

Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY

Brewer, Gayle, Carter, Gregory, Lyons, Minna and Green, Jessica (2018) Sensation-seeking in women does not affect their preference for Dark Triad male faces. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 130. pp. 92-95.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/3006/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.03.051>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk

Sensation-seeking in women does not affect their preference for Dark Triad male faces

Gayle Brewer^{1*}, Gregory Louis Carter², Minna Lyons¹, and Jessica Green¹

¹University of Liverpool, Liverpool, L69 7ZA, UK.

²York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31 7EX

*Corresponding author: Gayle Brewer, School of Psychology, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, L69 7ZA UK, email: gbrewer@liverpool.ac.uk

Highlights

- Women showed aversion to high Dark Triad faces
- Aversion occurred for both short- and long-term relationships
- Sensation-seeking did not predict preference for Dark Triad faces

Abstract

Women ($N = 356$) aged 16-68 years were recruited via online social networking sites and research participation websites. Participants were presented with 15 facial composite pairs (each pair including a high and low Dark Triad trait facial morph), and were asked to identify the most attractive individual either in the context of a short-term ($n = 171$) or long-term relationship ($n = 185$). Women also completed the Sensation-Seeking Scale (SSS-V, Zuckerman, 1994), containing boredom susceptibility, disinhibition, experience-seeking, thrill- and adventure-seeking subscales. Results indicate that women are averse to faces with high levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy for both short- and long-term romantic relationships. Sensation-seeking does not predict preference for Dark Triad traits as a short-term or long-term partner. Findings replicate previous research indicating that women dislike male faces high on Dark Triad traits for both short- and long-term relationships and are consistent with research suggesting that the aversion to men high on Dark Triad traits is resistant to individual variation.

Keywords: Dark Triad; Facial preference; Machiavellianism; Narcissism; Psychopathy; Sensation-Seeking

1. Introduction

Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy,) are related but distinct personality traits (Paulhus & Williams, 2002), characterised by disagreeable, manipulative, and callous behaviour (Jones & Figueredo, 2012). Narcissism is associated with an elevated sense of self-worth and entitlement (Emmons, 1984), Machiavellianism is associated with a willingness to exploit others and a lack of faith in humanity (Christie & Geis, 1970), and psychopathy is characterised by emotional coldness, impulsivity, and antisocial behaviour (Hare, 1996). Those high on Dark Triad traits display a preference for short-term mating (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009), insecure attachment to relationship partners (Brewer et al. 2018a), and are more likely to engage in infidelity (Brewer, Hunt, James, & Abell, 2015). Hence, the selection of partners high on Dark Triad traits may impact on important relationship outcomes such as reproductive success (Marcinkowska, Lyons, & Helle, 2016).

A number of studies have suggested that it is possible to successfully identify those with high levels of Dark Triad traits from facial composites alone (Holtzman, 2011). Such research is consistent with evidence that faces convey a range of evolutionarily-relevant information (e.g., health, reproductive status, and trustworthiness), and may provide an indication of past, current, or future behaviour (Carré, & McCormick, 2008; Carré, McCormick, & Mondloch, 2009). Previous research indicates that women display an aversion to male composite faces high on Dark Triad traits as both short- and long-term relationship partners (Lyons, Marcinkowska, Helle, & McGrath, 2015). Individual differences may, however, influence facial preference (Brown & Sacco, 2017a,b). For example, women believing the world to be a dangerous place display a stronger aversion to faces high on psychopathy (Brown, Sacco, Lolley, & Block, 2017), suggesting that attitudes to risk or engagement in risky behaviour may influence women's perceptions of male faces high or low on Dark Triad traits.

Sensation-seeking can be conceptualised as “a trait defined by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (Zuckerman, 1994, p.27), may also influence a

preference for Dark Triad traits. It is related to the preference for dominant partners (Giebel, Moran, Schawohl, & Weierstall, 2015) and sexual risk taking (Bancroft, et al. 2003), suggesting that those high on sensation-seeking may be less averse to Dark Triad faces. Previous research employing vignettes and questionnaires administered to each member of a relationship pair suggests that sensation-seeking predicts attraction to those high on narcissism (Grosz, Dufner, Back, & Denissen, 2015), though the influence of sensation-seeking on perception of Dark Triad faces alone is less clear.

In the present study, we investigate the influence of sensation-seeking on women's preferences for facial composites displaying high or low levels of Dark Triad traits. We predict women will be averse to high Dark Triad faces, for both short- and long-term relationships, and those with high levels of sensation-seeking will be less averse to high Dark Triad men.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Women ($N = 356$) aged 16-68 years ($M = 29.60$, $SD = 10.70$) were recruited via online social networking sites and research participation websites. Participants were typically American (44.1%) or British (34.3%). All participants were heterosexual or bisexual (i.e., had a sexual attraction to men). Participants were aged 16-68 years ($M = 29.12$, $SD = 10.22$) and 16-61 years ($M = 30.03$, $SD = 11.14$) in the short- and long-term conditions respectively. There was no significant difference in participant age between groups, $t(354) = -.80$, $p = .424$. In both conditions, participants were most likely to be in a relationship at the time of the study (short-term condition: 63.2%; long-term condition: 61.6%).

2.2 Materials and procedure

Participants answered initial demographic questions (e.g., age, relationship status) and were presented with 15 facial composite pairs. Face pairs were created by imposing prototype morphs of high and low Dark Triad individuals (Holtzman, 2011) onto base faces using the Psychomorph program (see Lyons, Marcinkowska, Helle, & McGrath, 2015 for more information). Each pair contained a high and low trait facial morph, and presentation was counterbalanced. Presentation order and positioning were consistent for all participants. Five face pairs were employed per Dark Triad trait (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy). For each pair, participants were asked to

identify the most attractive individual either in the context of a short-term ($n = 171$) or long-term relationship ($n = 185$).

The instructions for short and long-term conditions were adopted from Little, Jones, Cohen, and Belsky (2007). In the short-term relationship condition, participants were instructed “Imagine that you are looking for the type of person who would be attractive in a short-term relationship. This implies that the relationship may not last a long time. Examples of this type of relationship would include a single date accepted on the spur of the moment, an affair within a long-term relationship, and possibility of a one-night stand.” In the long-term relationship condition, participants were instructed “Imagine that you are looking for the type of person who would be attractive in a long-term relationship. Examples of this type of relationship would include someone you may want to move in with, someone you may consider leaving a current partner to be with, and someone you may, at some point, wish to marry (or enter into a relationship on similar grounds as marriage).”

Participants then completed the Sensation-Seeking Scale (SSS-V, Zuckerman, 1994). This scale contains 40 forced-choice statement pairs. Sensation-seeking responses are coded as 1 and non-sensation-seeking responses are coded as 0. The scale contains four subscales: Thrill- and Adventure-Seeking (e.g., desire for activities involving danger); Disinhibition (e.g., lack of restraint); Experience-Seeking (e.g., preference for travel and new opportunities); and Boredom Susceptibility (e.g., dislike of routine). Each subscale contains 10 items. Example statement pairs include “I like “wild” uninhibited parties” vs “I prefer quiet parties with good conversation” (Disinhibition) and “There are some movies I enjoy seeing a second or even third time” vs “I can’t stand watching a movie that I’ve seen before” (Boredom Susceptibility). Ratings of facial photographs and questionnaire responses were completed online via a Qualtrics survey.

3. Results

One-sample t -tests were conducted to determine whether women preferred, or were averse to, male faces reflecting high levels of Dark Triad traits. A score of 1 indicated a preference for high Dark Triad faces in all pairs and 0 indicated an aversion to high Dark Triad faces in all pairs. Analyses compared participant responses with chance (.5). One-sample t -tests revealed that participants were averse to faces with high levels of narcissism ($t(170) = -11.65, p < .001$),

Machiavellianism ($t(170) = -9.75, p < .001$), and psychopathy ($t(170) = -5.82, p < .001$), for short-term relationships. Participants were also averse to male faces displaying high levels of narcissism ($t(184) = -11.05, p < .001$), Machiavellianism ($t(184) = -8.23, p < .001$), and psychopathy ($t(184) = -7.43, p < .001$) for long-term relationships. Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 1. A series of standard linear multiple regressions were then conducted to examine the influence of sensation-seeking (Boredom Susceptibility, Disinhibition, Experience-Seeking, Thrill- and Adventure-Seeking) on perceived attractiveness of (high- or low-Dark Triad trait) male faces as short- or long-term relationship partners. Analyses revealed that sensation-seeking did not predict a preference for Dark Triad traits as a short- or long-term partner. These data are shown in Tables 2 and 3. Controlling for age and relationship status did not alter the pattern of results.

4. Discussion

Results demonstrate a female aversion to facial morphs high on Dark Triad traits when considering male faces for both short- and long-term relationships. Findings are consistent with trends previously reported by Lyons and Blanchard (2016) and Lyons and Simeonov (2016). This aversion may facilitate women's avoidance of partners who are insecurely attached or likely to engage in undesirable behaviour (Brewer et al. 2018a). Findings are not consistent with studies suggesting that those high on Dark Triad traits (and narcissistic individuals in particular) are perceived as attractive during short-term encounters (Jauk et al. 2016; Paulhus, 1998). This may reflect greater self-presentation behaviour, e.g., editing photographs posted on social networking sites and selection of expensive or stylish clothing (i.e., 'peacocking'; Fox & Rooney, 2015; Holtzman & Strube, 2012). Indeed, observer ratings of target narcissism are correlated with the presence of specific cues (such as the presence of stylish and expensive clothing) suggesting that these contribute to observer judgements of narcissism (Vazire, Naumann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2008).

Previous research suggests that individual differences influence partner preference (Brown & Sacco, 2017a,b) and the perceived desirability of those high on Dark Triad traits (Marcinkowska, Helle, & Lyons, 2015). We predicted that women high on sensation-seeking, and thus more prone to risky behaviour, may be less averse to high Dark Triad faces. However, the aversion to faces high on

Dark Triad traits did not alter in relation to rater sensation-seeking levels. Therefore though previous research suggests that individual differences may exacerbate women's aversion to high Dark Triad faces (e.g., Brown, et al. 2017) it may be less feasible to reduce aversion to high Dark Triad traits (e.g., Brewer et al. 2018b).

4.1 Limitations and future research

Current findings are limited by reliance on self-report sensation-seeking measures, which may be susceptible to social desirability. We also utilised a limited set of facial stimuli, which presented Caucasian faces only and did not assess participant ethnicity. Though physical attractiveness ratings are consistent across cultural groups, some variation does occur (Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Fruen, & Wu, 1995). Therefore, though it has been argued that manipulation using own-race, other-race, or mixed-race composites demonstrates little difference when conducting attractiveness research (Rhodes, et al. 2001), future research should consider presenting a broader array of facial stimuli. The present study did not measure the menstrual cycle phase during which women rated the facial composites. It has been argued that women experience an ovulatory-induced perceptual shift, with characteristics most suited to a short-term relationship rated as more attractive during the fertile phase (Durante, Griskevicius, Simpson, Canfu, & Li, 2012). However, though Aitken, Lyons, and Jonason (2013) suggest that women show some preference for highly-Machiavellian men as short-term partners at peak fertility, other researchers (e.g., Marcinkowska, et al. 2016) report no relationship between facial preference and hormonal status. Future research may consider whether aversion to male faces high on Dark Triad traits varies across the menstrual cycle.

To conclude, the current study indicates that women are averse to male faces presenting high levels of, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The aversion to men high on Dark Triad traits is evident for both short- and long-term romantic relationships and is not influenced by women's self-reported sensation seeking. Findings are consistent with previous research reporting that women reject male faces high on Dark Triad traits for both short- and long-term relationships. Findings are consistent with the suggestion that aversion to men high on Dark Triad traits is resistant to individual

variation, though future studies may consider women's aversion to male faces high on Dark Triad traits across the menstrual cycle.

5. References

- Aitken, S. J., Lyons, M., Jonason, P. K. (2013). Dads or cads? Women's strategic decisions in the mating game. *Personality and Individual Differences, 55*, 118-122.
- Bancroft, J., Janssen, E., Strong, D., Carnes, L., Vukadinovic, Z., & Long, J. S. (2003). Sexual risk-taking in gay men: The relevance of sexual arousability, mood, and sensation seeking. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 32*, 555-572.
- Brewer, G., Bennett, C., Davidson, L., Ireen, A., & Phipps, A. J., Stewart-Wilkes, D., & Wilson, B. (2018a). Dark triad traits and romantic relationship attachment, accommodation, and control. *Personality and Individual Differences, 120*, 202-208.
- Brewer, G., Christiansen, P., Dorozkinaite, D., Ingleby, B., O'Hagan, L., Williams, C., & Lyons, M. (2018b). A drunk heart speaks a sober mind: Alcohol does not influence the selection of short-term partners with dark triad traits. *Personality and Individual Differences, In Press*.
- Brewer, G., Hunt, D., James, G., & Abell, L. (2015). Dark Triad traits, infidelity and romantic revenge. *Personality and Individual Differences, 83*, 122-127.
- Brown, M., & Sacco, D. F. (2017a). Greater need to belong predicts a stronger preference for extraverted faces. *Personality and Individual Differences, 104*, 220-223.
- Brown, M., & Sacco, D. F. (2017b). Unrestricted sociosexuality predicts preferences for extraverted male faces. *Personality and Individual Differences, 108*, 123-127.
- Brown, M., Sacco, D. F., Lolley, K. P., & Block, D. (2017). Facing the implications: Dangerous world beliefs differentially predict men and women's aversion to facially communicated psychopathy. *Personality and Individual Differences, 116*, 1-5.
- Carré, J. M., & McCormick, C. M. (2008). In your face: Facial metrics predict aggressive behaviour in the laboratory and in varsity and professional hockey players. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 275*, 2651-2656.
- Carré, J. M., McCormick, C. M., & Mondloch, C. J. (2009). Facial structure is a reliable cue of aggressive behavior. *Psychological Science, 20*, 1194-1198.

- Christie, R., & Geis, F. L. (1970). *Studies in Machiavellianism*. London: Academic Press.
- Cunningham, M. R., Roberts, A. R., Barbee, A. P., Druen, P. B., & Wu, C. H. (1995). "Their ideas of beauty are, on the whole, the same as ours": Consistency and variability in the cross-cultural perception of female physical attractiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 261-279.
- Emmons, R. A. (1984). Factor analysis and construct validity of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 48, 291-300.
- Fox, J., & Rooney, M. C. (2015). The Dark Triad and trait self-objectification as predictors of men's use and self-presentation behaviors on social networking sites. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 76, 161-165.
- Grosz, M. P., Dufner, M., Back, M. D., & Denissen, J. J. A. (2015). Who is open to a narcissistic romantic partner? The roles of sensation seeking, trait anxiety, and similarity. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 58, 84-95.
- Hare, R. D. (1996). Psychopathy: A clinical construct whose time has come. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 23, 25-54.
- Holtzman, N. S. (2011). Facing a psychopathy: Detecting the dark triad from emotionally-neutral faces, using prototypes from the Personality Faceaurus. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 45, 648-654.
- Holtzman, N. S., & Strube, M. J. (2013). People with dark personalities tend to create a physically attractive veneer. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4, 461-467.
- Jauk, E., Neubauer, A. C., Mairunteregger, T., Pemp, S., Sieber, K. P., & Rauthmann, J. F. (2016). How alluring are dark personalities? The dark triad and attractiveness in speed dating. *European Journal of Personality*, 30, 125-138.
- Jonason, P. K., Li, N. P., Webster, G. D., & Schmitt, D. P. (2009). The Dark Triad: Facilitating a short-term mating strategy in men. *European Journal of Personality*, 23, 5-18.
- Jones, D. N., & Figueredo, A. J. (2013). The core of darkness: Uncovering the heart of the Dark Triad. *European Journal of Personality*, 27, 521-531.

- Little, A. C., Cohen, D. L., Jones, B. C., & Belsky, J. (2007). Human preferences for facial masculinity change with relationship type and environmental harshness. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, *61*, 967-973.
- Lyons, M., & Blanchard, A. (2016). "I could see, in the depth of his eyes, my own beauty reflected": Women's assortative preference for narcissistic, but not for Machiavellian or psychopathic male faces. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *97*, 40-44.
- Lyons, M. T., Marcinkowska, U. M., Helle, S., & McGrath, L. (2015). Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the most masculine of them all? The Dark Triad, masculinity, and women's mate choice. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *74*, 153-158.
- Lyons, M., & Simeonov, L. (2016). The undesirable Dark Triad? Women dislike Dark Triad male faces across different mating context and socioecological conditions. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *90*, 338-341.
- Marcinkowska, U. M., Ellison, P. T., Galbarczyk, A., Milkowska, K., Pawlowski, B., Thune, I., & Jasienska, G. (2016). Lack of support for relation between woman's masculinity preference, estradiol level and mating context. *Hormones and Behavior*, *78*, 1-7.
- Marcinkowska, U. M., Helle, S., & Lyons, M. T. (2015). Dark traits: Sometimes hot, and sometimes not? Female preferences for Dark Triad faces depend on sociosexuality and contraceptive use. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *86*, 369-373.
- Marcinkowska, U. M., Lyons, M. T., & Helle, S. (2016). Women's reproductive success and the preference for Dark Triad in men's faces. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *37*, 287-292.
- Paulhus, D. L. (1998). Interpersonal and intrapsychic adaptiveness of trait self-enhancement: A mixed blessing? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*, 1197-1208.
- Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The dark triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *36*, 556-563.
- Rhodes, G., Yoshikawa, S., Clark, A., Lee, K., McKay, R., & Akamatsu, S. (2001). Attractiveness of facial averageness and symmetry in non-Western cultures: In search of biologically based standards of beauty. *Perception*, *30*, 611-625.

- Vazire, S., Naumann, I. P., Rentfrow, P. J., & Gosling, S. D. (2008). Portrait of a narcissist: Manifestations of narcissism in physical appearance. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*, 1439-1447.
- Zuckerman, M. (1994). *Behavioral expressions and biosocial bases of sensation seeking*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Dr Indrikis Krams for providing the base faces, Dr Nick Holtzman for the dark triad prototype morphs, and Dr Urszula Marcinkowska for constructing the facial stimuli used in the study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Short-Term and Long-Term Partner Preference

Relationship	Dark Triad Trait	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Short-Term			
	Narcissism	.29	.24
	Machiavellianism	.35	.20
	Psychopathy	.39	.24
Long-Term			
	Narcissism	.30	.25
	Machiavellianism	.38	.20
	Psychopathy	.37	.24

Table 2: Multiple Regression Results for Short-Term Partner Preference

Dark Triad Trait	ANOVA	Individual Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Narcissism	$F(4,166) = 1.07, p = .375$	Boredom	-.13	-1.56	.120
		Disinhibition	.07	.77	.443
		Experience	.10	1.24	.217
		Thrill	.03	.34	.731
Machiavellianism	$F(4,166) = 1.20, p = .312$	Boredom	-.08	-.94	.351
		Disinhibition	.06	.73	.467
		Experience	-.15	-1.78	.078
		Thrill	.01	.17	.862
Psychopathy	$F(4,166) = .96, p = .432$	Boredom	-.03	-.32	.753
		Disinhibition	-.03	-.36	.719
		Experience	.06	.75	.456
		Thrill	.13	1.64	.102

Table 3: Multiple Regression Results for Long-Term Partner Preference

Dark Triad Trait	ANOVA	Individual Predictor	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Narcissism	$F(4,180) = 1.99, p = .099$	Boredom	-.08	-1.03	.304
		Disinhibition	-.06	-.78	.435
		Experience	-.15	-1.92	.056
		Thrill	.01	.09	.932
Machiavellianism	$F(4,180) = 1.08, p = .368$	Boredom	.02	.28	.779
		Disinhibition	-.09	-1.11	.269
		Experience	-.11	-1.41	.162
		Thrill	.07	.84	.401
Psychopathy	$F(4,180) = 1.38, p = .241$	Boredom	-.05	-.66	.510
		Disinhibition	.14	1.77	.079
		Experience	-.13	-1.70	.091
		Thrill	-.04	-.57	.572