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Choosing Interaction Positions: Dark Triad and Light Triad as Behavioral Predictors

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Abstract

Introduction. It is important to identify factors that influence the choice of interaction positions and behavioral strategies. The Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and non-clinical psychopathy) and the Light Triad (faith in humanity, humanism, and Kantianism) can act as integrated factors in choosing an interaction position. This study represents the first attempt to investigate the role of the Dark Triad and Light Triad in students' choice of interaction positions – coercion, manipulation, non-violence, and non-interference. **Methods.** The sample comprised of 206 students of Cherepovets State University (range: 17–24 years, mean age: 18.4 years). Research methods: (a) Short Dark Triad by Jones and Paulhus (modified by Egorova, Sitnikova, and Parshikova), (b) the Light Triad Scale by Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde, Tsukayama, and (c) the questionnaire to identify interaction positions developed by the authors. Methods of descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis were used. **Results.** When choosing interaction positions, students prefer the positions of non-violence and non-interference rather than positions of coercion and manipulation. The Light Triad traits prevail over the Dark Triad traits. The Dark Triad is positively correlated with the positions of coercion and manipulation while the Light Triad is negatively correlated. The main role in choosing the positions of coercion and manipulation is played by psychopathy, Machiavellianism and a low level of Kantianism. The Light Triad is positively associated with the position of non-violence. The greatest influence on its choice is the belief in humanity, as long as there are no traits of non-clinical psychopathy. The position of non-interference had no positive connections with the Dark Triad and Light Triad. However, its choice can be influenced in some cases by such a trait of the Dark Triad as Machiavellianism. **Discussion.** The Dark Triad and Light Triad play an important role in students' choice of interaction positions. The results

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obtained in this study can be used both for scientific and practical purposes to develop a non-violent position among students.

Keywords

For citation

Introduction

Interaction is the mutual influence of people on each other to achieve certain goals. G. M. Andreeva classifies it as one of the three aspects of communication and understands it as an aspect of communication "which includes not only the exchange of information, but also the organization of joint actions that allow partners to implement some common activities for them" (Andreeva, 2014, p. 67). In terms of content, G. M. Andreeva states that there are two types of interaction – cooperation and competition.

In interaction, people can take different positions. Interaction positions represent the integration of a person's position in the system of social relations and his/her relations to different aspects of reality. The objectives of subjects may be different and often do not coincide. The contradiction between the objectives of subjects leads to the emergence of contradictions that are resolved by the individual adopting one position or another and selecting the appropriate behavior strategy. The most typical positions of interaction are positions of ***coercion, manipulation, non-violence, and humility (non-interference).*** Coercion is a variety of forms of psychological and physical pressure on a person. Manipulation is a kind of pressure based on deception. Non-violence in the process of interaction with others which manifests itself in the rejection of coercion and various forms of pressure in the account of the personality of another. Non-interference is passive acceptance of an event as it is, without any active action.

The preferences of a person for a position are determined by many factors (Maralov, Kudaka, Smirnova et al., 2022; Maralov, Sitarov, Romanyuk et al., 2023). Among them, integrated factors are particularly important, including, for example, five- and six-factor personality models (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience, + honesty/humility), psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, stability), resilience (involvement, control of the situation, willingness to take risks). This also includes the Dark Triad and Light Triad.

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Dark Triad

The Dark Triad includes the following three traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. It should be praised for highlighting the characteristics of the Dark Triad to D. Paulhus and C. Williams (Paulhus & Williams 2002). They believe that these characteristics are similar in their manifestations and have some independence at the same time. Machiavellianism manifests itself in the desire to manipulate others, narcissism – in the desire to see oneself as an exceptional person, psychopathy – in arrogance, inattention to the problems of others, in impulsiveness and aggression. Based on these ideas, two Dark Triad inventories were developed. These are the Short Dark Triad by D. N. Jones and D. L. Paulhus (Jones & Paulhus, 2014), modified by M. S. Egorova, M. A. Sitnikova and M. A. Parshikova (2015), and the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen by P. K. Jonason, G. D. Webster (Jonason & Webster, 2010), modified by T. V. Kornilova and co-authors (Kornilova et al., 2015).

Research on the Dark Triad suggests that narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy, although different traits, nevertheless share common intersection points. This dark core, according to the research of D. N. Jones and A. H. Figueredo (Jones & Figueredo, 2013), is manipulation/callousness, which explains the coincidence of antagonistic traits. It has been found (Jones & Neria, 2015) that the common factor of manipulation/callousness is positively associated with the general aggression index. Psychopathy was positively associated with physical aggression, and narcissism was negatively associated with hostility, and Machiavellianism was positively associated with hostility. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism were also closely associated with various forms of coercion, explained by a low degree of agreeableness (Pailing, Boon, & Egan, 2014). Psychopathy and Machiavellianism were also associated with low self-control, a tendency to underestimate the future consequences of actions, and a high level of attention deficit disorder (Jonason & Tost, 2010).

N. Aghababaei and A. Błachnio (2015) examined the relationship of the Dark Triad traits with eudaimonic (pursuing of happiness) and hedonic (pursuit of pleasure) well-being. The results showed that narcissism was positively associated with both types of well-being. Although psychopathy was associated with lower levels of both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, Machiavellianism was generally not associated with outcomes of well-being.

The relationship between the characteristics of the Dark Triad traits and the relationships and characteristics of human interactions deserves special attention in this context. In particular, E. B. Hadházi et al. (2023) found a correlation between the Dark Triad traits and unethical behavior attitudes such as "disclosing confidential information", "shifting the blame for one's mistakes onto an innocent colleague" and "taking credit for someone else's work". Jonason, Luevano, and Adams (2012) found that the Dark Triad is positively associated with short-term romantic preferences and negatively associated with long-term relationships preferences. A study of the characteristics of communication

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at work shows that representatives of the Dark Triad prefer manipulation in its various forms. Psychopathy is related to the preference for hard manipulation tactics, and Machiavellianism and narcissism – to soft ones (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). The Dark Triad was also found to be differentially associated with manifestations of affective and cognitive empathy. M. Wai and N. Tiliopoulos (Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012) found that all Dark Triad individuals showed deficits in affective empathy, but there were few signs of impaired cognitive empathy.

We should note that the Dark Triad does not contribute to the establishment of positive interpersonal relationships.

Light Triad

The identification and study of the Dark Triad of personality naturally raises the question: If there is a dark triad, why can there be no light triad? The Light Triad was discovered by a team of authors consisting of S. B. Kaufman, D. B. Yaden, E. Hyde, E. Tsukayama in 2019 (Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde, & Tsukayama, 2019). The Light Triad of personality includes the following three traits: **faith in humanity, humanism and Kantianism** (after the German philosopher I. Kant). Faith in humanity is the belief that a person is fundamentally good; humanism is the belief that a person deserves respect and recognition; and Kantianism is a view of a person as an intrinsic value, a purpose, not a means of achieving a goal. In order to diagnose the Light Triad traits, the authors developed a special inventory that gained popularity among research specialists. The Russian-language version of the Light Triad Scale was tested by N. R. Ilyichev and A. A. Zolotareva, who used a scale consisting of 8 items to measure faith in humanity, humanism and Kantianism (Il'ichev & Zolotareva, 2023). Its version was proposed by V. Vyazovkina, D.S. Kornienko and A.N. Nevryuev (Vyazovkina, Kornienko, & Nevryuev, 2023). The authors tried to adapt all the scales of the Light Triad Scale for the needs of Russian psychology.

Currently, the Dark Triad is studied more extensively than the Light Triad. Some authors try to find the bright side of the Dark Triad. In particular, Yu. V. Krasavtseva and T. V. Kornilova (Krasavtseva & Kornilova, 2019) regard narcissism as the 'light' aspect of the Dark Triad.

Indeed, the concept of S. B. Kaufman and others identifying the Light Triad traits is not the only concept. There are other approaches. In 2021, J. Musek and D. K. Grum, in contrast to the Dark Triad traits, identified three characteristics borrowed from the five-factor personality model: emotional stability (low neuroticism), agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These traits were the basis of the Light Triad. The Light Triad traits are positively associated with overall life satisfaction and traditional, social, cognitive, democratic values and tend to be negatively associated with status- or power-related values. V. Gouveia et al. (Gouveia et al., 2021) offer their approach to identifying the Light Triad traits; they consider altruism, forgiveness and gratitude as the Light Triad traits.

At the same time, most researchers who identify the Light Triad traits adhere to the concept by B. Kaufman, which has become dominant. In this approach, it is established

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that people with predominant light personality traits are characterized by partner ability, trust in others, high levels of life satisfaction, and positive self-esteem (Neumann et al., 2020). In romantic relationships, these characteristics were also found to predict long-term relationships (Sevi & Doğruyol, 2020), and in workplace research, it was shown that they contributed to the higher workers' self-assessments of social well-being (Javanmard, Borjali, Eskandari, & Farokhi, 2020). A study by De Holanda Coelho, Hanel, Monteiro et al., 2021 found that, overall, the Light Triad traits were more closely related to values than the Dark Triad traits. R. Gerimski and D. Krok (Gerymski & Krok, 2019) have identified the association of the Light Triad with compassion, kindness, and friendliness.

The available research does not provide us with a complete picture of the role of the Dark Triad and Light Triad in choosing interaction positions by people, in our case students. Nevertheless, the dispersed data obtained by several authors convince us, firstly, of the need to carry out a special study and, secondly, provide the basis for some hypotheses.

Purpose

This study aimed to identify the role of the Dark and Light Triad in students' choice of interaction positions.

Research hypotheses

Our research hypotheses were as follows: Hypothesis 1: The Dark Triad is more related to the choice of the positions of coercion and manipulation, while psychopathy has a greater influence on the choice of the coercion position, and Machiavellianism has a greater influence on the choice of the manipulation position. Hypothesis 2: The Light Triad and all its three components (faith in humanity, humanism, and Kantianism) will largely contribute to the choice of the non-violence position. Hypothesis 3: The non-interference position should not have positive correlations with the Dark Triad and Light Triad; as special studies show, its choice is determined by other factors (Maralov et al., 2022).

Methods

Sample

The study was conducted in April-May 2023 and comprised of 206 students of pedagogical, psychological, and psychological-pedagogical training profiles of Cherepovets State University (Cherepovets, Vologda region, Russian Federation) aged 17 to 24 years (mean age = 18.4 years, SD = 1.09), of whom 176 were women (85.44 %) and 30 were men (14.56 %).

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Diagnostic tools

The methodology of this study is a system approach, whereby each triad is regarded as a system in relationships with a particular interaction position. Specific research tools were as follows:

1. **The Short Dark Triad (SD3) by D. Jones and D. Paulhus** (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) modified by M. S. Egorova, M. A. Sitnikova, and O. V. Parshikova (2015). The inventory includes 27 questions. The students were given the following instructions: "Dear students, we draw your attention to a number of statements concerning the life and activities of people. You must express the degree of your agreement with each of the above-mentioned statements with a measurement scale, which is given in a special form, of the following type: completely disagree – 1 point; disagree – 2 points; agree and disagree equally – 3 points; agree – 4 points, completely agree – 5 points". For each property studied, the total points were calculated and then converted into a standard ten-point scale.

2. **The Light Triad Scale (LTS) by S. B. Kaufman et al.** (Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde & Tsukayama, 2019). The Scale is a list of 12 questions, with answers ranging from completely not agreed to completely agreed. Students received instructions similar to those from the previous inventory. The sum of points for each trait (faith in humanity, humanism, and Kantianism) was calculated. The results were converted into a standard ten-point scale.

3. **The questionnaire to identify interaction positions developed by the authors** (Maralov & Sitarov, 2018). The test represents 40 questions/statements. For each statement, four answer options were offered, allowing the subject to distinguish between the preferences of different interaction positions – coercion, manipulation, non-violence, and non-interference. Each scale involved calculating a total score and then converting it into a standard ten-point scale.

Statistical analysis

The results were processed using mathematical statistics methods in Microsoft Excel. Average values, standard deviations, and linear Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated and regression analysis was performed.

Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of interaction positions, Dark Triad and Light Triad.

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Table 1

Means and standard deviations of interaction positions, Dark Triad and Light Triad

Positions:			
Coercion	Manipulation	Non-violence	Non-interference
M			
5.18	5.41	5.92	6.08
SD			
2.27	2.14	1.89	1.84

Dark Triad:		
Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy
M		
6.08	5.72	4.40
SD		
1.21	1.07	1.09

Light Triad:		
Faith in humanity	Humanism	Kantianism
M		
7.32	7.85	7.65
SD		
1.35	1.31	1.31

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As shown in Table 1, students more often use the positions of non-interference and non-violence in interactions (M = 6.08, SD = 1.84; M = 5.92, SD = 1.89). The choice of the non-interference position indicates students' increasing prudence when making decisions, while the choice of the non-violent position indicates the desire to resolve existing contradictions peacefully through compromise and cooperation. The coercion position is used less often than others (M = 5.18, SD = 2.27), which involves the use of various forms of pressure on the individual. A comparative analysis of the Dark Triad and Light Triad showed that students clearly prefer the Light Triad. In this case, the results for all indicators are significantly higher than means. Humanism dominates (M = 7.85, SD = 1.31), followed by Kantianism (M = 7.65, SD = 1.31); faith in humanity is used less frequently (M = 7.32, SD = 1.35). The Dark Triad scores are lower, which is quite normal for people training in higher education programs and preparing to work in the 'person-person' field. Machiavellianism is used most often (M = 6.08, SD = 1.21), followed by narcissism (M = 5.72, SD = 1.07); psychopathy is used less frequently (M = 4.40, SD = 1, 09).

Let us solve the main task of this study – to identify the interrelationships between the interaction positions and the Dark Triad and Light Triad and the characteristics of their influence on the implementation of this choice. The results of the correlation analysis using the linear Pearson correlation coefficient are shown in Figures 1–4.

Figure 1
The relationship between the coercion position and the Dark Triad and Light Triad*
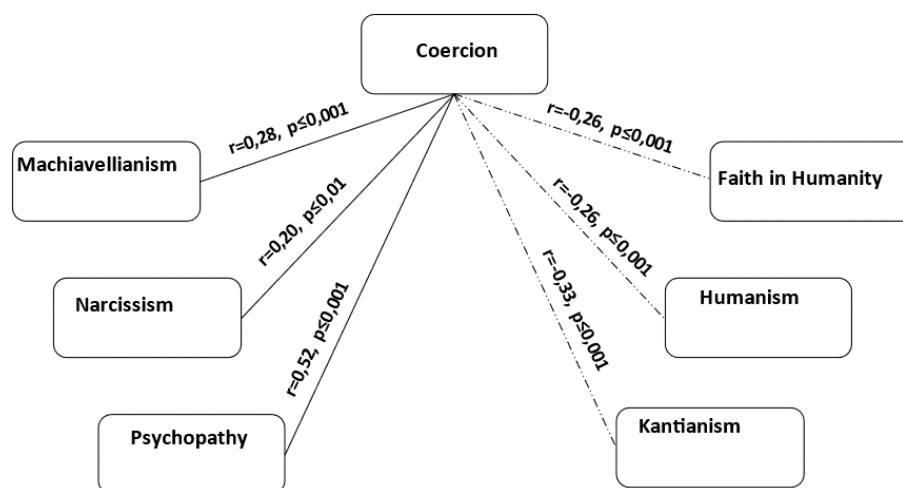
Note. Here and further in the figures, the solid line indicates direct correlations, and the dotted line indicates reverse correlations.

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Figure 1 shows the relationship between the position of coercion and the Dark Triad and Light Triad. Positive correlations were found with all Dark Triad traits and negative correlations with all Light Triad traits. There was a weak positive correlation between the position of coercion and Machiavellianism (r = 0.28, p $\leq$ 0.001) and narcissism (r = 0.2, p $\leq$ 0.001), and a moderate one – with psychopathy (r = 0.52, p $\leq$ 0.001). The correlations with faith in humanity (r = -0.26, p $\leq$0.001), humanism (r = -0.26, p $\leq$0.001) and Kantianism (r = -0.33, p $\leq$0.001) were weakly negative.

The results of the correlation analysis were supplemented by regression analysis. The study shows that the best results are obtained not by creating a general model of the Dark and Light Triad, but by creating models that separately reflect the influence of the Dark Triad and Light Triad on the choice of the coercive position. We have used this analysis principle for personality triads in all other studies on the influence of personality triads on the choice of interaction positions.

As a result, statistically significant regression models (p = 0.000) were generated and factors as predictors of students' choice of the coercive position were identified. It was found that non-clinical psychopathy has the greatest impact on the choice of the coercive position (β_3 = 0.96, p = 0.000), Machiavellianism has a small effect (β_1 = 0.24, p = 0.04) and narcissism has the smallest effect (β_2 = 0.2, p = 0.067). Among the characteristics of the Light Triad, Kantianism had the greatest negative effect (β_6 = -0.43, p = 0.002).

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the manipulation position and the Dark Triad and Light Triad.

Figure 2

Relationship between the manipulation position and the Dark Triad and Light Triad
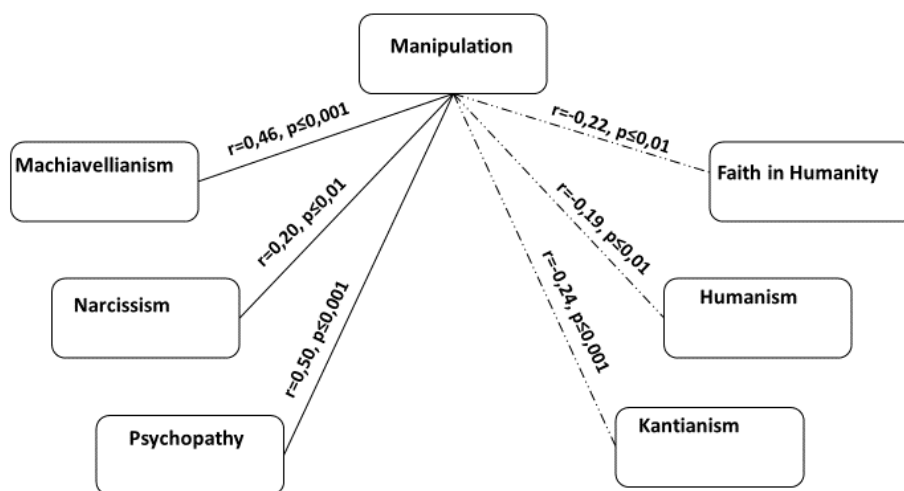
As in the previous case, manipulation had positive correlations with the Dark Triad and negative correlations with the Light Triad. As expected, according to the research hypothesis, along with psychopathy ($r = 0.50$, $p \leq 0.001$), there was a moderate correlation with Machiavellianism ($r = 0.46$, $p \leq 0.001$) and a weak positive correlation with narcissism ($r = 0.20$, $p \leq 0.01$). Of the Light Triad traits, there was a weak negative correlation between manipulation and humanism ($r = -0.19$, $p \leq 0.01$), faith in humanity ($r = -0.22$, $p \leq 0.01$) and Kantianism ($r = -0.24$, $p \leq 0.01$). Regression analysis yielded the following results: As with the choice of coercion, the dominant role is played by non-clinical psychopathy ($\beta3 = 0.76$, $p = 0.000$). At the same time the share of Machiavellianism increased ($\beta1 = 0.57$, $p = 0.000$) and the impact of narcissism remains at the same level ($\beta2 = 0.20$, $p = 0.08$), with a negative impact of Kantianism ($\beta6 = -0.31$, $p = 0.02$).

Figure 3 shows the results of the correlation analysis of the non-violence position with the traits of the Dark Triad and Light Triad.

As shown in Figure 3, the non-violence position is positively correlated with all Light Triad traits. The strongest relationship was found between non-violence and faith in humanity ($r = 0.34$, $p \leq 0.001$), followed by humanism ($r = 0.28$, $p \leq 0.001$) and Kantianism ($r = 0.23$, $p \leq 0.001$). The negative correlation coefficient between non-violence and psychopathy was obtained ($r = -0.38$, $p \leq 0.001$).

Figure 3

*Relationship between the non-violence position and the Dark Triad and Light Triad*
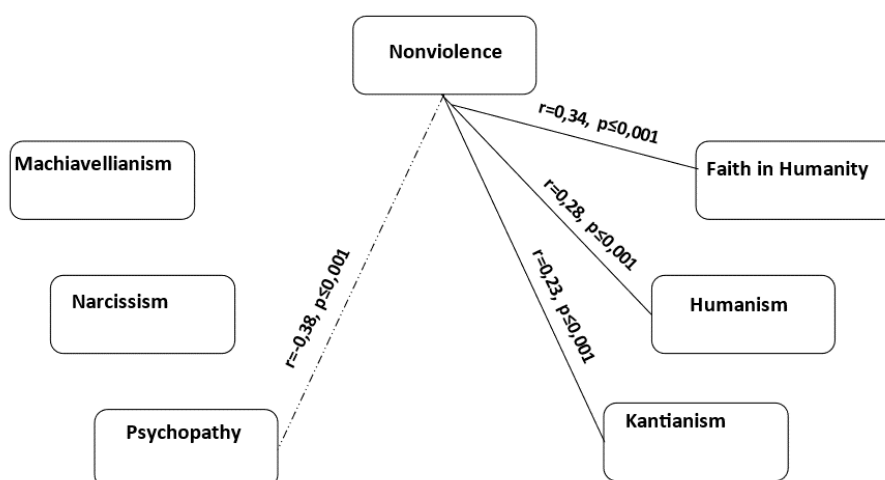
Regression analysis has shown that two factors play a fundamental role in the choice of the non-violent position, one with a positive impact and the other with a negative impact. The positive factor includes faith in humanity ($\beta4 = 0.38$, $p = 0.002$); the negative factor includes psychopathy ($\beta3 = -0.68$, $p = 0.000$). In other words, the non-violence

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position may be preferred by students who do not have psychopathy traits, who have a positive attitude toward others and regard them as fundamentally good, fair and worthy of respect.

Similarly, let us consider the relationship between the non-interference position and the Dark and Light Triad.

Figure 4

Relationship between the non-interference position and the Dark Triad and Light Triad
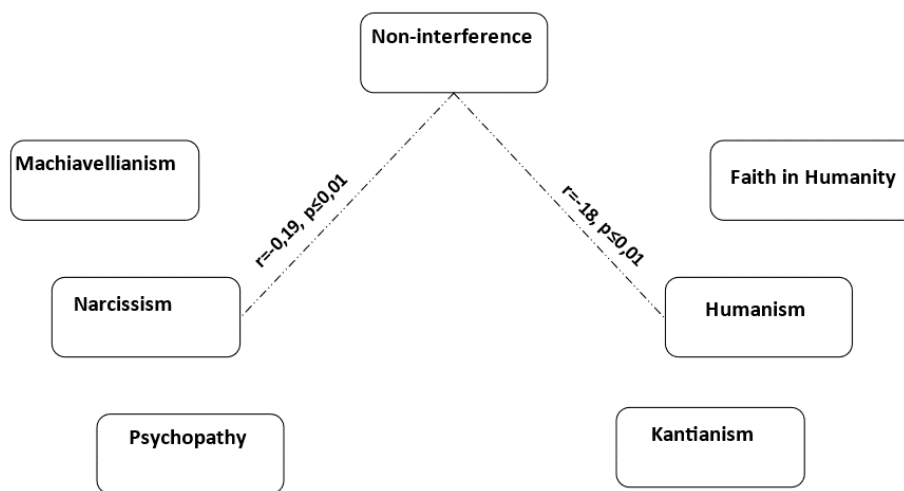
The non-interference position (Fig. 4) had a single weak negative correlation with the Dark Triad traits – with narcissism (r = -0.19, p ≤ 0.01), and with the Light Triad traits – with humanism (r = -0.18, p ≤ 0.01). At the same time, regression analysis showed an interesting point that was not provided by the hypothesis of the study. A positive impact of Machiavellianism on the choice of the non-interference position was found. This influence is not strong, but, nevertheless, it takes place ($\beta 3 = 0.21$, p = 0.05) despite the fact that in the process of correlation analysis no significant correlation coefficient was obtained between the non-interference position and Machiavellianism (r = -0.11, not significant). It was also found that a high level of narcissism interfered with the choice of the non-interference position ($\beta 2 = -0.35$, p = 0.004).

Discussion

In modern psychology, attempts are made to establish the relationship between the Dark Triad and Light Triad and individual behavior in different fields of life: in political affairs

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(Peterson & Palmer, 2021), in business activities (Cooke, 2020, Baldacchino, 2023), in intimate interpersonal relations (Sevi, Urganci, & Sakman, 2020; Grigoropoulos, 2023). The relationship between the Dark and Light Triad traits and value orientations is studied (Ucar, Malatyalı, Planalı, & Kanik, 2023). Particular attention is paid to the identification of the roles of the Dark Triad and Light Triad in the manifestation of aggression, manipulation, and non-violent forms of behavior.

The Dark Triad is associated with interpersonal manipulation that requires orientation skills in social situations (Rauthmann, 2011). Psychopathy is associated with hard manipulation tactics, while Machiavellianism and narcissism are associated with soft manipulation tactics (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). Carton & Egan (2017) found that low agreeableness was positively associated with psychopathy, and psychopathy was strongly associated with both psychological and physical/sexual abuse. Moreover, according to Jones & Neria (2015), psychopathy is a predictor of physical aggression. Narcissism is negatively associated with hostility, and Machiavellianism is positively associated with hostility.

The results of this study made it possible to significantly clarify the existing facts on the impact of the Dark Triad traits on the choice of the positions of coercion and manipulation. It was established that two factors – psychopathy and Machiavellianism – play the leading role. Furthermore, the value of Machiavelianism increases slightly when choosing manipulation, as the hypotheses suggested, but the influence of psychopathy decreases slightly. The manifestation of psychopathy and Machiavellianism is accompanied by a low level of Kantianism. In other words, students who prefer to choose coercion and manipulation positions in the interaction process tend to view others as a means of achieving their own goals.

The Light Triad is positively correlated with high levels of spirituality, empathy, compassion, and benevolence, i.e., the parameters that may characterize a non-violent position (Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde, & Tsukayama, 2019). According to a study (Il'ichev & Zolotareva, 2023), the Light Triad scales are positively associated with the Big Five personality factors except neuroticism. Dickinson (2023) proved that the Dark traits, compared to the Light traits, predict a lower level of prosociality and increased readiness to make immoral choices.

The present study revealed that in the absence of a pronounced Light Triad and at the same time psychopathy, the person will prefer a non-violent position, which manifests itself in a friendly attitude, in taking the personality of another into account as much as possible, and in using various non-violent actions in the form of help, support, and cooperation. In this case, as the regression analysis results show, the main role belongs to faith in humanity. In real life, this feature manifests itself by focusing on positive personality traits, tolerance, understanding, and forgiveness.

The non-interference position showed no positive correlations with the Dark Triad and Light Triad. Only two negative correlations have been found here – with narcissism

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and humanism. At the same time, regression analysis revealed that there was a small but significant effect of Machiavellianism on the choice of the non-interference position with the negative impact of narcissism. This can be interpreted as the ability of some Machiavellian persons to use non-interference as a special form of manipulation. As evidenced by special studies (Maralov et al., 2022), non-interference is not positively associated with the Dark Triad and Light Triad. However, it is positively associated with the neuropsychological system of Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS) and with neuroticism, that is, with emotional instability and increased anxiety.

Therefore, the hypotheses proposed were only partially confirmed.

The Dark Triad is more related to the choice of the positions of coercion and manipulation, where psychopathy and Machiavellianism play the leading role with a low level of Kantianism, which was not provided by the first hypothesis.

The non-interference position did not reveal any positive connections with the Dark Triad and Light Triad. At the same time, it can be used as a specific form of manipulation by people who are exposed to the manifestation of Machiavellianism, but not narcissism, which was not provided by the hypothesis.

Conclusion

Students' choice of interaction positions is largely associated with the Dark Triad and Light Triad.

The dominance of the Dark Triad, in particular its components such as psychopathy and Machiavellianism, is related to the choice of positions of coercion, manipulation, or both, depending on the particular situation of interaction. Their influence on the choice of these positions was mediated by a low level of Kantianism, manifested in the desire to consider others as a means of achieving their own goals.

The domination of the Light Triad is associated with the choice of the non-violence position. In addition, one of the traits of Light Triad is of great importance – the faith in humanity, which is combined with the lack of tendency to manifest non-clinical psychopathy.

The non-interference position had no positive correlations with the traits of the Dark Triad and Light Triad. However, we found that, in some cases, students with a Machiavellian personality type would prefer it as a specific form of manipulation.

Further research will be undertaken to identify the influence of students' value orientation and basic beliefs on the manifestation of the traits of the Dark Triad and Light Triad.

The results of the study can be used for scientific and practical purposes, especially in the development of humanistic attitudes and non-violent interactions among students.

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Limitations

The main **limitation** of this study is the predominance of women in the study population, which is associated with the characteristics of Russian education, where mainly women receive pedagogical, psychological, and psychological-pedagogical education. Consequently, the recommendations relate mainly to working with the female population. On the other hand, the significant correlations can provide grounds to extrapolate the data obtained in this study to the entire student population.

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Author Contribution

Vladimir Georgievich Maralov formulated the basic concept of research, developed research methodology, chose diagnostic tools, processed the data, formulated conclusions, and edited the final version of the manuscript

Marina Aleksandrovna Kudaka contributed to the analysis of literature, collected and processed the data, prepared the initial version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Information

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.