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**Unmasking the Dark Triad: Exploring its Relationship with Attitudes Towards Intimate Partner Violence**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose.** Although it is a relatively recent conceptualization of malevolent personality, the Dark Triad (DT) has been widely researched and shown to be responsible for increases in physical violence, controlling behavior, short-term mating preferences, and poor relationship quality. This study aimed to investigate whether Dark Triad traits predict acceptance towards intimate partner violence (IPV) in the general population, addressing a gap in the literature regarding predictors of harmful attitudes towards romantic relationships.

**Methodology.** 150 adults aged 18-74 (76% women) completed two self-report questionnaires: the Short Dark Triad and the Intimate Partner Violence Attitude Scale-Revised.

**Findings.** A series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted with gender as predictor in the first models and Dark Triad traits added as predictors in second models. The results showed that male participants were more accepting of IPV than female participants. Over and above the contribution of gender, psychopathy and Machiavellianism positively predicted overall IPV acceptance, but narcissism did not. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism positively predicted acceptance of psychological abuse, and psychopathy positively predicted acceptance of controlling behaviors. Narcissism did not predict any facet of IPV acceptance.

**Originality.** As the first study to explore the roles of DT traits in acceptance of IPV behaviors, the results contribute to our understanding how these traits may predispose individuals to harmful intimate partner behaviors. These findings can inform IPV prevention efforts to aid early identification of individuals who hold maladaptive beliefs surrounding romantic relationships.

*Keywords:* Dark Triad; personality; intimate partner violence; relationships; intimate partner abuse

**Unmasking the Dark Triad: Exploring its Relationship with Attitudes Towards Intimate Partner Violence**

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) or abuse is a widespread global issue affecting people of all genders. However, research in this area often emphasizes the physical and sexual forms of abuse (Sardinha *et al.*, 2022), while affording comparatively less attention to the psychological forms of IPV (Dokkedahl *et al.*, 2022). These are estimated to be more common than physical IPV, and usually begin with psychological aggression (e.g., insults and yelling), progressing into coercion (e.g., isolation and threats). IPV perpetration has been empirically linked to personality disorders (Collinson and Lynam, 2021), with some evidence that subclinical traits may also be implicated in these behaviors (Pereira *et al.*, 2020). This can include those outlined in the Dark Triad (DT) of personality.

The DT (Paulhus and Williams, 2002) comprises three traits: Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy. Machiavellianism denotes cunningness and manipulation for one’s personal gain, usually with planning and long-term, focused goals (Miller *et al.*, 2016). Conversely, both narcissism and psychopathy are strongly linked to impulsivity and disorganized behavior (Jones and Paulhus, 2011). Narcissism is further characterized by a grandiose sense of self-importance, lack of empathy, and a disposition for engaging in exploitative behaviors (Campbell and Miller, 2011; Canavan, 2017). Due to their inflated sense of self-worth, individuals with high levels of narcissism regularly indulge in attention-seeking behaviors (Holtzman *et al.*, 2010). Upon social rejection of attention-seeking advances, they may become angry and violent (Poggi *et al.*, 2019), even towards a romantic partner. This sensitivity to rejection is also commonplace among those high in the behavioral and interpersonal facets of psychopathy (Poggi *et al.*, 2019). Evidently, psychopathy and narcissism share many characteristics (Hare and Neumann, 2008, 2009), while Machiavellianism is more contrasting. While this trait shares characteristics of interpersonal manipulation with psychopathy and narcissism, the methods of such manipulation are vastly different (Jones and Paulhus, 2017), and there seem to be few other overlapping factors aside from empathy deficits.

Although the DT is a relatively recent conceptualization, an extensive body of work has examined these socially aversive traits. These studies have uncovered strong relationships between each DT trait and various interpersonal tendencies, including controlling behaviors and attachment styles within romantic relationships. For instance, Brewer *et al.* (2018) found that, among women, Machiavellianism was linked to attachment avoidance and controlling behaviors in romantic relationships, while psychopathy was associated with fear of abandonment; a disorganized or anxious-avoidant attachment style; and various forms of partner control. In contrast, using a mixed-gender sample, Čopková and Lörincová (2021) observed a relationship between Machiavellianism and anxious attachment style, while their findings for psychopathy aligned with those of Brewer *et al.* (2018). Meanwhile, the literature on narcissism and attachment is limited and inconsistent. For example, Čopková and Lörincová (2021) did not observe a significant relationship between narcissism and any type of attachment, but Womick *et al.* (2020) argue that this trait resembles a dismissive attachment style. These findings are noteworthy given that insecure attachment styles have been empirically linked to IPV perpetration (Bonache *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, Jonason *et al.* (2012) found that DT traits are linked to preference for short-term relationships over long-term commitment. Namely, narcissism correlated with preferences for one-night stands; psychopathy with ‘booty-call’ relationships; and Machiavellianism with ‘friends-with-benefits’ situations—but interestingly, also with serious romantic relationships. It has been shown that dissatisfaction within one’s romantic relationship is associated with an increase in hostility and IPV (Heyman *et al.*, 2022); thus, it is possible that this preference for short-term relationships among individuals high on psychopathy and narcissism may be a mediating factor in the initiation of IPV.

It is therefore important to consider relationships between the DT and incidences of interpersonal violence (Lambe *et al.*, 2016). Pailing *et al.* (2014) found that psychopathy is the only DT trait that predicts interpersonal violence, including IPV. This could be a result of the synonymous impulsivity and recklessness associated with both IPV (Shorey *et al.*, 2010) and psychopathy (Jones and Paulhus, 2011). However, Pailing *et al.*’s (2014) study comprised mostly female participants (73%), resulting in findings that may not be generalizable to other genders. This is especially evident when considering that rates of all three DT traits are higher in men than women (Collinson and Lynam, 2021). Thus, more research is needed that assesses associations between DT traits and IPV among other gender groups.

Nonetheless, in a systematic review by Tharshini *et al.* (2021), a relationship between psychopathy and instrumental violence was observed. These results are interesting due to the association of psychopathy with impulsive behavior. It would be expected that most psychopathic violence would be impulsive and reactive to a specific situation; however, it appears it can also be employed strategically to achieve a subsidiary goal (Lindo *et al.*, 2022). In the context of IPV, this subsidiary goal is most commonly to maintain control over one’s partner (Ennis *et al.*, 2017).

Furthermore, it is important to consider the substantial evidence that psychopathy is not solely linked to an increase in physical assaults, but also levels of sexual aggression and Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) (Ioannides and Willmott, 2023). RMA typically encompasses victim-blaming attitudes, denying victim harm, and defending the perpetrator under the guise that ‘men cannot control their desires’ (Watts *et al*., 2017). Mouilso and Calhoun (2013) observed positive correlations between psychopathy and six of the seven subscales of the RMA scale (Payne *et al.*, 1999). Due to previous findings that RMA significantly predicts perpetration of sexual aggression (Yapp and Quayle, 2018), it is vital to consider that RMA may result in sexually abusive behaviors within romantic relationships, particularly those involving individuals high on psychopathy. Furthermore, blaming one’s partner is a common method utilized in abusive relationships, as shown by its inclusion in various measures of IPV (Ford-Gilboe *et al*., 2016; Porrúa-García *et al*., 2016). There therefore appears to be overlap between RMA and psychological abuse.

Narcissism has also been associated with an increase in violence (Kjærvik and Bushman, 2021), usually occuring when the individual is provoked or criticized, or when their ego is threatened. These findings are consistent throughout the general population, including across cultures (Kjærvik and Bushman, 2021; Lambe *et al.*, 2016). This trait also appears to be a strong predictor of both psychological and sexual abuse (Russell *et al.*, 2022), the latter of which is further emphasized by findings that, like psychopathy, narcissistic traits positively predict RMA (Bushman *et al*., 2003; Long and Herr, 2022). Although existing research on relationships between RMA and narcissism is currently limited, it is evident that individuals high on narcissism may be more likely to engage in various abusive behaviors and to favor short-term relationship situations. This contributes to lower levels of commitment within long-term relationships (Foster and Brunell, 2018), which could consequently develop into frustration and potentially IPV.

Alternatively, Machiavellianism tends to involve using cunning interpersonal manipulation in order to get one’s way (Dahling *et al.*, 2009), rendering the use of violence unnecessary. This has been demonstrated by Plouffe *et al.* (2020), who found that Machiavellianism did not significantly predict physical or psychological violence, and in fact individuals with higher levels of this trait are less likely to engage in such behaviors. However, their study failed to establish whether individuals high in Machiavellianism hold accepting attitudes towards IPV but simply choose not to engage in it, or if there is actually an inverse relationship between these variables. Although associations have been observed between Machiavellianism and the legitimization of sexual violence and RMA (Jonason *et al*, 2017), it currently unclear whether this extends to IPV.

Machiavellianism also plays an interesting role within the wider romantic relationship context. While the trait predicts harmful behaviors such as the use of deceptive mating strategies (Dussault *et al.*, 2013); partaking in relationships solely for status and resources (Ináncsi *et al.*, 2016); and a tendency for divulging intimate sexual secrets (Kardum *et al.*, 2018), it is not an accurate predictor of low relationship quality (Kardum *et al.*, 2018). Thus, while psychopathy is a strong predictor of poor relationship quality (Mooney *et al.*, 2019), this does not appear to be the case for narcissism or Machiavellianism.

**The Current Study**

Previous research has shown associations between the DT traits such relationship issues as controlling behaviors (Brewer *et al.*, 2018), insecure attachment styles (Brewer *et al.*, 2018; Čopková and Lörincová, 2021; Womick *et al.*, 2020), violence (Kjærvik and Bushman, 2021; Lambe *et al.*, 2016; Pailing *et al.*, 2014), short-term relationship preferences (Jonason *et al.*, 2012), and sexist attitudes (Gluck *et al.*, 2020). However, societal acceptance of harmful behaviors such as IPV has implications for policy and criminal justice. It is therefore important to investigate such attitudes and which individual difference factors may be implicated in them. At present, little is known about the relationships between the DT and attitudes towards IPV. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the relationships between Dark Triad traits and attitudes towards IPV, in accordance with the following hypotheses:

H1. There will be a significant difference in acceptance of IPV between genders, with men holding more accepting attitudes than women.

H2. Beyond the influence of gender, higher levels of Dark Triad traits will positively predict more accepting attitudes of IPV.

H3: Higher levels of psychopathy will be the strongest predictor of accepting attitudes towards IPV.

# Method

Data files from this study are publicly available on the Open Science Framework at BLINDED.

**Participants**

Participants were gathered from the general public using opportunistic sampling via social media (Facebook, SurveyCircle) and a university participant recruitment platform (SONA). Inclusion criteria required participants to be aged 18+ and fluent in English. There were no other exclusion criteria. Although the study was undertaken at a UK institution, adults in any country were free to participate. An *a priori* power analysis using G\*Power (Faul *et al.*, 2007) showed that a minimum of 77 participants was required in order to detect a medium effect (*f*2 = .15), to a power of 80% and a significance level of α = .05. In total, 152 adults participated; however, two outliers were removed (see Results section), resulting in a total sample of 150 (34 men, 114 women, 2 non-binary). Aside from one participant who did not disclose their age, participants were aged 18 to 74 (*M* = 32, *SD* = 14.14). Due to institutional budget restraints, participants were not provided with payments or incentives. However, SONA participants earned credits which allow them to advertise their own studies on the platform.

**Materials**

The Intimate Partner Attitude Scale-Revised (IPVAS-R; Fincham *et al.*, 2008) was used to measure attitudes towards IPV. This scale has 17 items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree to strongly agree.* Higher scores indicate more accepting attitudes towards IPV. The scale includes three subscales: physical violence (4 items, all reverse-scored; e.g., “I think it is wrong to ever damage anything that belongs to my partner”); psychological abuse (8 items; e.g., “It is okay for me to blame my partner when I do bad things”); and controlling behaviors (5 items; e.g., “It is okay for me to tell my partner not to talk to someone of the opposite sex”). The IPVAS-R has been shown to have good construct validity and very good test-retest reliability (α = .91) (Fincham *et al.*, 2008; Hall and Jones, 2022). In the current study, internal consistency was as follows: psychological abuse, α = .83; controlling behaviors, α = .67; physical violence, α = .68; total scale, α =.84.

Dark Triad traits were measured using the 27-item Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones and Paulhus, 2014). Participants indicated how much they agreed with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with each DT trait as its own 9-item subscale. Item examples include “It’s not wise to tell your secrets” (Machiavellianism), “People see me as a natural leader” (narcissism), and “People often say I’m out of control” (psychopathy). Higher scores indicate higher levels of each DT trait. The SD3 demonstrates strong convergent validity with longer measures of the same constructs, and robust incremental and discriminant validity (Maples *et al*., 2014). In the current study, each subscale showed acceptable internal consistency: Machiavellianism, α = .78; narcissism, α = .72; and psychopathy, α = .72.

**Procedure**

Following ethical approval from the College of Health, Psychology, and Social Care at the researchers’ university (Ref: ETH2233-1338), prospective participants navigated to the study on Qualtrics. After reading an information sheet about the study, they gave their consent and demographic information. They then completed the SD3 and IPVAS-R and were debriefed and thanked for their time.

**Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). Participation was completely voluntary and full ethical approval was gained prior to data collection. No identifying information was collected during the study. In order to uphold their right to withdraw while maintaining anonymity, participants were required to generate a unique ID code, which could then be used to withdraw their data after participation if they requested this. Unique ID codes were destroyed two weeks after data collection ended. A full risk assessment was conducted prior to ethical approval and the study was deemed of low risk. Nonetheless, all participants were signposted on the debrief to relevant mental health and IPV support services to support their wellbeing.

# Results

First, data were screened for parametric assumptions and outliers. Scatterplots appeared linear, but a Mahalanobis Distances analysis revealed two significant multivariate outliers at a significance level of .001 (p = .00013 and p = .00073), indicating that these data points were unusually distant from the center of the dataset. They were therefore removed prior to inferential analyses to avoid skewing the results. Means and standard deviations for each variable are presented in Table I, split according to gender. Bivariate correlations showed that all variables were significantly correlated with one another except for acceptance of physical violence, which was not correlated with any of the DT traits (see Table II).

>>INSERT TABLES I AND II APPROXIMATELY HERE<<

Next, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. In step one, gender was the predictor and IPV acceptance was the outcome variable. Due to insufficient sample size, non-binary participants (*n* = 2) were excluded from the analysis. In support of H1, Model 1 was significant, *F*(1, 146) = 4.53, *p* = .035, *R*2 = .03. In step two, narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism were added as predictors. The addition of DT traits to the prediction of IPV acceptance (Model 2) led to a statistically significant increase in *R*2 of .23, *F*(3, 143) = 14.98, *p* < .001, *f*2 = .31. H2 was therefore also supported. The full model of gender, narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism to predict IPV acceptance (Model 3) was statistically significant, *R*2 = .26, *F*(4, 143) = 12.70, *p* < .001, *R*2adj = .24. In support of H3, psychopathy was the strongest predictor (*t* = 3.12, *p* = .002, *B =* .468, *SE = .*150, β = .309). Machiavellianism also contributed significantly to this model (*t* = 2.47, *p* = .015, *B =* .322, *SE = .*130, β = .226), but narcissism did not (*t* = 0.43, *p* = .665).

Additional exploratory analyses were then conducted to investigate whether DT traits predicted the separate facets of IPV acceptance (psychological abuse, controlling behaviors, and physical violence) over and above the contribution of gender. To mitigate the risk of Type I error, a Bonferroni correction was applied, resulting in a new significance threshold of *p* = .017. Bonferroni was chosen because of its conservative nature and power when number of comparisons is small (Field, 2017). Acceptance of psychological abuse was positively predicted by psychopathy (*t* = 3.03, *p* = .003, *B =* .260, *SE = .*086, β = .294) and Machiavellianism (*t* = 2.65, *p* = .009, *B =* .198, *SE = .*075, β = .238), but narcissism was not a significant predictor (*t* = .794, *p* = .428). Acceptance of controlling behaviors was positively predicted by psychopathy(*t* = 2.51, *p* = .013, *B =* .135, *SE = .*054, β = .269), but Machavellianism (*t* = 1.46, *p* = .146) and narcissism (*t* = .187, *p* = .852) were not significant predictors. None of the DT traits were significantly predictive of acceptance of physical violence. All hierarchical regression results are summarized in Table III.

>>INSERT TABLE III APPROX HERE<<

# Discussion

**H1: Gender and IPV Acceptance**

This study’s first hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant difference in acceptance of IPV between genders, with men holding significantly more accepting attitudes towards IPV than women. This was supported by the first model, which suggested that, on average, men endorse IPV behaviors more than women. This is somewhat consistent with previous research, wherein it is commonly expressed that men tend to be perpetrators of IPV, while women tend to be victims (Laskey *et al.*, 2019; Tarzia *et al.*, 2017). However, it is important to consider the growing body of literature on the topic of male victimization, which has found that men are just as likely to be victimized by IPV (Lysova and Dim, 2020), or even more so in some cases (Pengpid and Peltzer, 2016). Nonetheless, attitudes to certain behaviors can be vastly distinct from the propensity to actually engage in them. It is possible that men wish to exert a more stereotypically masculine output, in line with societal expectations based on general biological differences of aggression (Im *et al.*, 2018), and may consequently present with accepting attitudes towards IPV. Many men are also driven by a desire for power and control, and acceptance of IPV would aid this goal of achieving such over one’s partner.

However, many men choose not to engage in such behavior. Men who perpetrate IPV are often described as ‘angry’ and ‘controlling’, while female perpetrators are merely referred to as ‘overly emotional’ (Scarduzio *et al.*, 2016). These perceptions are also present within the legal system, wherein male-perpetrated IPV is viewed as a much more severe issue than female-perpetrated IPV (White and Dutton, 2013). Despite these earlier observations, in a more recent study, Conroy *et al*. (2023) found that perpetrator sex does not influence attitudes towards IPV. Interestingly, those who endorse male-perpetrated IPV also tend to endorse female-perpetrated IPV, potentially indicating a shift in attitudes as society becomes increasingly egalitarian. Overall, it seems as if men hold significantly more accepting attitudes towards IPV than women, but many choose not to engage in it—perhaps as a result of harsher legal and social ramifications.

**H2: Dark Triad Traits and IPV Acceptance**

The second hypothesis predicted that, when controlling for gender, higher levels of DT traits would positively predict more accepting attitudes towards IPV. This hypothesis was supported by the results, which will be discussed below in relation to each trait.

**H3*:* Contribution of Each DT Trait**

***Psychopathy***

In support of the third hypothesis, psychopathy was found to be the strongest predictor of IPV acceptance. Specifically, psychopathy significantly predicted acceptance of psychological abuse and controlling behaviors, but not physical violence. This lack of significant relationship is surprising, especially considering the strong empirical links to violence that have been observed in previous studies (Pailing *et al.*, 2014; Tharshini *et al.*, 2021). Due to the impulsivity inherent in psychopathy (Jones and Paulhus, 2011), those high on this trait tend to commit reactive violence (Jones and Paulhus, 2010) as an emotional response to provocation (Blais *et al.*, 2014). This provocation is most commonly physical, such as a gratuitous violent act from one’s partner (Jones and Paulhus, 2010), rather than verbal. Physical IPV also tends to be impulsive in nature (Shorey *et al.*, 2010), which could explain why those high on psychopathy tend to engage in this behavior more (Cunha *et al.*, 2018). However, as little deliberation is involved, these individuals may not hold accepting attitudes towards reactive violence, as they would only utilize it if they felt they needed to retaliate against their partner in the moment. However, those high on psychopathy are also capable of instrumental violence (Tharshini *et al.*, 2021), wherein violent behavior is utilized to gain control over one’s partner, assert dominance, and gain bargaining power (Ennis *et al.*, 2017). This type of violence is much more premeditated, with a specific goal in mind. As such, it was surprising to find that psychopathy did not predict acceptance towards physical violence in this study. However, the IPVAS-R subscale seems to focus predominantly on attitudes towards reactive violence, failing to capture attitudes towards instrumental violence. This may indicate a flaw with the instrument, warranting further research on the relationship between psychopathy and acceptance of physical violence towards intimate partners.

Conversely, despite the limited research on the topic, the strong relationship observed between psychopathy and acceptance of psychological abuse was as expected in light of the interpersonal manipulation that is inherent to psychopathy (Hare and Neumann, 2008). These findings suggest that those high on psychopathy may believe it is acceptable to psychologically abuse their partner—most likely as a method of manipulation or intimidation. However, high-psychopathy individuals tend to be callous and sadistic (Hare and Neumann, 2008; O’Connell and Marcus, 2019), and it is therefore plausible that these individuals may have demonstrated accepting attitudes towards psychological abuse simply because they are indifferent to seeing or imagining their partner in emotional distress.

It is interesting that, with Bonferroni correction applied, psychopathy still emerged as a significant predictor of acceptance towards controlling behaviors in this study. This finding was largely expected as a result of previous findings linking psychopathy to engagement in various forms of attempted control over one’s partner (Brewer *et al.*, 2018; Massar *et al.*, 2017). These behaviors may be a result of the link between psychopathy and fear of abandonment (Brewer *et al.,* 2018). Those high on psychopathy may feel as if controlling their partner’s actions is a necessary act to ensure the security of their relationship. For example, they may be more weary of their partner’s infidelity, whereby acceptance of controlling behaviors would serve as a solid basis from which to avoid this occurrence. Individuals high on psychopathy struggle to form emotional attachments with others due to their shallow affect and lack of empathy (Čopková and Lörincová, 2021), and prefer short-term relationships (Jonason *et al.,* 2012). Thus, controlling one’s partner may be seen as a way to maintain a sense of distance in their relationship by reinforcing a power dynamic. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial for future research investigate motivations for controlling behavior amongst those high on psychopathy.

***Machiavellianism***

Machiavellianism also contributed significantly to the model, but less so than psychopathy. Like psychopathy, Machiavellianism was also not a significant predictor of acceptance of physical violence. Machiavellianism is a trait focused on self-preservation, self-fulfillment, and long-term goals (Miller *et al.,* 2016). Individuals high on this trait have a tendency to not engage in acts of physical violence (Plouffe *et al.,* 2020). It is possible that these individuals do not accept or engage in physical violence because they are acutely aware of the potential negative ramifications of it, such as legal trouble. It is also important to consider the link between Machiavellianism and a preference for long-term, serious relationships (Jonason *et al.,* 2012). Physically attacking a partner could lead to the end of one’s relationship and thus a loss of power over one’s partner, and may result in a setback to achieving their goals for the future. Thus, perhaps those high on Machiavellianism did not demonstrate acceptance towards physical violence in this study simply because it is counter-intuitive to advancing their personal and/or interpersonal goals. Moreover, the IPVAS-R measures attitudes towards actual engagement in violent behavior, whereas Machiavellianism is likely more strongly associated with acceptance of threatening to engage in such behaviors as a form of intimidation (Rauthmann and Will, 2011), which is characterized as psychological abuse.

In this regard, it is unsurprising that Machiavellianism was a significant predictor of acceptance towards psychological abuse in this study. This high level of acceptance is most likely due to the fact that psychological abuse facilitates manipulation of one’s partner through belittling and intimidation to damage their self-esteem (Radell *et al.*, 2021). Individuals with low self-esteem and confidence are particularly susceptible to exploitation; thus, those high on Machiavellianism may utilize this type of abuse as a means of increasing their partner’s vulnerability and consolidating their control over them.

This focus on increasing control renders the finding that Machiavellianism did not predict acceptance towards controlling behavior quite surprising. Acceptance of controlling behavior was expected to be positively related to Machiavellianism, as this trait involves a predisposition to manipulation and exploitation to achieve a particular goal (Dahling *et al.*, 2009; Miller *et al.*, 2016). However, this was not the case, despite a strong relationship being found in some other studies (e.g., Brewer and Abell, 2017; Brewer *et al.*, 2018). Perpetration of controlling behavior is based on long-term planning towards achieving a future goal, likely to enable effective exploitation of a partner (e.g., financially, sexually, or emotionally). Considering the long-term strategic nature of people high on Machiavellianism, it was expected that they would therefore be very accepting of this type of behavior. However, scant research has explored associations between Machiavellianism and perpetration of controlling behavior. Consequently, more empirical evidence is required to parse nuances within the relationships between Machiavellianism and acceptance and perpetration of controlling behaviors in romantic relationships.

***Narcissism***

Narcissism was expected to significantly predict acceptance towards IPV due to its strong empirical links to physical violence and psychological abuse (Kjærvik and Bushman, 2021; Lambe *et al.*, 2016; Russell *et al.*, 2022), but the current study’s results suggest that individuals high on this trait do not have accepting attitudes towards these behaviors as a whole, nor is narcissism a significant predictor of any discrete facets of IPV acceptance.

To explain the null finding regarding acceptance of physical violence, it is important to note that those high on narcissism tend to commit reactive violence in response to a threat to their ego or to provocation (Kjærvik and Bushman, 2021). Thus, much like psychopathy, while these individuals may commit physical IPV, they may not consciously hold accepting attitudes towards it. Narcissism is also associated with maintaining a positive image of oneself to others, and violence may not serve as an effective method of achieving this. Perhaps awareness that IPV is societally abhorred results in an internalization of unsupportive attitudes towards such behavior.

The issue regarding psychological abuse is more complex. As shown by Ponti *et al.* (2019), the ways those high in narcissism engage in psychological abuse differs depending on whether they exhibit the grandiose or vulnerable type of this characteristic. Grandiose narcissism manifests in exaggerated self-esteem, superiority, and entitlement, while vulnerable narcissism is characterized by low self-esteem, emotional hypersensitivity, and introversion (Bogaerts *et al.*, 2021). Ponti *et al.* (2019) found that grandiose narcissists tend to engage in more direct forms of psychological abuse, such as making threats, blaming, or ridiculing one’s partner, while vulnerable narcissists tend to engage in indirect forms, mostly through behaviors intended to make their partner jealous. Due to their introvert tendencies, perhaps they take this more subtle approach to psychological abuse to avoid direct confrontations with their partner.

This dichotomy could explain why narcissism was not a significant predictor in the present study. One of the primary criticisms of the SD3 (Jones and Paulhus, 2014) is that it does not capture vulnerable narcissism very well as it appears to primarily assess the grandiose type (Maples *et al.*, 2014). Thus, it is possible that vulnerable narcissism is significantly predictive of IPV acceptance, but this could not be detected by the present study due to the shortfalls of the scale. It is also important to note that items on the IPVAS-R (Fincham *et al.*, 2008) include statements that relate to both direct and indirect psychological abuse; thus, different items may be more associated with either side of the narcissism dichotomy. For example, respondents with high levels of grandiose narcissism may have held significant acceptance towards the direct forms of psychological abuse, but not the indirect forms, and vice versa for those high on vulnerable narcissism. This may have confounded participants’ scores, explaining the non-significant relationship between this trait and acceptance of IPV.

It is also important to consider the role of this dichotomy in acceptance of controlling behaviors. Those high on grandiose narcissism tend to seek dominance over others, while vulnerable narcissism relates to an avoidant and defensive attitude in interpersonal relationships (Zajenkowski *et al.,* 2018). Thus, those high on grandiose narcissism may hold accepting attitudes towards controlling behavior because it exerts power and dominance over others, but this may not have shown in our results due to the limitations of the SD3. However, it is important to consider the possibility that, due to the egocentricity inherent in this trait, these individuals may be unmotivated to control their partner. This is especially relevant when considering the items of controlling behavior included in the IPVAS-R. These items focus on preventing one’s partner from speaking to other people, usually of the opposite sex. This could have possibly influenced results, as those high on narcissism tend to be less committed in relationships (Foster and Brunell, 2018), and these behaviors may therefore not be much concern to them. Moreover, a study of psychopathy and RMA by Willmott *et al.* (2024) found that the egocentricity and interpersonal manipulation facets of psychopathy did not significantly predict of RMA. In fact, only empathy deficits and demographic variables were significantly predictive of higher RMA. Egocentricity is also characteristic of narcissism; thus, it may be beneficial for future research to investigate how other facets of narcissism, and the demographic variables of those who score high on this trait, may relate to acceptance of IPV.

**Limitations**

This study had some noteworthy limitations. Firstly, participants were asked about their gender identity rather than their sex. This was an oversight, but may also be useful in aiding our understanding of IPV acceptance. Langenderfer-Magruder *et al.* (2014) found a significant relationship between gender identity and IPV victimization, wherein transgender individuals are much more likely to be victimized than cisgender individuals. As such, it would be expected that these individuals would hold much less accepting attitudes towards IPV. In this way, the current study contributes to an emerging evidence base regarding the relationship between gender identity and IPV acceptance.

Secondly, this study utilized a cross-sectional design, which did not account for changes in high-DT individuals’ levels of acceptance towards IPV over time. Romantic relationships are notorious for their ebbs and flows (Knee *et al.*, 2008). As such, participants’ responses likely reflected a snapshot of their current relationship dynamic, neglecting to account for temporal changes. While this is unlikely to have skewed results, it would be beneficial for future longitudinal studies to examine if associations between DT traits and IPV attitudes change or remain consistent over time.

Thirdly, high levels of multicollinearity were present in the dataset. Indeed, Miller *et al.* (2019) highlight that consistently observed conceptual and statistical overlap between measures of psychopathy and Machiavellianism in the DT literature impede clarity about the distinct contributions of these two traits to behavioral outcomes. In our study, these traits showed a correlation of *r* = .595, indicating results should be interpreted with caution. There is also a body of literature that disputes the validity of various instruments measuring psychopathy, with some recommending the use of the Psychopathy Personality Traits Scale to capture the essence of this trait (Boduszek *et al*., 2016; 2018; 2021). Likewise, although the skewed gender balance of the sample did not impact integrity of the regression results because homogeneity of variance was present, the fact that women comprised three-quarters of the sample may impact the generalizability of the findings.

**Implications and Recommendations for Future Research**

Although many studies have investigated the mating strategies and relationship quality of high-DT individuals (Jonason *et al.*, 2011, 2012; Kardum *et al.*, 2018; Prusik *et al.*, 2021), scant research has examined relationships between DT traits and IPV acceptance. Consequently, this study offers new insight into the attitudes of high-DT individuals in regard to romantic relationships.

Nonetheless, this study did not distinguish between the common dichotomies of either vulnerable and grandiose narcissism (Green *et al.*, 2020; Loeffler *et al.*, 2020), nor primary and secondary psychopathy (Davis *et al.*, 2022; Walker *et al.*, 2021). Thus, considering that perpetration of IPV has been more often linked with primary psychopathy (Brassard *et al.*, 2022), and different facets of IPV show different associations with each type of narcissism (Green *et al.*, 2020), further research that incorporates these distinctions may aid in capturing a more comprehensive understanding of attitudes towards IPV in relation to DT traits. Additionally, this area could be further developed by including attitudes towards instrumental physical IPV, in order to determine the level of acceptance held by those high on psychopathy towards this particular form of physical violence.

Furthermore, evidence suggests psychopathy manifests differently in different cultures (Verschuere *et al*., 2018); thus, culture may play an important role in future studies investigating relationships between DT traits and IPV acceptance. The complex interplay between gender and personality traits may also be elucidated further in future studies, as investigating how societal norms relating to gender roles influence attitudes towards romantic relationships could reveal rich implications for gender-sensitive IPV interventions.

It would also be beneficial for replications to explore the role of participant sex in attitudes towards IPV. This would help to determine whether there is a biological difference in attitudes towards violent behavior against one’s partner. This is especially important when considering the role of evolution in IPV. Buss and Duntley (2011) argue that men are more inclined to use tactics of IPV to limit female autonomy (Wilson and Daly, 1996), and to reduce their partner’s potential sexual contact with other men, in order to improve their own chances of reproductive success. Therefore, from an evolutionary psychology perspective, it is likely that men are more inclined to hold accepting attitudes towards IPV, as it can help ensure they do not lose their partner to a sexual rival and therefore protects their chances of reproduction. Consequently, if a significant difference is found, those findings could be utilized to inform effective prevention strategies of IPV perpetration by targeting sex differences in these maladaptive attitudes.

Additionally, IPV prevention efforts could be aided by early identification of individuals with high levels of DT traits. In particular, this study highlights the harmful beliefs held by those high in psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Early identification of such traits could be invaluable to the criminal justice system by providing these individuals with effective treatment options to challenge their maladaptive beliefs surrounding romantic relationships.

**Conclusions**

Although IPV is a widespread issue, there is very little research on attitudes towards such behavior. High-DT individuals, in particular, have been shown to be significantly more likely to engage in IPV, but their levels of acceptance towards such behaviors had not yet been explored. The present study aimed to address this gap by investigating the predictive role of the DT in attitudes towards IPV. The results showed that Machiavellianism and psychopathy were positively related to IPV acceptance, but narcissism was not. Men were also observed to be more accepting of IPV. Together, these results provide valuable insight into the attitudes of high-DT individuals with regard to romantic relationships, revealing fruitful new avenues for future studies in this important area.

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