the questionnaire. Because the instruments were applied in online, it was not possible to control the foreign variables and possible interruptions that could have occurred on the subjects at the time of completion. An adequate usage of specialty terms is also important when translating these instruments, as well as making sure that people understand them correctly. This as there is a professional language used by psychologists and social workers (Goian, 2004, Goian, 2010, Goian, 2012). Also, future studies could focus on subjects who have achieved high levels of narcissism, machiavellism and psychopathy to check their scores in relation to the couple's satisfaction, but also to their partners. Moreover, in order to obtain valid and robust results, future studies should take into consideration to use a validated and culturally adapted scale (Tudorel et al., 2019; Vintilă et al., 2018).

Theoretical and practical implications

From a practical point of view, the present work helps to demonstrate the implications of the personality in the couple relationship. Thus, it can serve its usefulness in couple therapies, coming as an explanation of certain behaviors that one of the couple's partners may have and which may have a connection with the satisfaction felt in the couple.

Conclusions

As it was highlighted in the present study, there is a relation between certain aspects of personality, such as narcissism, machiavellism, psychopathy and couple satisfaction. Noteworthy is that the results did not show a significant relation between narcissism and couple satisfaction. If the presented results are produced as a result of errors in the design of the study or actually generated by the content of the used instruments, it remains a problem that must be addressed in future studies. At the same time, the results showed that with the increase of machiavellianism and psychopathy, the couple's satisfaction will decrease. Therefore, the present study highlights a contemporary problem found in couple relationships, namely that the manifestation of certain personality patterns can create conflict and minimize the satisfaction felt by the couple's partners.

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