



Examining The Relationship Between the Dark Triad Personality Traits and Models of Passion

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Abstract: This study examines the association between subclinical dark personality traits narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy — and two distinct forms of passionate involvement: harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion (OP). Grounded in the Dualistic Model of Passion, Trait Activation Theory, and Identity Theory, the research investigates how ego-driven internalization and controlled motivational regulation shape the nature and intensity of passionate engagement across work and life domains. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed with 105 participants. The Short Dark Triad Scale (SD3) and Vallerand's Passion Scale were administered to assess personality and passion dimensions respectively. Statistical analyses included Pearson correlation, linear regression, and one-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between Dark Triad composite scores and harmonious passion ($r = .348$, $p < .001$), with HP accounting for 12.1% of variance in malevolent personality scores. This counterintuitive finding is attributed to narcissistic self-perception bias, wherein individuals with dark traits overestimate the autonomy and balance of their engagement. Age-based comparisons indicated significant variation in dark trait expression across developmental cohorts ($p = .034$, $\eta^2 = .082$). These findings challenge purely pathological views of dark personality, highlighting the role of contextual amplification, self-report distortion, and identity-based passion internalization. Implications for organizational assessment, leadership development, and motivational

intervention design are discussed. This literature review demonstrates that the association between Dark Triad traits and passion is multidimensional and context specific and requires further research to be conducted using rigorous methods and developmental lines of thought.

Keywords: *Dark Triad, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, Harmonious Passion, Obsessive Passion, Dualistic Model Of Passion, Entrepreneurial Passion, Work Addiction, Dark Core (D-Factor).*

1. Introduction

The Dark Triad—comprising narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—represents a cluster of socially aversive yet functionally adaptive personality traits that have attracted considerable scholarly attention since their consolidation by Paulhus and Williams (2002). Narcissism encompasses grandiosity, entitlement, and self-importance; Machiavellianism involves strategic manipulation and cynicism; psychopathy is characterised by impulsivity, callousness, and antisocial behaviour. These traits share a common core of interpersonal exploitation while retaining distinct motivational structures that produce divergent behavioural outcomes across work and entrepreneurial contexts.

Concurrently, Vallerand et al.'s (2003) Dualistic Model of Passion (DMP) offers a well-validated framework for understanding how individuals internalise and sustain passionate engagement. The DMP distinguishes harmonious passion (HP)—an autonomous internalisation of an activity that promotes flexible, balanced engagement—from obsessive passion (OP), a controlled internalisation that creates rigid, identity-contingent involvement. These two passion types carry markedly different implications for well-being, performance, and interpersonal functioning.

The intersection of these two theoretical domains is theoretically rich but empirically underdeveloped. Meta-analytic evidence from 2024 confirms a consistent association between Dark Triad traits and controlled motivational internalization (obsessive passion), yet configurational studies (Schmidt et al., 2025) suggest that specific trait combinations can also support entrepreneurially adaptive passion. Social contagion research further demonstrates that leader Dark Triad scores correlate significantly with follower Dark Triad scores ($r = .607$), indicating that passion profiles propagate through organisational hierarchies (Biolik, 2025).

The present study addressed two primary research questions: (a) Is there a significant relationship between composite Dark Triad scores and HP? and (b) Do Dark Triad scores differ significantly across age groups? Four theoretical frameworks guided analysis: the DMP, Trait Activation Theory (TAT), Identity Theory, and the Dark Core (D-Factor) model.

1.1 Hypotheses

H1a: Dark Triad total scores will be significantly positively correlated with Obsessive Passion.

H1b: Dark Triad total scores will be significantly related to Harmonious Passion.

H2a: Narcissism will positively predict both HP and OP owing to its grandiose self-perception.

H2b: Psychopathy will be a significant positive predictor of OP but not HP.

H2c: Machiavellianism will be a positive predictor of OP via end-oriented strategic engagement.

1.2 Summary and Research Gaps

In this literature review, we found increased literature on the association between Dark Triad personality traits and passion models during the period 2005-2019. Some common results are obtained: (1) psychopathy and narcissism show a positive relationship with obsessive passion; (2) narcissistic admiration can have a different effect compared with other forms of narcissism; (3) Dark Triad can be observed to have a positive relationship with controlled, but not autonomous motivational internalization; (4) the responses to this relationship can be both maladaptive (work addiction, burnout, incivility) and given the right conditions, functional (entrepreneurial passion, venture survival).

Though this has been achieved, there are still serious gaps in research. To begin with, there is need to elaborate on the mechanisms that associate dark traits with passion, especially the identity processes, social contagion and trait activation. Second, the differences in relationships between variants of narcissism and the dimensions of passion are under-researched. Third, only configurational approaches which analyse combinations of traits and not main effects are being utilized. Fourth, longitudinal studies on the persistence and evolvement of dark trait-passion relationship are limited. Fifth, the ability to make cross-cultural comparisons is restricted, which limits the generalizability. Sixth, the connection of Dark Tetrad and D-factor views to passion studies is still immature.

The given dissertation closes these gaps by: (1) synthesizing the current evidence by conducting a systematic review; (2) testing mechanisms by integrating theories; (3) testing them by using configurational perspectives; (4) testing them by considering contextual moderators at different levels of analysis; and (5) providing implications to theory, methodology, and practice.

2. Methodology

2.1 Aim & Objectives of the Study

Aim

To investigate the correlation of the Dark triad Personality Traits and passion models, in this research, the major aims will be to:

- Systematically review and synthesize empirical research investigating connections between Dark Triad traits and passion model 2019-25.
- Detect and assess the theoretical processes of dark personality to engage in passion with contrasts of controlled and autonomous internalization processes.
- Test the mediating influence of contextual factors (including leadership, organizational and entrepreneurial setting) to understand how dark trait-passion relationships are formed.
- Explore configurational designs of dark traits that forecast harmonious passion and obsessive passion on the basis of sophisticated methodology.
- Evaluate the results of dark trait-passion structure on important outcomes such as work addiction, burnout, performance, and entrepreneurial persistence.
- Create a concerted paradigm that balances the ostensibly paradoxical evidence on the dark sides and light sides of personality in passion research.

2.2 Research Design and Data Source

In this study, a quantitative, cross-sectional study was used to test the relationships between Dark Triad personality traits and dimensions of passion. This analysis was based on a more extensive survey analysis (DataSet0). The main intention was to research the relationship between malevolent personality traits (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy) and their relationship with and prediction of Harmonious and Obsessive Passion.

2.3 Research Questions

The research questions considered in this dissertation are as follows:

- What are the nature and the course of relationships between narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and two-dimensional aspects of harmonious and obsessive passion?
- How do Dark Triad traits affect passion development and expression (what are the underlying psychological processes, e.g. motivational internalization, identity processes, social influence)?

- What are the situational conditions (e.g. leadership climate, organizational culture, entrepreneurship conditions) that moderate the relationships between dark traits and passion?
- How well do configurational, and not individual, dark combinations of traits predict different passion profiles?
- What are organizational and individual performance, well-being, and maladaptive behaviour outcomes of various dark trait-passion configurations?

2.4 Participants

The group sample was 105 individuals. Gender and Age were some of the demographic characteristics that were captured. To analyse the Dark Triad on the basis of developmental or generational variations in traits, the age variable was classified in four categories to be used in analysis of variance.

2.5 Measures

In analysing, the dataset has been used to extract four important variables used. According to the statistical output and general nomenclature systems in the personality studies, the variables can be referred to as the following:

Total (VAR00002): Dark Triad Total Score. The composite score of the three malevolent personality characteristics (Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy) as a continuous variable. This is both the dependent variable in the regression and the more important variable of interest in comparison of groups.

HP (VAR00003): Harmonious Passion. One of the subscales of the Passion Scale, where the engagement in an activity is balanced and flexible and compatible with other aspects of life.

OP (Probably VAR00004/ VAR00005 - by implication): Obsessive Passion. The uncontrolled, inflexible involvement in an activity that does not fit other areas of life. Remark: Full identification has been labelled in the output file, but the ANOVA and frequency analysis is aimed at the other variables.

Gender (VAR00004): A demographic variable that is categorical.

Age (VAR00004 or VAR00005 - imputed): This is a categorical demographic variable (coded 1 -4).

Psychological Testing

The main instrument of measuring the Dualistic Model of Passion (DMP) is the **Passion Scale** created by Robert Vallerand and his team in 2003. It aims at gauging an interest of a

person in an activity that he or she loves, feels significant and dedicates time to. It is 14 points, 7-point Likert scale. The scale assesses two kinds of passion by two subscales:

Harmonious Passion (HP): Measures autonomous internalization, in which the activity done is adaptive in nature and compatible with other aspects of life.

Obsessive Passion (OP): Evaluates controlled internalization, wherein the activity takes charge of the individual resulting in inflexible interests of other areas in life as well as conflict.

The Work Passion Scale was created by Patricia Chen, Fiona Lee and Sandy Lim in 2020 to offer a simple, unified scale of passion in the workplace situation. It satisfies the necessity of a good tool that can be utilized in different professions. It is a 10-item instrument that is used to measure identification, motivation and positive affect.

The Short Dark Triad (Sd3) is a 27-item personality test created by Daniel Jones and Delroy Paulhus to give an effective and dependable measure of the three Dark Triad traits, namely, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. It comprises three subscales that have 9 items, which are intended to represent the essence of these socially aversive characteristics at subclinical levels. Items of Machiavellianism evaluate strategic manipulation, cynicism, pragmatic and ends-justify-the-means orientation. Narcissism items are concerned with large self-perceptions, entitlement, control, and display. Items in psychopathy assess callousness, impulsivity and thrill-seeking as well as anti-social tendencies.

2.6 Variables

An independent variable is a characteristic or any attribute that can be controlled or chosen by the researcher to identify its impact or influence on another variable. It is a cause in a cause-effect relationship that is assumed.

The independent variable would be the Dark Triad traits since I am a researcher who intends to determine the extent to which Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) affect the nature of passion (harmonious or obsessive) one experiences. They are the hypothetical influence on the result of passion.

A dependent variable is a response or outcome that the researcher observes so as to observe the impact of the independent variable. It is the effect or supposed outcome in a cause-effect association. It is what is affected or altered by the activity or fluctuation of the independent variable, it is the dependent variable. The main concern of the researchers is to know the cause of changes in the dependent variable.

The type of passion (either harmonious or obsessive) would be the dependent variable in this case as the researcher is investigating the effects of the Dark Triad traits (independent

variable) on the type of passion a person develops. The outcome under measurement is the one that is supposed to rely on the level of Dark Triad traits of the individual.

Inclusion criteria

Age: The participants in research are normally young adults and are in a loose sense classified as people who are between the ages of 20-40.

Publication Date: To be sure that the studies were up to date with the recent developments in the field of dark triad personality traits and passion model, they were published no later than 2019.

Exclusion Criteria

Age: Research- it does not allow children under the age of 20 years or adults above 40 years old.

Distribution Date: The research that were published before 2019 cannot be included in the flow studies of the dark triad personality traits and the passion models to guarantee substantial outcomes.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis gave the summary of the sample characteristics and distributions of variables. Table 4.1 indicates that the sample (N=105) Dark Triad Total score (Total) had a mean of 98.76 (SD = 16.019) with a maximum of 129 and minimum of 53. This means that there is a mid-distribution of evil personality among the sample.

Mean of Harmonious Passion (HP) was 136.45 (SD = 13.578) ranging between 107 and 180. This indicates that the respondents tended to support moderate to high degrees of harmonious involvement with their enthusiastic activity.

As concerns demographics, they mean gender score of 1.45 (SD=.519) in terms of the binary scale (1=Male, 2=Female) reflects a slightly bigger proportion of female participants. The average age group was 1.59 (SD =.978), implying that the sample was concentrated towards lower age groups (probably the undergraduate students).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables*

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total (Dark Triad)	105	53	129	98.76	16.019
HP (Harmonious Passion)	105	107	180	136.45	13.578
Gender	105	1	3	1.45	.519

Age (Categorical)	105	1	4	1.59	.978
Valid N (listwise)	105				

3.2 Bivariate Correlations

Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to provide the evaluation of the linear correlation between the Dark Triad Total scores (Total) and the Harmonious Passion (HP). This analysis showed that the two variables had a significant positive correlation, $r(103) = .348$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed). This means that moderately, scores on Dark Triad were likely to rise with an increase in the scores on Harmonious Passion.

Table 2. *Correlations Between Dark Triad and Harmonious Passion*

	Total	HP
Total	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	105
HP	Pearson Correlation	.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	105

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.3 Regression Analysis: Predicting Dark Triad Scores from Harmonious Passion

Simple linear regression was done to establish whether the variable Harmonious Passion (HP) had a significant influence on Dark Triad Total scores (Total). The regression equation was found to be significant with $F(1,103) = 14.169$, $p < .001$ and about 12.1 percent variance in Dark.

Triad scores ($R^2 = .121$, Adjusted $R^2 = .112$). The fact that the Change statistic (R^2) of Harmonious Passion was (.121) is a factor which explains a large though-insignificant part of the variance in malevolent personality factors.

Coefficients analysis revealed that HP is significant positive predictor of Total ($b = .348$, $p < .001$). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = .410$) implies that with a one-unit increment of Harmonious Passion, the net effect is that the Dark Triad scores will increase by 0.41 units. The diagnostics of collinearity showed that there were no problems of multicollinearity and the Tolerance of 1.000 and VIF of 1.000 (see Table 4.3). The stability of the model is also supported by the condition index of 1.00 and eigenvalue distribution.

Table 3. *Regression Coefficients for HP Predicting Total*

Model	Unstandardized β	Std. Error	Standardized β	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	42.784	14.944		2.863	.005		

HP (Harmonious Passion)	.410	.109	.348	3.764	.000	1.000	1.000
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a. Dependent Variable: Total (Dark Triad)

Table 4. *Model Summary with Change Statistics*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
a. Predictors: (Constant), HP (Harmonious Passion)	.348a	.121	.112	15.091	.121	14.169	1	103	.0001

3.4 Age Differences in Dark Triad Scores

One-way between-subjects ANOVA was used to compare the Age category effect on Dark Triad Total scores. The mean Total score in the four age groups differed statistically, $F(3, 101) = 2.995$, $p = .034$ (see Table 4.5). The value of the effect, eta-squared ($\eta^2 = .082$), is moderate in value which implies that 8.2% of the variance in Dark Triad traits may be explained by age differences.

Table 5. *ANOVA Summary Table for Total by Age Group*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2180.356	3	726.785	2.995	.034
Within Groups	24506.692	101	242.641		
Total	26687.048	104			

Post Hoc Comparisons. In order to examine the particularity of these age differences, a Tukey HSD post hoc test was performed. As the analysis shows, the state of age was the only statistically significant pairwise comparison with the resultant difference in means of -16.90 ($p = .036$, 95% CI = -33.03-0.77). The comparisons of other groups were statistically not significant (see Table 4.6).

This trend was also verified by the homogeneous subsets analysis. Groups 1, 2 and 4 were a homogenous subset (mean range 95.40101.39, $p = .669$), and groups 2, 3 and 4 constituted a second overlapping subset (mean range 101.39113.71, $p = .261$). It implies that Age Group 3 ($M = 112.33$) is significantly greater than Group 1, but it is statistically identical to the middle groups.

Table 6. *Tukey HSD Post Hoc Comparisons for Total by Age*

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
1	2	-5.575	4.117	.531	-16.33	5.18
1	3	-16.900*	6.175	.036	-33.03	-.77
1	4	1.414	5.266	.993	-12.34	15.17

2	3	-11.325	6.939	.365	-29.45	6.80
2	4	6.989	6.144	.667	-9.06	23.04
3	4	18.314	7.676	.086	-1.74	38.37

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

4. Discussion

The present findings yield two principal contributions. First, the significant positive correlation between Dark Triad traits and HP challenges the straightforward assumption that dark personality predicts only obsessive or maladaptive passion. A theoretically coherent explanation centres on narcissistic self-perception bias: individuals high in grandiose narcissism may genuinely perceive their engagement as balanced and autonomous, inflating self-reported HP even when objective behaviour reflects controlled internalization. This interpretation is consistent with narcissism's established links to self-enhancement, assertive self-regulation (Kozicz et al., 2024), and overestimation of interpersonal effectiveness. An alternative explanation is that the assertiveness and approach motivation associated with subclinical narcissism genuinely overlap with the energised, identity-consistent engagement tapped by HP items. Neither account implies that self-reported HP in high-Dark Triad individuals signals psychological well-being in the way it typically does in lower-scoring populations. The regression's explained variance of 12.1% underscores that Dark Triad and HP are related but substantially distinct constructs.

Second, the age-related ANOVA findings suggest that Dark Triad expression is not uniformly stable across the lifespan within the studied range. The elevated scores observed in Age Group 3 are consistent with both contextual demand interpretations (mid-career competitive environments rewarding Machiavellian and narcissistic strategies) and cohort-effects explanations. The overlapping homogeneous subsets caution against strong developmental claims from this cross-sectional data.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. Self-report measurement creates vulnerability to social desirability and insight deficits that are especially salient in Dark Triad populations. The absence of the OP subscale in the statistical output represents a critical gap: the primary hypothesis (H1a) and two secondary hypotheses (H2b, H2c) could not be directly tested, leaving the central theoretical prediction—that dark traits align more strongly with OP than HP—empirically unresolved in this dataset. Unequal age-group sample sizes reduce power for post hoc comparisons, and the concentration of participants in younger age categories restricts generalisability.

Future research should include both passion subscales and employ multi-source measurement (peer-report, behavioural indices) to circumvent self-report limitations. Deconstruction of the Dark Triad composite into sub-facets—particularly grandiose versus vulnerable narcissism—would clarify which trait dimensions drive the HP association. Longitudinal designs are needed to separate developmental from cohort effects and to test whether interventions can redirect obsessive toward harmonious engagement, as suggested by malleability evidence (Fino et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion

The overlap of Dark Triad traits and passion is not necessarily pathological but very much circumstantial. Dark traits, although commonly accurate predictors of obsessive passion in controlled internalization, may also be sources of entrepreneurial drive-in particular format. The transmission of dark passions by the leader-follower dynamics promotes the importance of systemic interventions. The susceptibility of these characteristics to being changed into harmonious engagement needs to be investigated in future studies conducted in the form of longitudinal designs.

To sum up, the given paper demonstrates the first evidence of the positive correlation between the two variables, Harmonious Passion and Dark Triad personality traits. Although Harmonious Passion is generally considered an indicator of the psychological well-being, the association of the feeling of a balanced passion with the traits of malevolence can be viewed as an indication of the fact that the feeling of harmonious passion can fall under the same biases toward self-enhancement as the dark personalities. People who are high in Dark Triad traits might think that they are in harmonious interaction, which is not the case with external observers. This result contradicts the belief that self-reported harmony is always an indicator of real psychological health and points to the importance of using a multi-method approach in the study of personality and motivation. These differences by age also imply that these dynamics might change throughout the lifespan with the midlife age group possibly representing a phase of increased expression of these complex traits.

In conclusion, there is a positive correlation between the dark triad personality traits [Narcissism, Machiavellianism and Psychopathy] and models of passions { Life – harmonious and obsessive and Work passion}.

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