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## Implicit and Explicit Self-Esteem in Relation to the Dark Triad

Lauren Stenason\*

Individuals with characteristics encompassing the three domains of the Dark Triad (psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism) are often thought to possess inflated levels of self-esteem however, there has been controversy as to whether this inflated self-esteem represents their true underlying level of self-esteem. The present study investigated the relationships between the Dark Triad, explicit, and implicit self-esteem. Participants consisted of 231 individuals from The University of Western Ontario with an age range of 17 to 45 years ( $M = 19.390$ ,  $SD = 2.908$ ). 81% of participants were female and 19% of participants were male. Participants completed an online survey consisting of the Short Dark Triad, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Name Letter Task. The analysis revealed that Machiavellianism showed a weak negative correlation with last name initial. However, Machiavellianism and explicit self-esteem were not significantly correlated with first name initial. Narcissism showed a moderate positive correlation with explicit self-esteem and a weak positive correlation with last name initial but no significant relationship between narcissism and first name initial. Psychopathy did not reveal any significant correlations with either explicit or implicit self-esteem. Multiple regression analysis revealed that narcissism and psychopathy added significantly to the prediction of explicit self-esteem.

Self-esteem is involved in many domains regarding personality, psychological disorders, and overall mental health. Different types of personality characteristics involve varying levels of self-esteem, which reflect the trait portrayed in the individual. It has often been assumed that individuals who possess narcissistic, psychopathic, and Machiavellian personality traits have inflated levels of self-esteem (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Zeigler-Hill, 2006). Although high self-esteem is perceived as a desirable characteristic to possess, inflated self-esteem can be maladaptive. There has however, been controversy as to whether this inflation of self-esteem actually represents the individual's true levels of self-esteem. The purpose of this study is to determine the representation of implicit and explicit self-esteem in relation to the three components of the Dark Triad.

### The Dark Triad

The components of the Dark Triad are considered maladaptive personality traits that include narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Narcissism is characterized by an exaggerated sense of entitlement, grandiosity, and superiority (Veselka, Shermer, & Vernon, 2012). The second component of the triad is psychopathy, described by low anxiety and empathy and high thrill seeking behavior (Veselka et al., 2012). Finally, the last component is Machiavellianism, consisting of highly manipulative individuals characterized by interpersonal coldness (Veselka et al., 2012).

Research on the Dark Triad initially began by observing clinical and subclinical samples on various personality traits and it was found that narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism were the most frequent maladaptive personality traits (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). Paulhus and Williams (2002) determined that the three malevolent personality traits have significant overlap and decided to investigate the

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phenomenon further. Although all three overlap in their characteristics towards self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness, and therefore are all intercorrelated, they are by no means equivalent. Paulhus and Williams (2002) found that the Dark Triad exhibited distinct relationships with the traits in the Five Factor Model (agreeableness, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and neuroticism). While all three domains showed low agreeableness, narcissists and psychopaths had higher extraversion and openness scores, Machiavellianism and psychopathy showed lower levels of conscientiousness, and psychopaths were characterized by low neuroticism. However, a measure of the Dark Triad is necessary to accurately capture each dimension that provides a comprehensive portrayal of the maladaptive characteristics.

Furnham et al. (2013) conducted a 10-year review on the Dark Triad literature. They noted that many researchers lump all three domains together in order to form a simplistic division of good versus bad. However, it is crucial to distinguish not only the similarities, but also the differences among each domain of the triad. There has been some research on differentiations within each domain, such as grandiose and vulnerable forms of narcissism. Specifically, Miller et al. (2010) described vulnerable narcissism as a fragile sense of superiority and traits such as grandiosity to mask feelings of low self-esteem. The research on Machiavellianism and psychopathy in relation to different forms of self-esteem has been limited, as most of the research has focused on narcissism. There has been a lack of research that observes all three of the Dark Triad domains and concurrently examining their differential interrelationships and external correlates.

### **Self-Esteem and the Dark Triad**

Witt, Donnellan, and Trzesniewski (2011) investigated the relationships between self-esteem, narcissism, and Machiavellianism. They noted that most research has focused on

global or explicit self-esteem, with measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and explain that low self-esteem is linked with low attachment to society and externalizing behavior. All three components of the triad have been related to poor interpersonal relationships and delinquent behavior, thus supporting the belief that these individuals might possess low self-esteem. This contrasts the previously held beliefs that individuals possessing Dark Triad personality traits exhibit high levels of self-esteem. Witt et al. (2011) reported that previous research measures of global self-esteem and narcissism (i.e., measured on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory) show a positive correlation in college students ( $r = .30$ ). Witt et al. (2011) also predicted a negative correlation between self-esteem and maladaptive narcissism, revealing evidence that the global measure of high self-esteem could be maintained by the façade instituted by maladaptive narcissists. Less research has been conducted examining the effects of Machiavellianism and self-esteem; however, Witt et al. (2011) did report an unpublished study indicating a negative correlation between Machiavellianism and global self-esteem. They also noted the importance of distinguishing among the diversity of self-esteem and recommend that future research should be conducted to investigate explicit and implicit self-esteem in relation to the Dark Triad.

The second component of this study regards the concept of explicit and implicit self-esteem. In general, Aberson (2010) defined global self-esteem as the act of assessing ones own self-worth and competence while perceiving their own sense of pride and confidence. These perceptions vary to the degree of self-esteem present in the individual. It is also important to consider the notion of explicit and implicit self-esteem. Implicit self-esteem is believed to be a covert, unconscious, automatic self-evaluation whereas explicit self-esteem is an overt, conscious portrayal of self-liking, worth, and acceptance (Zeigler-Hill, 2006). It is important to distinguish between

these two types of self-esteem because an overt expression of self-liking may not provide a comprehensive picture of the individuals core self-esteem.

Zeigler-Hill (2006) divided high self-esteem into secure high and fragile high self-esteem categories. Secure high self-esteem is related to psychological health whereas fragile high self-esteem is associated with maladjustment (Zeigler-Hill, 2006). The focus of the current study is fragile high self-esteem. Fragile high self-esteem was further divided into four categories: defensive self-esteem, contingent self-esteem, unstable self-esteem, and discrepant self-esteem. The focus on the current study will examine whether discrepant self-esteem is evident in each domain of the Dark Triad. This discrepancy between explicit and implicit self-esteem was explained by Zeigler-Hill (2006) as a “difference in cognitive processing”. There are explicit interpretations or reinterpretations of events whereas implicit interpretations reflect the accumulation of appraisals at a more unconscious level. This is portrayed in individuals who seem to have a positive, or in the case of the Dark Triad, inflated, sense of self; however are also vulnerable to events or thoughts that threaten this confident exterior. The underlying negative thoughts towards the self remain unacknowledged. Zeigler-Hill (2006) focused his study on narcissism and found that individuals with discrepant high self-esteem also had high levels of narcissism. Other researchers have also distinguished the relationship between self-esteem and narcissism. Falkenbach, Howe, and Falki (2013) conducted a study to separate psychopathy, narcissism, and aggression. They found that narcissism and psychopathic individuals had lower self-esteem and more aggression (Falkenbach et al., 2013). However, these researchers did not account for any forms of implicit self-esteem.

Although the findings of Zeigler-Hill (2006) noted that high forms of narcissism involve discrepant self-esteem, there is a lack of evidence that observes self-esteem within each domain of the Dark Triad. In addition, more

attention should be given to various representations of self-esteem.

### **Name-Letter Task as a Measure of Implicit Self-Esteem**

The name letter task (NLT), or name letter effect, refers to the phenomenon where individuals rate letters included in their own name higher than letters that are not in their name and is a measure of implicit self-esteem. Stieger, Voracek, and Formann (2012) explained that this effect is even stronger for letters in an individual’s initials (also referred to as the Initials Preference Task; Stieger & Burger, 2013). Thus, this task is used as a measure of implicit self-esteem since the name letter effect reflects positive thoughts towards the self. As mentioned previously, an important component of implicit self-esteem is the underlying, more unconscious form of self-esteem, thus it is important that this task is an accurate measure. Implicit self-esteem is thought to differ from explicit self-esteem because of individual’s tendency to respond based on social expectations or desirability. This is especially important for individuals in the Dark Triad, as they are characterized to portray an inflated sense of self. Stieger et al. (2012) noted that high explicit self-esteem and low implicit self-esteem are related to increased narcissism; therefore interactions exist between an individual’s explicit and implicit self-esteem.

The NLT has been reported to have good reliability (Krause, Back, Egloff & Schmukle, 2011; Stieger, Voracek and Formann, 2012). It was also noted that first and last name initials could reflect different constructs in identity, especially when accounting for an individual’s culture (i.e., collectivistic versus individualistic). That being said, there has been some controversy as to the validity of the NLT. The name letter effect can often be “overruled by conscious thoughts” and can be affected by the order of presentation (Stieger et al., 2012). LeBel and Gawronski (2009) analyzed different algorithms that are most frequently used to score the NLT in order to see which one is most optimal when computing scores. It was found

that of five algorithms analyzed, the ipsatized double-correction algorithm was the most reliable. Despite these concerns among researchers, the NLT is one of the most frequently used measures to determine implicit self-esteem (Stieger & Burger, 2013).

### **Theory of Threatened Egotism**

Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1999) investigated the relationship between self-esteem and aggression. They found that individuals with unstable self-esteem may be more aggressive due to threatened egotism. Despite previous views that low self-esteem is the cause of violent behaviour, Baumeister et al. (1999) sought to determine whether fragile high self-esteem is really the cause of aggressive behaviour. These researchers defined egotism as “favourable self-appraisals” (Baumeister et al., 1999). Self-esteem in this theory was referred to as a global view of self-esteem. Due to their feelings of superiority, individuals with high explicit self-esteem may be more likely to take advantage of others without remorse. They may also be more confident to be the victorious individual when engaged in an argument or fight. This notion of threatened egotism occurs when feelings of superiority are endangered and the individual may react aggressively to protect this outer appearance. The favourable self-appraisal followed by the negative appraisal by others is discrepant and leads to threatened egotism. The individual can either reject or accept the negative appraisal. By rejecting the appraisal, an individual’s self has not changed but leads the individual to feel negative emotions and results in aggression. If they accept the negative appraisal, they experience negative emotions and withdraw (Baumeister et al., 1999). This theory is related to the current research because Baumeister et al. (1999) formed this theory on global self-esteem. When only looking at global or explicit self-esteem, individuals in the Dark Triad still want to protect this façade. However, there is no mention of their attempt to cover inner feelings of inadequacy. Thus, when only considering explicit self-esteem, individuals in the Dark Triad might aggress in order to protect their

outer appearance of confidence. Although the current study did not observe aggression, these findings could provide more insight into the Theory of Threatened Egotism by bridging the theoretical discrepancies that low versus high levels of self-esteem cause aggressive behaviour. Perhaps it is the case that the individual has both high and low self-esteem in the form of high explicit and low implicit self-esteem.

The present study aimed to gain more insight into the relationship between the Dark Triad and self-esteem by dividing self-esteem into two distinct categories: implicit and explicit self-esteem. Implicit self-esteem was defined as the participants score on the Name Letter Task, and explicit self-esteem as the individuals score on Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy scores represented the individual’s score on the Short Dark Triad.

Although it is evident that the three components of the Dark Triad have distinct similarities and differences, the predictions were the same for each domain. Previous literature has shown evidence that the similarities among the domains of the Dark Triad will contribute to the shared hypotheses regarding explicit and implicit self-esteem. Narcissism was predicted to share a positive correlation with explicit self-esteem and a negative correlation with implicit self-esteem. Psychopathy was predicted to have a positive correlation with explicit self-esteem but remain negatively correlated to implicit self-esteem. Finally, Machiavellianism was predicted to share a positive correlation with explicit self-esteem and correlate negatively to implicit self-esteem.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The sample in the present study consisted of 231 participants from the University of Western Ontario (187 females and 44 males) with an age range of 17 to 45 ( $M = 19.39$ ,  $SD = 2.91$ ). A total of 200 students

participated through the Introductory Psychology Research Pool (SONA) and 31 students contacted the researcher through posters distributed throughout campus. Participants were required to be fluent in English. Participants that responded through SONA received a partial course credit and participants recruited through posters around campus were entered for a chance to win one of ten 50 dollar prizes.

## Materials

### The Short Dark Triad Questionnaire.

As seen in Appendix A, narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism were measured using the Short Dark Triad, consisting of 27 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). There was also an option if participants preferred not to answer. This questionnaire contained three subscales, one for each domain of the triad. The first subscale was Machiavellianism, in which all nine items measured high levels of Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = .74$ ; e.g., “It’s not wise to tell your secrets”). The second subscale was narcissism; six items measured high levels of narcissism ( $\alpha = .73$ ; E.g., “People see me as a natural leader”) and three items measured low levels of narcissism which were reverse coded (e.g., “I feel embarrassed if someone compliments me”). The third subscale was psychopathy; seven items measured high levels of psychopathy ( $\alpha = .70$ ; E.g., “People often say I’m out of control”) and two items measured low psychopathy which were reverse coded (e.g., “I avoid dangerous situations”).

**Rosenberg’s Self-Esteem Scale.** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is one of the most widely used measures to evaluate global or explicit self-esteem. Robins, Hendin, and Trzesniewski (2001) noted that this scale is a reliable and valid measure of global self-esteem. This scale is composed of 10 items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) with subscales consisting of high and low self-esteem. Five items measured high self-esteem (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”) and five items measured low self-esteem, which were reverse coded (e.g., “I

certainly feel useless at times”). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*). Participants had an option if they preferred not to answer.

**Name-Letter Task (NLT).** As seen in Appendix B, implicit self-esteem was measured using the NLT. In this task, participants were given a letter of the alphabet and were asked to rate how much they liked each of the letters presented and to focus on their ‘gut’ feelings. Ratings were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). The letters were presented in the following random order: G, Z, I, B, Q, P, S, V, C, J, E, O, N, L, R, D, Y, M, K, W, T, X, U, A, H, F. For each letter, participants were asked “how much do you like this letter?” These results were compared to the participant’s first and last name initials that were recorded in the demographic section of the survey. This procedure was replicated from LeBel and Gawronski (2009). Participants viewed the statement and letter in *Arial* font. Scores were calculated using the ipatized double-correction algorithm ( $\alpha = .55$ ; LeBel & Gawronski, 2009).

## Procedure

Participants who signed up through SONA registered on the SONA website and were given an external link with online access through Survey-Monkey. They received a unique ID code given to them through SONA. Individuals who contacted the researcher through poster recruitment were given a unique identification code in an email and were sent the external link to the survey on Survey-Monkey. Participants read the letter of information and were given the opportunity to email the researcher with any questions. Participants gave their consent by clicking ‘Yes, I agree to participate’ to the statement: *I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, all questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate.* Participants were then asked for their identification code, gender, age, and initials. Participants had the opportunity to skip any questions they wished. Participants then completed the Short Dark Triad, Rosenberg

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Self-Esteem Scale, and the Name-Letter Task. Finally, participants were presented the debriefing form and were given both additional resources to gain more information on the study and the contact information of the researcher if they had any further questions. The study took approximately half an hour to complete.

### Results

A bivariate correlation was used to test the hypothesis that narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism would all be positively correlated with explicit self-esteem and negatively correlated to implicit self-esteem. Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy were measured on the Short Dark Triad and the mean score for each domain of the triad was computed based on average from the 5-point Likert scale. Explicit self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), where a mean score was computed for explicit self-esteem based on a 9-point likert scale. Implicit self-esteem was assessed using the NLT. First name and last name initial scores were both calculated separately using the ipsatized double-corrected algorithm, which LeBel & Gawronski (2009) found to be the most reliable algorithm to calculate implicit self-esteem scores.

Results revealed that Machiavellianism showed a weak, negative correlation to first name initial ( $r = -.14, p = .04$ ) but was not significantly correlated to explicit self-esteem ( $r = -.07, p = .30$ ) or last name initial ( $r = .09, p = .15$ ). Therefore, as Machiavellianism increased, implicit self-esteem decreased (only regarding the first name initial) but showed no significant relationships to explicit self-esteem or implicit self-esteem when considering the last name initial.

Narcissism showed a moderate, positive correlation to explicit self-esteem ( $r = .52, p = .00$ ) and a weak positive relation to last name initial ( $r = .13, p = .04$ ) but no significant relation to first name initial ( $r = .020, p = .76$ ). In other words, increased narcissism was related to increased explicit self-esteem and increased

implicit self-esteem (only when considering the last name initial).

Psychopathy was not related to explicit self-esteem ( $r = -.01, p = .84$ ), first name initial ( $r = -.10, p = .11$ ) or last name initial ( $r = .03, p = .69$ ). Therefore, psychopathy showed no significant relationships between explicit self-esteem or implicit self-esteem, regardless of whether it was the first or last name initial.

Multiple regression was also used to determine which variables contributed significantly to the prediction of explicit self-esteem. It was found that narcissism ( $\beta = .58$ ),  $t(229) = 9.88, p = .00$ , and psychopathy ( $\beta = -.20$ ),  $t(229) = -3.48, p = .001$ , both contributed significantly to the prediction of explicit self-esteem,  $F(2, 227) = 48.91, p = .00$ . Both variables accounted for 30.1% of the variance accounted for in explicit self-esteem.

Independent sample *t*-tests were also used to determine whether any sex differences existed among psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and explicit self-esteem. Bonferroni corrections were used in order to control for Type I error. In terms of Machiavellianism, Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was not significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(1, 229) = .36, ns$ . It was found that males ( $M = 3.60, SD = 0.62$ ) and females ( $M = 3.17, SD = 0.55$ ) differed significantly in their self-reported Machiavellianism,  $t(229) = 4.62, p < .001$ . Regarding narcissism, Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was not significant, therefore equal variance were assumed, Levene  $F(1, 229) = 0.96, ns$ . It was found that males ( $M = 3.34, SD = 0.63$ ) differed significantly from females ( $M = 2.94, SD = 0.53$ ) in their self-reported narcissism scores  $t(229) = 4.39, p < .001$ . In terms of psychopathy, Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was not significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(1, 229) = 0.18, ns$ . It was found that males ( $M = 2.45, SD = 0.55$ ) and females ( $M = 2.17, SD = 0.56$ ) differed significantly in their psychopathy scores,  $t(229) = 3.00, p < .01$ . Finally for explicit self-esteem, Levene's test of

homogeneity of variances was not significant, therefore equal variances were assumed, Levene  $F(1, 229) = 0.30, p = ns$ . Results revealed that males ( $M = 3.71, SD = 0.72$ ) and females ( $M = 3.38, SD = 0.70$ ) differed significantly in their explicit self-esteem scores,  $t(229) = 2.83, p < .01$ . In summary, males and females scored significantly differently on Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and explicit self-esteem, males consistently scoring higher than females.

### Discussion

It was hypothesized that narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy would all be positively correlated with explicit self-esteem and negatively correlated with implicit self-esteem. Contrary to expectations, Machiavellianism was negatively correlated to implicit self-esteem (first name initial) and showed no significant relationship with explicit self-esteem. Narcissism was positively correlated to explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem (last name initial). Psychopathy showed no significant correlations with explicit or implicit self-esteem. Findings also revealed that narcissism and psychopathy both added significantly to the prediction of explicit self-esteem.

The current results are consistent with previous literature on explicit self-esteem and narcissism. Specifically, both the current study and previous research have found that narcissism is positively correlated with explicit self-esteem. For example, Witt et al. (2011) and the current study both found moderately positive correlations among explicit self-esteem and narcissism, despite the use of different measures. Therefore, the Theory of Threatened Egoism (Baumeister et al., 1999) is supported. Specifically for narcissists, global or explicit self-esteem must be protected to avoid discrepant negative appraisal. This theory has only indicated this phenomenon for explicit self-esteem and does not change despite the findings that narcissism is also related to increased implicit self-esteem. These findings simply indicate that narcissism is related to high

implicit self-esteem rather than the prediction that it is related to low implicit self-esteem. That being said, the current research did not find support for the previous research that suggested narcissism is negatively related to implicit self-esteem. The current study found the opposite trend; specifically, narcissism was positively related to implicit self-esteem. The current findings challenge the notion of vulnerable narcissism (Miller et al., 2010; Zeigler-Hill, 2006), which suggested that overt grandiosity masks low self-esteem. Zeigler-Hill's (2006) findings that narcissists have discrepant high self-esteem are also challenged, as Zeigler-Hill (2006) suggested narcissists should have high explicit but low implicit self-esteem. Machiavellianism on the other hand, was negatively correlated with implicit self-esteem but showed no significant relationship with explicit self-esteem. Although the hypothesis that Machiavellianism would be positively correlated with explicit self-esteem but negatively correlated with implicit self-esteem is partially supported, future research must consider this phenomenon in greater detail.

A potential explanation for the findings in narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism can be related to previous research on the Dark Triad and emotional intelligence (EI). EI is described as the ability to perceive and regulate emotions in the self and others (Schuette, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley & Hollander, 2002). It has also been found that high EI is related to high self-esteem (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer & Veselka, 2011; Schuette et al., 2002). Petrides et al. (2011) found that psychopathy and Machiavellianism were negatively related to global EI whereas narcissism was positively related to EI. Similar relationships were found in the current research with regards to implicit self-esteem. Therefore, it seems as though these constructs are related and could help to explain the findings regarding the Dark Triad and self-esteem. It would be interesting for future research to determine EI in relation to explicit and implicit self-esteem. Perhaps this relationship could further explain why narcissism was positively correlated to

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explicit and implicit self-esteem but Machiavellianism was negatively related to implicit self-esteem. In addition, the non-significant correlation between psychopathy and both implicit and explicit self-esteem could be due to the characteristic of shallow affect. Due to psychopaths' lack of emotional insight, they likely do not tune into their own emotions. Thus, they may not attend to their own personal emotions and insights while completing the items on the surveys.

Although some of the results from the current study are in line with previous research, there are also discrepant findings. These discrepancies include the lack of significance in the relationships between psychopathy, explicit, and implicit self-esteem, as well as narcissism and high implicit self-esteem. Discrepancies could be due to previous researchers using self-esteem as a general term, and not specifying the specific form of self-esteem that was measured. Though many researchers have suggested that individuals in the Dark Triad have high overt or explicit self-esteem but may be vulnerable due to the underlying or implicit self-esteem in a theoretical sense, the current research does not support these concepts for narcissism (Zeigler-Hill, 2006). By referring to self-esteem in general, it lacks the specific criteria to allow researchers to make explicit predictions of overt and covert forms of self-esteem, especially if these constructs are thought to differ among an individual.

In addition, since all three domains had different results, it supports the suggestion that all three domains should be considered as individual, yet related constructs. It is not sufficient to lump together all three domains of the triad because they yield different results. Therefore, there are implications regarding the importance of considering all domains of the Dark Triad separately rather than generalizing results to all three domains. Another implication of the current research regards the importance of considering self-esteem as a multidimensional construct. Since explicit and implicit self-esteem yielded different results for each Dark Triad domain, it supports the concept that both forms

of self-esteem can be discrepant in an individual.

Future research must continue to treat all domains of the Dark Triad as distinct but related constructs. This will allow researchers to clarify the discrepancies found in the current literature. The majority of literature on self-esteem and maladaptive personality characteristics has mostly involved narcissism. Therefore, there is a lack of research on self-esteem in relation to psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Future research must attempt to clarify the relationship between explicit and implicit self-esteem in relation to psychopathy and Machiavellianism. It would also be interesting for future research to assess the Dark Triad with regards to EI, explicit, and implicit self-esteem. Specifically, whether EI depicts more of an implicit or explicit level of self-esteem and how individuals in the Dark Triad fit within this relation.

Some of the discrepancies in the current and previous literature could also be due to the various limitations of the current study. The first limitation was that females were overrepresented in the sample. In the current study, males scored significantly higher on narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and explicit self-esteem than females. The gender differences found in the Dark Triad and explicit self-esteem were consistent with previous findings. Specifically, these maladaptive personality traits have been found to be less frequent in the female population and could have influenced the results (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Another limitation was that implicit self-esteem was measured in an online survey format, whereas previous literature has administered the NLT in a laboratory setting. Although the reliability of the NLT in the current study was in line with previous research, participants could take however long they desired to answer the question, which may have impeded the goal of participants answering with their 'gut instinct'. Although participants were prompted to answer based on their initial reactions, it is possible that participants did not complete the survey the way the researcher intended. The reasons for dissimilar results

between the first and last initial are also unclear. One explanation is that first and last name initials may reflect different constructs in identity due to culture (Stieger et al., 2012), which were not controlled for. There could have been certain collectivist or individualistic cultures overrepresented or underrepresented in the sample that could explain why first and last name initials yielded differential results. Multiple measures of implicit self-esteem should be used in subsequent studies in order to strengthen the converging evidence on the relationships between implicit self-esteem and the Dark Triad.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the current study assessed the relationship between the Dark Triad, explicit, and implicit self-esteem. The majority of research has focused on explicit self-esteem and the Dark Triad; however, researchers have raised questions as to whether this overt form of self-esteem is consistent with an individual's implicit self-esteem. It was hypothesized that narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism would all be positively correlated to explicit self-esteem and negatively correlated to implicit self-esteem. Contrary to the hypothesis, results revealed that Machiavellianism was negatively correlated with implicit self-esteem (first initial) but showed no significant relationship to explicit self-esteem. Narcissism was positively correlated to explicit self-esteem and implicit self-esteem (last name initial). Finally, psychopathy showed no significant relationship between explicit or implicit self-esteem. A multiple regression analysis revealed that narcissism and psychopathy both added significantly to the prediction of explicit self-esteem. Due to the different results in each domain of the triad, implications regard researching the Dark Triad as three separate but related domains. Future research must expand and replicate the current findings due to the discrepancies of previous research and perhaps include multiple measures of implicit self-esteem to converge and strengthen findings.

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## Appendix A

### SD3.1 – 27 items

*Please rate your agreement or disagreement with each item using the following guidelines.*

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

#### ***Machiavellianism subscale***

1. It's not wise to tell your secrets.
2. I like to use clever manipulation to get my way.
3. Whatever it takes, you must get the important people on your side.
4. Avoid direct conflict with others because they may be useful in the future.
5. It's wise to keep track of information that you can use against people later.
6. You should wait for the right time to get back at people.
7. There are things you should hide from other people because they don't need to know.
8. Make sure your plans benefit you, not others.
9. Most people can be manipulated.

#### ***Narcissism subscale***

1. People see me as a natural leader.
2. I hate being the center of attention. (R)
3. Many group activities tend to be dull without me.
4. I know that I am special because everyone keeps telling me so.
5. I like to get acquainted with important people.
6. I feel embarrassed if someone compliments me. (R)
7. I have been compared to famous people.
8. I am an average person. (R)

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9. I insist on getting the respect I deserve.

### *Psychopathy*

1. I like to get revenge on authorities.
2. I avoid dangerous situations. (R)
3. Payback needs to be quick and nasty.
4. People often say I'm out of control.
5. It's true that I can be mean to others.
6. People who mess with me always regret it.
7. I have never gotten into trouble with the law. (R)
8. I enjoy having sex with people I hardly know
9. I'll say anything to get what I want.

# SELF-ESTEEM AND THE DARK TRIAD

## Appendix B

### Name-Letter Task

For the final part of the survey, you will complete a task that will allow us to investigate how individuals make judgments about objects.

Your task is to indicate how much you like each of the letters presented on the screen. Please make these ratings quickly and focus on your "gut feelings" toward each letter.

1. How much do you like this letter? G
2. How much do you like this letter? Z
3. How much do you like this letter? I
4. How much do you like this letter? B
5. How much do you like this letter? Q
6. How much do you like this letter? P
7. How much do you like this letter? S
8. How much do you like this letter? V
9. How much do you like this letter? C
10. How much do you like this letter? J
11. How much do you like this letter? E
12. How much do you like this letter? O
13. How much do you like this letter? N
14. How much do you like this letter? L
15. How much do you like this letter? R
16. How much do you like this letter? D
17. How much do you like this letter? Y
18. How much do you like this letter? M
19. How much do you like this letter? K
20. How much do you like this letter? W
21. How much do you like this letter? T
22. How much do you like this letter? X
23. How much do you like this letter? U
24. How much do you like this letter? A
25. How much do you like this letter? H

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26. How much do you like this letter? F