



Hedonism, Achievement, and Power: Universal values that characterize the Dark Triad



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ABSTRACT

Using a sample of Swedes and Americans ($N = 385$), we attempted to understand the Dark Triad traits (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in terms of universal social values. The Dark Triad traits correlated significantly with all 10 value types, forming a sinusoid pattern corresponding to the value model circumplex. In regression analyses, Machiavellianism and narcissism were positively associated with the values Achievement and Power, while psychopathy was positively associated with the values Hedonism, and Power. In addition, the Dark Triad traits explained significant variance over the Big Five traits in accounting for individual differences in social values. Differences between the Swedish and the US sample in the social value Achievement was mediated by the Dark Triad traits, as well as age. Given the unique complex of values accounted for by the Dark Triad traits compared to the Big Five traits, we argue that the former account for a system of self-enhancing “dark values”, often hidden but constantly contributing in evaluations of others.

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1. Introduction

The Dark Triad (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) is a popular grouping of individual differences representing antisocial personality traits in the general population (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits are characterized by entitlement, superiority, dominance (i.e., narcissism), glib social charm, manipulativeness (i.e., Machiavellianism), callous social attitudes, impulsivity, and interpersonal antagonism (i.e., psychopathy). These traits have proved valuable in terms of understanding interpersonal (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009) and intrapersonal aspects of personality (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody, & Scrutton, 2014; Jonason & Tost, 2010). They have proven valuable in various contexts including organizational psychology (Jonason, Wee, Li, & Jackson, 2014; O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012; Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014) and mate or friendship selection (Jonason & Schmitt, 2012; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). In hopes of providing unique insights into what holds these traits together and distinguishes each from one another, and other conceptualizations of personality, such as the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1992), we examine how the Dark Triad traits relate to values.

Researching the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and values is important because the latter are considered an important source of moral development in society (Silfver, Helkama, Lönnqvist, & Verkasalo, 2008). Population rates of narcissism appear to be on the rise in both Generation X (i.e., born before 1981) and Millennials (i.e., born after 1981). There is an increased emphasis on money, fame, and self-image, while concern for others is decreasing (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). Given the long tradition of research on Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, it is noteworthy that few studies have attempted to document the social value systems associated with all or even one of the Dark Triad traits (see Jonason, Strosser, Kroll, Duineveld, & Baruffi, *in press*). There might be some explanations for this. First, work on “darker” aspects of personality tends to be studied explicitly or implicitly as pathologies. For instance, work psychology mostly focuses on the toxicity and counterproductive workplace behaviors linked to the Dark Triad (O’Boyle et al., 2012; Spain et al., 2014), while generally neglecting the less visible factors like vocational interests (Jonason et al., 2014). Second, the goal of much of this research is the detection, reduction, or avoidance of people characterized by these traits, instead of trying to understand the way these traits may operate in people’s lives, for instance, through values. Third, research biases may exclude certain sensitive questions such as the questions like the ones we address in the present study. Thus, we attempt to uncover what types of social values characterize the Dark Triad traits.

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1.1. Values and traits

For our purposes, values are defined as enduring goals under cognitive control (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002; Schwartz, 1992). There appears to be 10 universal social value types: Security (e.g., national security, social order), Tradition (e.g., devoutness, humility), Conformity (e.g., obedience, honoring parents), Benevolence (e.g., helpfulness, loyalty), Universalism (e.g., social justice, equality), Self-direction (e.g., creativity, independence), Stimulation (e.g., exciting life, varied life), Hedonism (e.g., pleasure, enjoying life), Achievement (e.g., success, ambition), and Power (e.g., authority, wealth). These 10 value types are commonly illustrated in a quasi-circumplex model (cf. Fig. 1), from which two orthogonal axes can be derived: Self-enhancement–Self-transcendence and Openness to change–Conservation.

While personality traits are under less cognitive control than values (Roccas et al., 2002), we would contend that value systems are stable and could be examined in relation to personality traits. For instance, Openness and Self-direction, Extraversion and Stimulation, Agreeableness and Benevolence, and Conscientiousness and Security are all correlated (Parks-Leduc, Feldman, & Bardi, 2014). However, the constructs are both theoretically and empirically distinct (Roccas et al., 2002). Traits account for how people behave, whereas values describe what people consider important. Traits are defined as consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions, whereas values mostly influence behavior when intentionally activated (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Values are of particular importance in predicting behaviors preceded by intent and salient cognition (Parks & Guay, 2009). Personality traits differ from values by the endogenous characteristics of being genetically heritable (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008), while values are more learned adaptations from a shared environment (Oliver & Mooradian, 2003), thus stressing an inherent nature–nurture interaction. As such, we contend that values are the proximal factors that allow personality traits to predict behaviors, thus making understanding such connections important.

Over the last 75 years, the vast majority of personality research has focused on the Big Five traits: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992). There is good psychometric and empirical evidence to substantiate the utility of this grouping of personality traits in general (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007), as well as in relation to malevolent and antisocial behaviors (Jones, Miller, & Lynam, 2011; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). However, the Big Five may paint an unnecessarily “light” conceptualization of human nature (Lee &

Ashton, 2014; Lee et al., 2013) and overlaps considerably with the Dark Triad traits (O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, Story, & White, 2014). Therefore, it seems important to replicate associations with the Big Five and examine the values linked to the Dark Triad traits while controlling for this overlap. Doing so should afford us better insight into the way major dimensions of personality relate to social value systems.

1.2. The present study

The Dark Triad traits have previously not been studied in relation to values, with the exception for the recent study by Jonason, Duineveld, and Middleton (submitted for publication) on social values. Their results showed that the Dark Triad traits are linked to tendencies to exclude others and promote self, measured with the Moral Foundations questionnaire. Our present study measures social values by Schwartz’s renowned cross-cultural universal value model (Knafo, Roccas, & Sagiv, 2011), reporting on all 10 universal values, while also controlling for the explained variance from the Big Five traits. Furthermore we contrast Americans with young Swedish university students, known for their egalitarian value system, which contributes to much needed replications between the personality traits and social values from various geographical places and times (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014).

All three of the Dark Triad traits may seek power and self-serving achievements, albeit through varying social tactics (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012; Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li, & Crysel, 2012). In addition, all three of the traits are considered to embody a selfish and antisocial way of life (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010). This might imply the Dark Triad traits should be positively correlated with the value types on the Self-enhancing end of the circumplex in Fig. 1 (i.e., Achievement and Power) and negatively correlated with the Self-transcending value types (i.e., Universalism and Benevolence).

As we collected data from two different countries, we have the opportunity to do some comparisons between these groups, albeit in an *ad hoc* fashion. An exploratory hypothesis is that there are differences in social values across participants’ country of origin and that the Dark Triad traits could mediate some of the relationships between country and social values. In other words, country differences in value systems might be in part a function of individual-level personality traits.

The present study replicates and extends what we know about the relationship between dark traits and social values, by for the first time comparing the relative and independent associations of the Big Five and Dark Triad traits to 10 types of social values. We hope to document that what may be responsible for many of the socially undesirable outcomes linked to the Dark Triad traits is that they embrace a system of “dark values”. We contend that what makes the Dark Triad “dark” is not some latent evilness but a value system (i.e., focused on agentic/selfish outcomes) that is inconsistent with most people’s value systems (i.e., focused on pro-social outcomes).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants ($N = 385$) constituted two samples.¹ The first sample was from a university in the western part of Sweden and

¹ The aim was to gather a sample size beyond the point of stability ($N = 161$), after which the effect size only shows tolerable fluctuations around the true value (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). Samples differed ($p < .01$) with Extraversion being higher in the Swedish sample, and Openness as well as Conscientiousness being higher in the online sample. Neuroticism was also higher with women than men. Otherwise, the samples were similar.

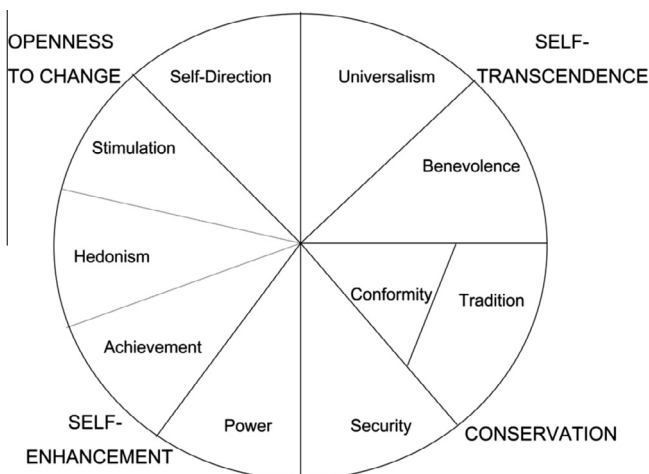


Fig. 1. Schwartz’s universal value types (Schwartz, 1992).

Table 1
Zero-order correlations and standardized regression weights for the Big Five and Schwartz's values.

| Value type | $r(\beta)$ | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Openness | Conscientiousness | Extraversion | Agreeableness | Neuroticism |
| Security | -.19** (-.20**) | .26** (.34**) | -.17* (-.15*) | -.04 (-.10*) | -.00 (.01) |
| Tradition | -.25** (-.27**) | .04 (.00) | -.04 (-.05) | .18** (.24**) | .01 (.03) |
| Conformity | -.37** (-.39**) | .04 (.05) | -.08 (-.07) | .17** (.25**) | .08 (.10) |
| Benevolence | .18** (.16**) | .08 (-.07) | -.05 (-.14*) | .32** (.36**) | .08 (-.01) |
| Universalism | .35** (.35**) | .13* (.03) | -.21** (-.30**) | .20** (.20**) | -.06 (-.03) |
| Self-direction | .44** (.45**) | .15* (.14*) | -.17** (-.23**) | -.10 (-.21**) | -.11 (-.14*) |
| Stimulation | .16* (.18**) | -.22** (-.24**) | .21** (.23**) | -.12 (-.12) | -.02 (-.04) |
| Hedonism | .03 (.07) | -.22** (-.15*) | .05 (.12) | -.22** (-.18**) | .12 (.05) |
| Achievement | -.15* (-.12) | -.17* (-.06) | .16* (.25**) | -.29** (-.30**) | .05 (.00) |
| Power | -.24** (-.23**) | -.19** (-.08) | .38** (.48**) | -.23** (-.26**) | .04 (.05) |

* $p < .01$.

** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

consisted of a class of 124 freshmen (99 women; 18–56 years, $M_{Age} = 25.41$, $SD_{Age} = 6.93$) enrolled in the Human Resource Management Program. The second sample was collected through Mechanical Turk (hitherto; MTurk). This consisted of 261 participants (137 women; 18–82 years, $M_{Age} = 36.96$, $SD_{Age} = 13.53$) from the United States, having completed at least 50 MTurk tasks with an acceptance rate of 95% or more. These participants were compensated with US\$1. Five control questions were added, as well as response filtering, which led to the exclusion of 23 participants.²

2.2. Measures

The Big Five Inventory (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) is a 44-item self-report personality inventory. Participants rated how much they agreed (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree) with statements such as: "I see myself as someone who is full of energy" (i.e., Extraversion). Items were averaged to create each dimension. The respective Cronbach's alphas were Openness ($\alpha = .84$), Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .84$), Extraversion ($\alpha = .90$), Agreeableness ($\alpha = .83$), and Neuroticism ($\alpha = .89$).

The Short Dark Triad (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a 27-item self-report questionnaire measurement of Dark Triad traits. Participants rated how much they agreed (1 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Strongly agree) with statements such as: "You should wait for the right time to get back at people" (i.e., Machiavellianism). Items were averaged to create composites of Machiavellianism ($\alpha = .79$), narcissism ($\alpha = .79$), and psychopathy ($\alpha = .77$).³

The Portrait Value Questionnaire (Schwartz et al., 2001) is a 40-item self-report questionnaire that measures values by allowing the participant to identify with short vignettes. Participants were asked how like (1 = Not like me at all; 6 = Very much like me). The scale requires centering to control for differences in individual response patterns. Items were averaged to create each dimension. Cronbach's alphas ranged from Universalism ($\alpha = .87$), being the highest, to Tradition ($\alpha = .49$), which most often is the lowest, according to meta-analytic results (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014).

3. Results

3.1. Overall tests

In Tables 1 and 2 we report zero-order correlations and standardized regression coefficients (controlling for the within

² All questionnaires were administered in the original English versions. The mandatory high-level English ability and practical use in Swedish universities is regarded to secure a similar high level of understanding (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012).

³ Machiavellianism correlated with narcissism ($r = .42$, $p < .001$) and psychopathy ($r = .66$, $p < .001$). Narcissism and psychopathy correlated similarly ($r = .47$, $p < .001$).

Table 2
Zero-order correlations and standardized regression weights for the Dark Triad and Schwartz's value types.

| Value type | $r(\beta)$ | | |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | Machiavellianism | Narcissism | Psychopathy |
| Security | -.07 (.16) | -.22** (-.19*) | -.20** (-.22*) |
| Tradition | -.16* (-.11) | -.14* (-.08) | -.14* (-.03) |
| Conformity | -.10 (.11) | -.19* (-.12) | -.23** (-.24**) |
| Benevolence | -.43** (-.33**) | -.22** (-.01) | -.36** (-.13) |
| Universalism | -.42** (-.29**) | -.33** (-.17*) | -.37** (-.10) |
| Self-direction | -.17** (-.13) | -.14* (-.07) | -.14* (-.02) |
| Stimulation | .23** (-.01) | .27** (.15*) | .34** (.28**) |
| Hedonism | .28** (.10) | .12 (-.06) | .34* (.30**) |
| Achievement | .51** (.37**) | .41** (.22**) | .42** (.07) |
| Power | .49** (.21**) | .54** (.35**) | .51** (.21**) |

* $p < .01$.

** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

taxonomy overlap) between personality traits and social values. Neuroticism had the lowest associations, while the other Big Five traits correlated with social values, thus confirming previous findings with a Swedish/American sample (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014).

We extend these findings. First, by examining how the Dark Triad traits correlated with values (see Table 2). The overall pattern of correlations (cf. Fig. 2) coheres with the characteristic sine wave demonstrated in previous value studies (cf. Parks-Leduc et al., 2014), illustrating one major peak (i.e., Power), reaching $r \approx .50$ with all three Dark Triad dimensions, and one major valley (i.e., Universalism), reaching $r \approx .40$. In accordance with the main hypothesis, the Dark Triad traits showed positive correlations with Self-enhancing values and negative correlations with Self-transcending values. Also, negative correlations with Conservation values and positive correlations with Openness to Change were found, but they were smaller in strength. This sinusoid pattern demonstrates the dynamic relations that follow from the orthogonal nature of the value model.

Second, we conducted a series of Hierarchical Multiple Regressions with the Big Five in Step 1, and the Dark Triad traits in Step 2 (see Fig. 3). Again, Self-enhancing values were best explained by the Dark Triad traits with around 20% explained variance, while Self-transcending values and Openness to Change values with 10% and 5%, respectively. Machiavellianism was associated ($p < .001$) with Achievement ($\beta = .31$), Power ($\beta = .18$), Universalism ($\beta = -.22$), and Benevolence ($\beta = -.25$). Narcissism was associated ($p < .001$) with Achievement ($\beta = .29$) and Power ($\beta = .28$). Psychopathy was associated ($p < .001$) with Power ($\beta = .21$) and Hedonism ($\beta = .26$). From the positive beta weights we gather that the values explained by the Dark Triad personality are Achievement, Power, and Hedonism.

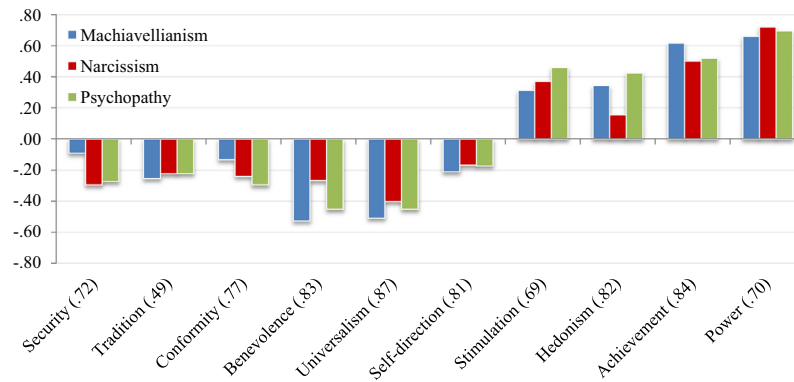


Fig. 2. Disattenuated correlations depicting the sinusoidal pattern between the Dark Triad traits and Schwartz's orthogonal value circumplex. Cronbach's alphas are reported in parenthesis. Correlations above $r = .14$ are significant ($p < .01$).

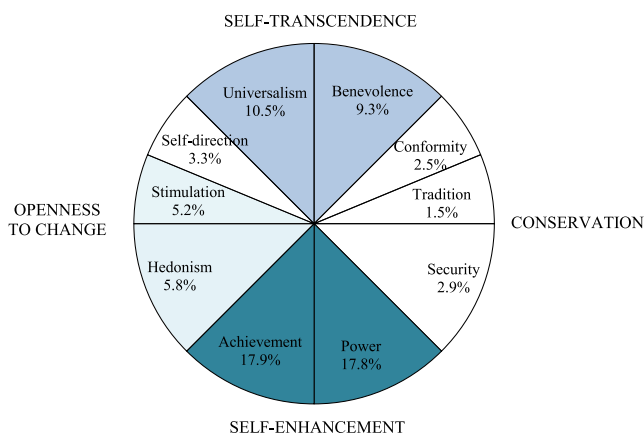


Fig. 3. Variance accounted for by the Dark Triad over the Big Five in the value system: the darkest colored two values at the bottom, ($\approx 20\%$, $p < .001$), the lighter colored two values at the top, ($\approx 10\%$, $p < .001$), and the lightest colored two values to the left, ($\approx 5\%$, $p < .001$). (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

3.2. The role of country and sex

Seeing our two samples, one from Sweden and one from America, we conducted a series of 2×2 univariate analyses with sex and country on the social value types. These showed significant effects ($p < .001$) only from country. Swedish participants scored higher than American participants on Achievement ($F(3, 384) = 12.72$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$), Power ($F(3, 384) = 39.50$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$), and Stimulation ($F(3, 384) = 14.41$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$). American participants scored higher than Swedish participants on Universalism ($F(3, 384) = 21.72$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$) and Benevolence ($F(3, 384) = 8.63$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$). Achievement, Power, and Stimulation were higher with men, and Universalism and Benevolence were higher with women; however, no significant effects ($p < .001$) from sex and no significant interaction effects ($p < .001$) between sex and country were found. Analyzing the Dark Triad traits with the same 2×2 model, all three traits showed both sex and country differences, with the Swedish sample scoring significantly higher ($p < .01$) than the American sample and men scoring significantly higher than women ($p < .01$) in Machiavellianism ($F(3, 384) = 12.67$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$), Narcissism ($F(3, 384) = 17.41$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$) and psychopathy ($F(3, 384) = 18.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$).

Last, we tested the mediating effect of the Dark Triad traits (1000 bootstrapped samples, using Hayes' PROCESS) between country, sex, and social values. In two-step hierarchical regression analyses (Step 1, country and sex; Step 2, Dark Triad traits), the only significant ($p < .001$) mediation was found between country and the social value of Achievement ($\Delta R^2 = .31$, $F(4,$

365) = 27.62). Machiavellianism ($K^2 = .10$), narcissism ($K^2 = .12$), and psychopathy ($K^2 = .02$) were all significant mediators between country and Achievement. Age of the participants appeared to mediate the effect of country, seeing how the Swedish sample was mostly made up of younger university students⁴. In a post-hoc analysis, when age was included with Machiavellianism as mediators in the same model, age was the only significant mediator of the effect of country ($\beta = .08$, 95% CI [.05, .13], $p < .001$), compared to Machiavellianism ($\beta = .08$, 95% CI [.04, .12], $p > .05$). More research is needed on the disentangling of age, sex and country effects in relation to the Dark Triad traits in relation to social values.

4. Discussion

What we know about the relationship between dark personality traits and social values has been sparse. With this study, we have made a number of meaningful contributions to the examination of these two important aspects of people's lives. First, we have replicated the relationships between the Big Five traits and social values with a combined sample of Swedish and American people, showing that all traits except for Neuroticism have associations with values, which confirms previous studies (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014). Second, we have extended what is known about the way personality traits are associated with values by examining the Dark Triad traits, which showed a characteristic sinusoid pattern that aligned with the orthogonal value circumplex (cf. Fig. 2). Hedonism, Stimulation, Achievement, and Power appear to be the primary values held by those high on the Dark Triad traits. Third, we have shown that the Dark Triad traits account for unique variance in social values which is not accounted for by the Big Five (cf. Fig. 3), indicating that meaningful personality traits are located outside the Big Five model. Such finding may add to the discussion on how many factors are needed to describe people. Fourth, we have shown that the Dark Triad traits can mediate some country-level differences in social values.

We contend that those characterized by high scores on the Dark Triad traits hold values that entail the exclusion of others and the enhancement of oneself (Jonason et al., in press). Those scoring high on Machiavellianism view others antagonistically and have a low propensity for including others (Jonason et al., submitted for publication; Rauthmann & Will, 2011). We contend that the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and Schwartz's values reveal a value system which we refer to as "dark values" (cf. Fig. 3). This value system is primarily characterized by

⁴ Age and Dark Triad correlated negatively; Machiavellianism ($r = -.29$, $p < .001$), psychopathy ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$), and narcissism ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$).

Self-enhancing values, but also of opposing Self-transcending values. People generally consider Self-transcending values to be more morally relevant than the other dimensions (Schwartz, 2007). Traditional conceptualizations of morality focus on what is good for the group over what is good for the individual (Jonason et al., in press; Jonason et al., 2012), and social values are associated with conventional morality in that they reflect what people believe to be good or bad (Schwartz, 2007). The apparent trait-value relationship manifested in our study raises questions regarding whether values should be considered morally neutral (Arvan, 2013). “Dark values” are associated with manipulating people and viewing other people as a means towards selfish gains.

4.1. Implications and future research

Social values are considered an important part of cultural development (Silfver et al., 2008), such as in policy-making on antisocial behaviors (Eisenberg, 2000). Social values of excluding others, such as Achievement and Power, as shown in our present study, have direct interpersonal consequences for others, in the forms of increased aggression, less helpfulness, and less rational and intelligent choices by those being exploited (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). This present study is part of a growing interest in revealing what particular social values are becoming common, with the decreasing empathy for others in society and contemporary culture (Twenge et al., 2012).

Furthermore, combating lack of empathy with effective therapy continues to be a challenge and it has been suggested that support treatment may be most effective through the sharing of values (Locke, 2014). Considering that values affect behavior when activated (Verplanken & Holland, 2002), a scientific pursuit of particular interest for therapy is to explore to what extent it is possible to manipulate values in highly callous individuals. Accordingly, future studies may investigate the role of dark values in relation to motivational processes such as goal content, goal striving, and goal accomplishment (see Parks & Guay, 2009). Individual differences in motivational processes may help explain crucial differences between successful and unsuccessful psychopaths (Mullins-Sweatt, Glover, Derefinko, Miller, & Widiger, 2010).

In conclusion, we have shown that the Dark Triad traits hold and predict values beyond the Big Five traits. We propose that future studies make more use of values. Dark values might bear similarities to the dark matter in the physical universe, hidden but constantly contributing, in this case to the universal, social values of human beings.

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