

Predictive Role of Dark Triad of Personality in Social Skills and Lying Behavior of Adolescents

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Abstract

Objectives. The present study attempted to explore the predictive role of dark triad of personality in social skills and lying behavior of adolescents. It was also intended to determine the mediating role of lying behavior in predicting social skills.

Method. Sample ($N=350$) comprised of school students of grade 9 and 10 (girls = 230 and boys = 120) with age range 15 to 18 years from the government and private schools. Dark Triad of Personality Scale (Paulhus, 2013), Lying Scale (Finkenauer, Engels, & Kooten, 2006), and Matson Evaluation of Social Skills (Matson, Rotatori, & Helsel, 1983) were employed to appraise the major constructs of the study.

Results. Results showed that dark triad traits negatively predicted social skills and positively predicted lying behavior; whereas lying behavior was positively related with social skills. In addition, social skills significantly mediated the relationship between dark triads of personality and lying behavior of adolescents. Gender differences indicated that boys reflected higher dark triad traits and lying behavior as compared to girls; while non-significant gender differences were found in relation to social skills.

Implications. Findings of the study would bear implications in clinical and educational settings to regulate inclinations to lie and enhancing better interpersonal skills.

Keywords: *Dark triad of personality, lying behavior, social skills, adolescents.*



Introduction

For many decades, the background of personality psychology has been overwhelmed by the Big Five attributes (Furnham, Richards, Rangel, & Jones, 2014); however, a parallel stream of research that has been rapidly gaining attention is the work on dark triad traits (Jonason, Richardson, & Potter, 2015). Paulhus (2013) described dark triad traits as a collection of three theoretically distinctive, yet, interconnected personality components comprising machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Machiavellianism is characterized by self-intrigued conduct, manipulative methodologies to social lead and a tendency to be insensitive (Jonason et al., 2015; Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde, & Tsukayama, 2019). Narcissism includes dominance, strength, and grand feeling of self-esteem (Furnham et al., 2014); while, a subclinical narcissistic identity incorporates a feeling of significance and uniqueness, yearning for consistent consideration, expecting extraordinary supports, and being interpersonally exploitative. Psychopathy is characterized by a spontaneous behavioral style, a self-important, misleading interpersonal style, unsatisfactory set of emotions (Jones & Paulhus, 2017) and contended to add withdrawn conduct (Marcus, Preszler, & Zeigler-Hill, 2018). According to Landay, Harms, and Credé (2019), the dark triad is usually portrayed by arrogance and conceit (i.e. narcissism), manipulation and distrust (i.e. machiavellianism), and unsympathetic social mentalities and being unethical (i.e. psychopathy).

Another construct that has been explored in this study is social skills; which are generally defined as particular conduct that an individual displays to perform confidently on social tasks (Joshi, Nasim, & Goodman, 2016). Riggio, Tucker, and Throckmorton (2016) describe social skills as complicated arrangement of skills that includes communication, problem-solving, decision making, group collaboration, and self-administration. Social skills typically show individual's capacity and inclination to communicate with others and look after relationships, and keep away from socially undesirable reactions (Joshi et al., 2016). The acquisition of social skills establishes a basic framework for later academic achievement and job related aptitudes (Talwar & Lee, 2008) and involve various mechanisms including direct guidelines, peer learning, socialization practices, and avoidance plans for troubling behaviors (Riggio et al., 2016).

In the present study, lying behavior is considered as an outcome construct; while lying is regularly viewed as saying false content to someone else with the aim that other individual trusts that announcement to be valid (Antomo, Müller, Paul, Paluch, & Thalmann, 2018; Vrij, Akehurst, & Knight, 2006). Similarly, lying is considered as putting forth a purposefully false expression with the aim to betray (Harris, 2017). According to Azizli et al. (2016), lying behavior is manifested in two compositions: firstly, low-stakes falsehoods which do not intent to harm or hurt anyone and characterized by ordinary dishonesty. Secondly, high-risk deception which include hazard that liar may intent to achieve through unfair means such as cheating in exam or being deceitful in one's relationships.

Review of related literature offered insight into the possible relationships among the major constructs of the study. Given the noxious propensities related with the dark triad attributes, empirical evidences connected these three dark traits separately to lying and deceptions. For instance, machiavellianism had appeared to be a solid indicator of self-serving lies and machiavellian people are more inclined to telling falsehoods and risk-taking lying (Paulhus, 2013). Edwards et al. 2017 reported positive affiliation between narcissism and lying in an intellectual setting, which is expressive of high risk-taking deceitfulness. Jonason et al. (2015) inspected the relationship between the dark triad of traits and quantity of lying among adolescents, found that psychopathy is identified with the tendency to tell a lie for no specific reason; while, narcissism is identified with expanded self-evaluated lying capacity. In addition, self-pickup lies has positive association with narcissism; while, benevolent lies with machiavellianism. Rogoza and Ciecuch (2018) examined the dark triad traits relationships with different measures of lying and reported that individuals who are high on psychopathy have more impulsive tendency to lie; whereas, individuals with machiavellianism are more inclined to develop a detailed deceptive plan to lie. Recently, Choshen-Hillel, Shaw, and Caruso (2020) inferred that children tend to lie to appear honest and truthful as psychopathic inclinations.

In relation to the role of dark triad with social skills, Moshagen, Hilbig, and Zettler (2018) found that there is negative relationship between machiavellianism and social skills in circumstances requiring assertiveness and social reasoning. Similarly, Rauthmann and Kolar (2012) inferred that machiavellianism is negatively associated with social attribute requiring social introduction and skills. Recent set of studies (Hart, Jones, Terrizzi, & Curtis, 2019; Li, Murad, Shahzad, Khan, & Ashraf, 2020) on prominent personality models indicated that interpersonal aspects of agreeableness (i.e., confidence, straightforwardness, conformity, modesty, tender mindedness) has the strongest relationship with the dark triad. Further evidences demonstrated negative relationship of dark triad with interpersonal skills, social humility (Hodson et al., 2018), social abilities (Turnipseed & Landay, 2018), friendship quality (Stead & Frekken, 2014), and social relations with peers (Geng et al., 2016).

Prior investigations on the relationship between social skills and the ability to lie demonstrated mixed inferences. For instance, few evidences (Geng et al., 2016; Hodson et al., 2018) proposed that people who have good social skills are often more capable of socially acceptable lying. Specifically, adolescents with better social ability, which includes social skills, may tell more believable lies, and liars who are socially adept are treated with an honest conduct prejudice (Hu, Huang, Wang, Weare, & Fu, 2020). In addition, Meibauer (2018) demonstrated that children and adolescents used lying and deception as a social mechanism to make friends and to be accepted in social circle of friends. In this manner, it is conceivable that higher social abilities associate with a higher inclination to tell lies with a lesser chance to be caught as a liar. On the contrary, Morf, Horvath, and Torchetti (2011) found that adolescents equipped with good social skills are capable of figuring out multiple solutions for the interpersonal problems and prefer to be honest and truthful in their interactions. On similar note, Lavoie, Leduc, Crossman, and Talwar (2015) observed that high school students who have good social aptitudes are more straightforward and less inclined to be deceitful and to lie with their friends.

There are few, but noteworthy work has been done in Pakistan which provides an insight about the possible relationships among study variables. For instance, dark triad traits are found as a predictor of

bullying and victimization in adolescents (Fatima, 2016); while, aggressive children are high on social skills (Saleem, 2014), and personality traits of assertiveness and agreeableness positively predict social skills (Khan, 2005). In addition, acceptability of lying behavior is a function of perceivers' motives to lie (Moin, 2012).

Gender differences. Numerous studies focused on gender differences in relation to dark triad, social skills, and ability to lie. For instance, men scored higher on all the three traits of dark triad (Edwards, Albertson, & Verona, 2017) and are more likely to be deceitful and indulge in lying behavior as compared to women (Moin, 2012; Riggio et al., 2016). However, other set of studies (Harris, 2017; Talwar & Lee, 2008) pointed out a caution for individual differences (irrespective of gender) that, in part, accounted for the observed differences in the dark triad. Empirically, it has been observed that cheating, deception, and lying is more prevalent among male students; while, girls have shown more readiness for academic support and believed in genuine effort for attaining good academic score (Peters & Fonseca, 2020). Likewise, male adolescents are more involved in both risk taking lying and high risk deception (Jonason et al., 2015; Meibauer, 2018) and have better social skills in telling lies because they know that they are less likely to be caught in their lies (Li et al., 2020; Visser, Bay, Cook, & Myburgh, 2012). Conversely, school girls have shown better social aptitudes and standards for conduct, more talented in socially enthusiastic expressions as compared to boys (Lavoie et al., 2015).

The review of aforementioned literature offered judicious reasons to design the present study. For instance, earlier researches primarily focus on dark triad in relationship choices (Azizli et al., 2016), creative ability, (Jonason et al., 2015), and aggressive behavior; however, there is a gap in the existing literature about the possible role of dark triad in negative conduct related issues such as lying behavior. In addition, earlier studies predominantly examined the relationship between much standard and renowned personality models such as Big Five and Eysneck personality theory in the development of social skills; however, there is scarcity of empirical exploration to determine the role of dark triad traits in predicting social skills. Hence, this study attempted to minimize this gap by exploring the predictive role of dark triad in social skills and lying behavior among adolescents.

Adolescence is the transitional stage and attainment of various cognitive and emotional skills performs dual function of being shaped by personality dispositions as well as endures various positive and negative outcomes. Nevertheless, adolescents are the principal focus of social scientists specifically in the relevant domains of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems in Western cultures; still there is a dire need for further indigenous probing to examine the predictive role of negative traits of personality that may influence their positive qualities such as social skills as well as deceptive and lying behaviors.

Major objectives of the study were to determine the role of dark triad of personality in predicting social skills and lying behavior among adolescents. It was also intended to examine the mediating role of social skills in predicting lying behavior from dark triad traits of personality. Gender differences were also investigated in relation to major constructs of the study.

Hypotheses derived from the literature review were as follows:

1. Dark triad traits (psychopathy, machiavellianism and narcissism) will negatively predict social skills and positively predict lying behavior.
2. There will be positive relationship between social skills and lying behavior.
3. Social skills will mediate the association between dark triad of personality and lying behavior.
4. Boys are more likely to express dark triad traits and lying behavior as compared to girls, while girls would reflect better social skills as compared to boys.

Participants

The sample ($N = 350$) comprised of students from schools of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, using the purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria was based on inclusion of only those students whose both parents were alive and living together. Respondents included boys ($n = 120$) and girls ($n = 230$), with age ranging from 15 to 18 years ($M = 16.61$; $SD = 4.80$). Educational level of the respondents included grade 9th ($n = 229$) and 10th ($n = 121$) and belonged from nuclear ($n = 244$) and joint ($n = 106$) family systems. Parental education of the respondents was minimum matric and occupational affiliations included public and private sector jobs.

Measures

Dark Triad of Personality Scale (Paulhus, 2013). This scale comprised of 27 items, with three subscales having 9 items each: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. Responses were obtained on 5-point rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Possible score ranged from 27-135 where high score on each dimension indicate high inclination of that trait of dark triad. Paulhus (2013) reported the reliability of total scale as .88; while in the present study alpha coefficient of .78 was achieved for this scale. This scale has been used for adolescent population in the earlier indigenous studies (e.g., Fatima, 2016) with adequate psychometric indices (internal consistency = .81).

Matson Evaluation of Social Skills (Matson, Rotatori, & Helsel, 1983). The 36 items scale consisted of three subscales, that is, Assertiveness (25 items), Conceit (5 items), and Social Anxiety (6 items). Responses were acquired on 5-point rating scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) and total score could range from 36-180 and high score on the total scale indicate better social skills. Teodoro et al. (2005) found adequate reliability of .84; while, Cronbach's alpha of .75 was achieved for the present sample.

Lying Scale (Finkenauer, Engels, & Kooten, 2006). This scale consisted of 12 items with 5-point rating scale ranging from never (1) to very often (5) with possible score range of 12-60 where high score indicating more tendency of lying behavior. Reliability of this scale was reported as .90 (Finkenauer et al., 2006) thereby indicating good content and concurrent validity: however, alpha of .81 was achieved for the present sample.

Procedure

Institutional heads were contacted for official permission to conduct the study. Respondents were approached in person, were clarified about the purpose of this study and ensured about the confidentiality of the personal information. Respondents were ascertained that any personal information shared would be completely confidential and would not be disclosed at any forum. Informed consent was acquired from the respondents and were also informed that they have the right to quit if they do not want to be the part of the study. Respondents were given verbal and written instructions, and questionnaire booklets were individually administered. Although, there was no time

restriction for the completion of booklet, respondents took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Later, participants were thanked for their time and provision of valued information for the study.

Results

Descriptive statistics showed that all the scales bear adequate reliability indices and were found to be valid for the adolescent population. Initially, linear regression was performed to determine the predictive role of dark triads in relation to social skills and lying behavior. Multiple regression was done to determine the mediating role of social skills in the relationship between dark triad of personality and lying behavior and gender differences were also tabulated.

Table 1

Predictive Role of Dark Triads of Personality in Social Skills and Lying Behavior (N = 350)

Variables	B	SE	β	R ²	ΔR^2	F	ΔF
Social Skills **							
Constant ^a	31.13	.19		.21	.19	8.62	7.02 **
Mach .	-.43	.10	-.29 *				
Narci ssism	-.50	.17	-.35 **				
Psych oopathy	-.74	.13	-.42 **				
Lying Behavior **							
Constant ^a	66.70	.23		.28	.26	7.15	6.31 **
Mach .	.63	.16	.26 *				
Narci ssism	.53	.24	.38 **				
Psych oopathy	.86	.19	.45 **				
Lying Behavior **							
Constant ^a	71.50	.25					
Social Skills	.82	.14	.47 **	.33	.31	12.81	11.44 **

Note. ^a = Age, education, and birth order were entered as control variables. Mach. = Machiavellianism **p* < .01. ***p* < .001

Table 1 showed that dark triad is significant negative predictor of social skills and significant positive predictor of lying behavior. Moreover, dark triad's dimensions (machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy) explained 19% variance in social skills and 26% variance in lying behavior. In addition, social skills explain 31% variance in predicting lying behavior. These findings provide substantial support for H1 and H2.

Mediating role of social skills in predicting lying behavior was tabulated through AMOS. Findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Mediating Role of Social Skills in Predicting Lying Behavior (N = 350)

Criterion Variables	Predictor Variables	β	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Direct Effects					
Lying Behavior	Machiavellianism	.33	.01	1.19	5.02
Lying Behavior	Narcissism	.39	.00	1.37	7.33
Lying Behavior	Psychopathy	.47	.00	1.19	5.01
Social Skills	Machiavellianism	-.67	.00	-2.31	-0.11
Social Skills	Narcissism	-.58	.00	-3.16	-0.75
Social Skills	Psychopathy	-.43	.00	-2.82	-1.21
Lying Behavior	Social Skills	.35	.01	2.19	6.66
Indirect Effects					
Lying Behavior	Mach . through Social Skills	.06	.38	-1.08	4.09
Lying Behavior	Narcissism through Social Skills	.10	.24	-2.27	2.53
Lying Behavior	Psychopathy through Social Skills	.12	.17	-3.19	1.42

Note. Mach = Machiavellianism

Table 2 showed direct and indirect paths in predicting lying behavior. Results showed that direct effect of machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy (components of dark triad of personality) is significant in predicting social skills and lying behavior. Moreover, direct path between social skills and lying behavior is also significant. However, when social skills is entered as a mediator, then all these direct paths becomes nonsignificant; thereby establishing the complete mediating role of social skills in predicting lying behavior, the significant relationship between dark triad of personality's components and lying behavior becomes nonsignificant; thereby indicating complete mediating effect of social skills. These findings offer empirical support for H3.

Independent sample t-test was conducted to determine differences along the gender (boys and girls).

Table 3

Gender Differences on Dark Triad of Personality, Social Skills and Lying Behavior (N=350)

Variables	Boys (n = 183)		Girls (n = 167)		t(348)	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Dark Triad (Total)	83.65	12.43	71.40	11.37	6.96	.00	-7.70	-1.01	.74
Mach .	33.38	8.27	27.83	6.72	3.68	.01	-5.32	-1.60	.38
Narcissism	31.29	7.56	25.86	5.91	4.38	.00	-5.26	-1.90	.46
Psychopathy	30.22	8.64	24.70	7.88	5.42	.00	-7.64	-3.75	.58
Social Skills	90.97	13.10	91.53	12	1.05	.27	-1.37	2.49	.07
Lying Behavior	54.83	12.39	45.51	11	8.12	.00	1.69	7.74	.95

Note. Mach. = Machiavellianism

Table 3 showed significant gender differences in relation to study variables. Findings indicated that boys displayed higher inclinations of dark triad traits and more lying behavior as compared to girls. However, nonsignificant gender differences existed in terms of social skills; hence, H4 is partially supported.

Discussion

Findings of the study showed that dark triad traits negatively predicted social skills and positively predicted lying behavior. This inference is optimally explained by Azizli et al. (2016) stating that personality dispositions play an important role in shaping one's adjustment skills in social scenarios and at the same time making people vulnerable to various behavioral tendencies. According to Prusik and Szulawski (2019), amalgamation of dark triad traits function in a consistent manner and component of machiavellianism and psychopathy overlap to some extent in their characteristics which includes display of self-deceiving conduct, and a tendency to be insensitive towards the needs of others; thereby hindering the learning of skills necessary for social interactions and adjustment. Jonason et al. (2015) and Landay et al. (2019) further added that tendency of being psychopathic and narcissism is often intensely

connected with misdemeanor behaviors including lying behavior without any feelings of being regretful. Pincus, Cain, and Wright (2014) asserted that individuals with higher narcissistic tendencies are likely to have enhanced propensity of lying behavior. Kaufman et al. (2019) explained that such people have grandiose sense of self-worth and dominance in relationships; hence, they lie more when circumstances becomes out of their control.

Results further showed that social skills are positively associated with lying behavior. This pattern of results are genuinely explained in the context of interpersonal skills model (Joshi et al., 2016) emphasizing that social skills are one of the major component of our environmental learning which makes people to adjust their responses, interactions and behaviors in accordance to the needs of the social environment.

This model further explains that lying is considered as an adjusted response (verbal or behavioral) to attain the shared or individual target with the intention to get the things done rather with a latent intention to hurt others. Most of the inferences (Geng et al., 2016; Lavoie et al., 2015) based on applied research proposed that individuals with better social and interpersonal skills have the tendency to exaggerate and lying, primarily, as a strategy to convince others or to cover up for one's inadequacies. On similar lines, Riggio et al. (2016) found that adolescents with enhanced social skills are likely to earn more peer popularity as they are able to amplify and lie about their personal triumphs.

Likewise, Peters and Fonseca (2020) suggested that school students frequently use lie as a skill to earn approval of significant others including parents and teachers.

It has also been found that social skills mediated the relationship between the dark triad dimensions and lying behavior. Talwar and Lee's (2008) theory of social and cognitive correlates of lying behavior among children and adolescents offered reasonable explanation to grasp the mediating role of social skills. According to this theory, acquisition of social skills is contingent upon two broad factors; that is, personality traits and social exposure; where personal dispositions escalate the likelihood of the extent and nature of social learning which is later manifested in all types of behaviors including lying behavior. Hu et al. (2020) also deliberated that school children tend to use their interpersonal skills and social relations for gossips and prosocial lies. Jonason et al. (2015) inferred that presence of dark triad traits frequently influence the social and interpersonal relationships of people and may enhance their better lying capabilities.

Finally, results showed that male adolescents exhibited higher inclinations of dark triad traits and more lying behavior as compared to female adolescents; while nonsignificant gender differences existed on social skills. This finding is quite in line with prior studies indicating that psychopathic and narcissistic tendencies are more prevalent among men as compared to women. Similarly, Moin (2012) and Vrij et al. (2006) found that although lying behavior is more prevalent among male students; however, it is more of prosocial nature; while, Geng et al. (2016)

inferred that boys are high on all dimensions of dark triad and more likely to be involved in antisocial conduct and lying behaviors. Hart et al. (2019) concluded that girls are inclined to use more relational lies and inclined to use lying as a defensive mechanism to gain sympathy. However, Lavoie et al. (2015) found nonsignificant gender difference on social skills declaring that social skills are more contingent upon the nature of social circumstances and social learning; therefore, it may influence the person varying independent of one's gender.

Limitations and Recommendations

The present study had few potential limitations. Firstly, the participants were selected from few schools which may restrict the variation in the demographic spread of the respondents, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the use of self-report measure may induce the unavoidable influence of social desirability and subjectivity of personal response style. Finally, there would be additional influences such as parental education and occupation that would shape the personality development of the adolescents. To enhance and improve the work for future studies, researchers should prefer diverse cohorts of sample in order to make it more reflective of general population. In addition, development of indigenous qualitative measures may offer better insight into the appraisal of personality dimensions unrestricted from the influence of desirable response patterns. Finally, future explorations may incorporate the role of other related constructs such as emotional, clinical, and educational factors that play an important role in shaping lying behavior towards parents teacher, friends, and other social activities.

Implications

The current study provides baseline yet, directional data to capture the fundamental understanding of the plausible role of dark triad traits in predicting social skills and lying behavior. Therefore, findings of the study could offer multiple applications in the domains of educational and clinical settings so as to consider the role of personal dispositions in developing certain pathological and socially disapproved behaviors. In addition, the findings of the current study would be assistive in designing psychosocial interventions especially for the school children to adept better social skills and avoiding deceitful behaviors.

Furthermore, vocational and career counselors in schools would undertake personality parameters of dark triads in consideration while making evaluations and corresponding personality profiling of students which provide safeguard against adolescents likelihood of developing criminal conducts.

Conclusion

The basic premise of the present study was to determine the predictive role of dark triad of personality in determining the social skills and lying behavior of the adolescents. Findings of the study demonstrated direct and indirect effects of the social skills in predicting lying behavior from dark triad dispositions. In addition, significant gender differences were also reflected in relation to major constructs of the study. These inferences bear potential consequences in the field of educational and personality psychology.

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