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## **“Dark,” but Useful: Why the Term Still Matters—Commentary on Chester et al. (2025)**

Javier I. Borráz-León, Markus J. Rantala, and Peter K. Jonason

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## COMMENTARY

# “Dark,” but Useful: Why the Term Still Matters—Commentary on Chester et al. (2025)

Javier I. Borráz-León<sup>1, 2</sup>, Markus J. Rantala<sup>3</sup>, and Peter K. Jonason<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Secretariat of Science, Humanities, Technology, and Innovation

<sup>2</sup> Department of Ethology, National Institute of Psychiatry “Ramón de la Fuente Muñiz”

<sup>3</sup> Department of Biology, University of Turku

<sup>4</sup> Research Institute for Psychology, Vizja University

Chester et al. (2025) raised objections to the use of the term “dark” for describing antagonistic traits, such as narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Their central claim is that “dark” is stigmatizing, sensationalistic, imprecise, and potentially problematic. While their concerns merit careful consideration, it is notable that the authors provide no scientific evidence to substantiate them. Here, we defend the continued use of this terminology while providing bibliometric evidence demonstrating that the term “dark” has facilitated interdisciplinary scientific progress and helped consolidate a rapidly growing field of research.

### Scientific Progress and Conceptual Integration

Since its introduction by Paulhus and Williams (2002), the “Dark Triad” has catalyzed a burgeoning literature that connects narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy under a common conceptual structure. The rapid expansion of this field—later extended to the “Dark Tetrad” with sadism (Buckels et al., 2013)—demonstrates the heuristic value of the terminology. Far from being merely sensational, the “dark” label has functioned as a useful shorthand that has brought together diverse strands of research under a recognizable umbrella. This integration has promoted cumulative knowledge-building and inspired theoretical refinements, such as the proposal of a unified “exploitative


social style” or “dark core” of personality (Jonason et al., 2009; Moshagen et al., 2018). Without such a unifying term, research on these traits might have remained fragmented across subfields, hindering theoretical coherence and limiting cumulative progress.


Bibliometric analyses further demonstrate that the term “dark” itself has been central to the advancement of personality psychology. As shown in Figure 1, the term “dark triad” emerges as a prominent hub directly connected to psychometric tools, evolutionary perspectives, clinical insights, and applied domains such as leadership, social dominance, and job performance (Dinić et al., 2025). Its sustained prominence in recent years (2015–2020) indicates that the term continues to unify diverse research traditions and stimulate cumulative scientific knowledge (see also Dinić & Jevremov, 2021).

This integrative role is reinforced by longitudinal frequency analyses (see Figure 2), which show that the cumulative use of the term has increased steeply since 2010, surpassing not only individual traits (i.e., narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) but also alternative frameworks such as the HEXACO or the Big Five (Pawar et al., 2024). The trajectory of this growth illustrates that the scientific community has actively adopted the label, using it as a shared framework that organizes research across disciplines such as clinical psychology, evolutionary theory, and social science (e.g., Borráz-León et al., 2025; Dinić et al., 2025; Jonason et al., 2010, 2020).

Taken together, these bibliometric findings provide empirical support for our claim that it is not merely the construct, but the terminology itself, that has catalyzed theoretical integration, methodological innovation, and applied insights. We acknowledge that, despite the rise in work under this title, it remains possible that these effects are partly due to the way the constructs have been organized rather than the label alone. Nevertheless, the consistent adoption of the term “dark” across diverse subfields suggests that its heuristic value extends beyond mere organization, fostering a shared conceptual framework that has unified research efforts and driven cumulative progress (Dinić et al., 2025; Pawar et al., 2024). This unifying role is particularly evident when addressing concerns about the term’s precision. While Chester et al. (2025) highlight the term “dark” as imprecise because of its multiple meanings, its consistent use within personality research, as shown in bibliometric networks (Dinić & Jevremov, 2021; Dinić et al., 2025), suggests a shared

Aidan G. C. Wright served as action editor.

Javier I. Borráz-León  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9815-1442>

Markus J. Rantala  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1191-8741>

Peter K. Jonason  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8833-048X>

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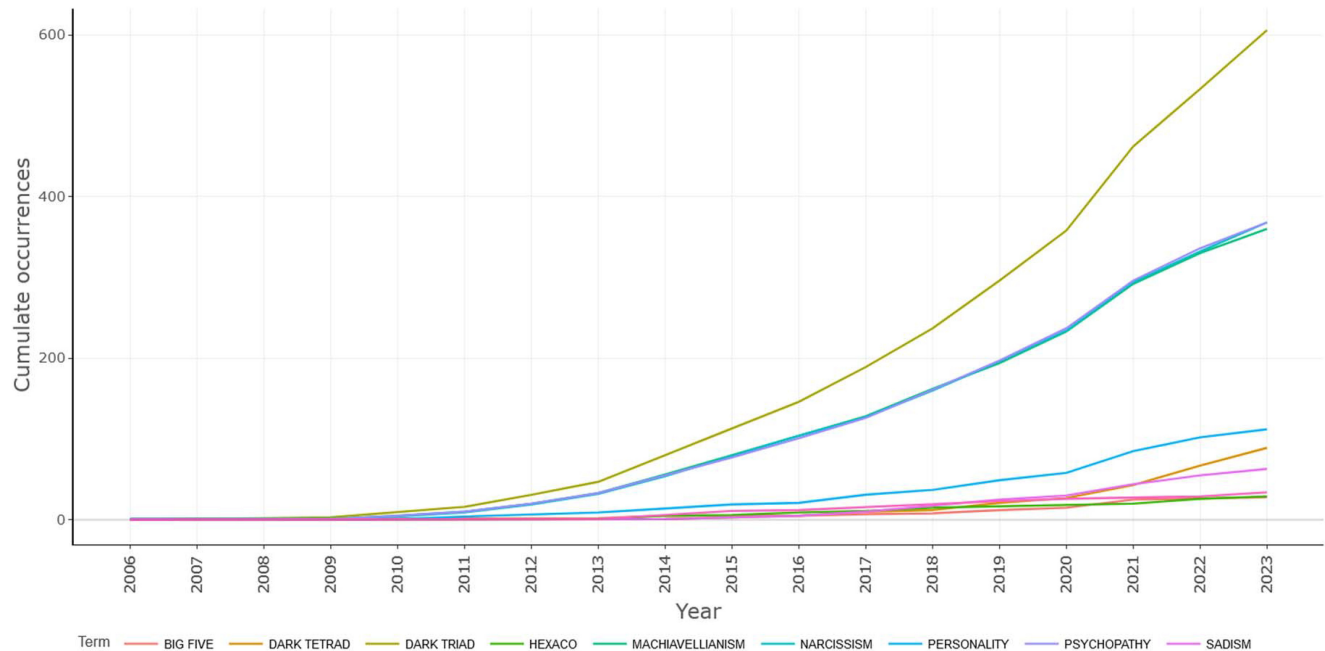
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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Javier I. Borráz-León, Secretariat of Science, Humanities, Technology, and Innovation, Avenida Insurgentes Sur 1582, Colonia Crédito Constructor, Alcaldía Benito Juárez, CP 03940 Ciudad de México, Mexico. Email: [javier.borraz@seciht.mx](mailto:javier.borraz@seciht.mx)



**Figure 2**

Annual Growth in Publications Using Term “Dark Triad” in Comparison to Individual Traits (i.e., Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy) and Other Related Constructs (e.g., Big Five and HEXACO)



*Note.* From “Bibliometric Dataset (2002–2024) on Dark Triad, Dark Tetrad and Dark Personalities,” by V. Pawar, P. Chavan, M. Paliwal, A. Vhatkar, and P. Petare, 2024, *Mendeley Data, V1* (<https://doi.org/10.17632/zc5j2zhtk9.1>). CC BY 4.0. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

power and integrative potential that have cemented “dark” as an indispensable cornerstone of personality science, propelling ongoing discoveries that illuminate our collective understanding of antagonistic traits.

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