

Deeds in the Dark: Relationship between Dark Triad and Sociosexuality in the Indian Context

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the interplay between Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and sociosexuality, with a focus on potential gender variations. Data from 132 individuals, primarily from Southern India, were collected using Google Forms and paper questionnaires. The review of literature highlights existing research on the association between Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality, providing a foundation for the current study. The study employed the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory-Revised (SOI-R) and the Short Dark Triad (SD3) scales to assess sociosexuality and Dark Triad traits, respectively. The results indicated a positive relationship between Dark Triad and sociosexuality. There exist gender differences in sociosexuality and psychopathy, but are absent in Machiavellianism and Narcissism. The study's significance lies in its potential implications for relationship counselling, sexual health education, and the development of targeted interventions.

Keywords: *Dark Triad, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Sociosexuality, Gender*

Extensive psychological research has delved into human sexual attitudes and behaviour, examining how a range of personal and situational elements impact one's sociosexual orientation. The sociosexual orientation of an individual refers to the differences in their propensity to engage in casual sexual behaviours or relationships. Understanding sociosexuality is essential for understanding human mating strategies, interpersonal relationships, and the nuanced interaction between personality traits and sexual orientations. Due to the coming of online dating apps and the hookup culture, sociosexuality has undergone a great extent and research has not done it any favour. Individuals who use online dating apps like Tinder would score higher in sociosexuality (Sevi, 2019).

The Dark Triad personality traits – Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy – have captured considerable interest in the study of personality due to their malicious and manipulative tendencies within interpersonal connections. Machiavellianism refers to a disposition where individuals manipulate others, often using deceit, showing emotional detachment, and adapting their behaviour to different situations. Machiavellianism may be more influential in predicting women's sociosexual behaviour compared to men (Jonason et al., 2009). Narcissism involves feelings of entitlement,

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arrogance, grandiose self-perception, a desire for admiration, and dominance, and using others to enhance one's image. Psychopathy is characterised by impulsiveness, antisocial behaviour, a lack of empathy, and minimal feelings of fear or guilt (Jonason et al., 2009). Psychopathy is characterised by a lack of empathy and impulse control, which can lead to risky sexual behaviour (Holtzman et al., 2013).

Those with elevated Dark Triad traits commonly exhibit self-centred, cunning, and indifferent behaviours in their social dealings. Earlier studies have examined the impacts of these traits in areas like leadership, social conduct, and aggression. Nevertheless, there exists a noticeable knowledge gap concerning the connection between the Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality, a pivotal component of human sexual conduct.

The Dark Triad has been associated with a range of negative outcomes. However, there has been a lack of integration between research on the Dark Triad and research on positive traits and fulfilling outcomes in life. To address this gap, the Light Triad Scale (LTS) was developed to measure a loving and beneficent orientation towards others, which includes three facets: Kantianism, humanism, and faith in humanity (Kaufman et al., 2019). The LTS contrasts with the Dark Triad, and the two scales can be used to study the effects of personality traits on various outcomes.

When the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI) was developed, sociosexuality was shown to be two dimensional having 1) restricted sociosexuality (committed relationship) and 2) unrestricted sociosexuality (casual sex) (Simpson et al., 1991). Earlier studies have identified a correlation between Dark Triad personality traits and an inclination towards unrestricted sociosexuality (Jonason et al., 2012). Later on, the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory was revised (SOI-R) by Penke and Asendorpf (2008), who proposed a tri-dimensional form having 1) sociosexual behaviour, 2) attitudes, and 3) desire.

Studies suggest that individuals with elevated Dark Triad traits tend to have lenient viewpoints regarding casual sexual activities. They may perceive such behaviours as favourable and acceptable, and consequently, partake in riskier sexual conduct while demonstrating increased tendencies towards sexual exploitation. It should be highlighted that having the desire to participate in brief sexual encounters does not guarantee that one would act on such desire (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008). Casual sex is a common occurrence in young adults and university students, especially related to early sexual transition and substance abuse (Grello et al., 2006). This includes mostly the sexual behaviours occurring outside of a committed or romantic relationship, often called "no strings attached". Psychopathic traits are associated with a reduced concern for the emotional consequences of casual sex (Jonason et al., 2009). There is a positive correlation between the Dark Triad traits and an increased preference for short-term mating tactics, a greater quantity of sexual partners, and a diminished inclination towards forming committed relationships. An individual's relationship status may also influence sociosexuality. People in committed relationships may be less inclined to engage in sociosexual unrestricted behaviours compared to those who are single.

Furthermore, investigating gender disparities in sociosexuality has been a significant area of study. When you look at finding the differences based on gender, the number of sex partners (according to gender) does not make a difference, whereas it is the attitudes and the thought "which men and women" that play a significant role. This is rarely investigated (Jonason, 2008). Studies indicate that men with Dark Triad traits tend to have a higher number of

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sexual partners and engage in more unrestricted sociosexual behaviour compared to women with similar traits (Jonason et al., 2012). Hence the link between Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality may be stronger in men compared to women. However, other research suggests that the influence of Dark Triad traits on sexual attitudes may vary based on gender. For instance, narcissism may have a stronger impact on sexual attitudes in men, while psychopathy may have a more pronounced effect on women (Blanchard et al., 2021).

There are additional variables, such as self-esteem, mate value, attachment style, and cultural factors, that play important roles in shaping the complex relationships between Dark Triad traits, gender, and sociosexuality. Self-esteem can mediate the relationship between Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality. Research suggests that individuals with higher narcissism may have inflated self-esteem, which, in turn, predicts greater sociosexuality (Back et al., 2011). Mate value refers to an individual's desirability as a potential partner. Individuals with high mate value may be less affected by the negative consequences of Dark Triad traits, as they have more opportunities for sexual encounters (Jonason et al., 2010). Individuals with avoidant attachment styles may be more likely to engage in casual sex, especially when combined with high Dark Triad traits (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Cultural and societal norms can also impact the relationship between Dark Triad traits, gender, and sociosexuality. In some cultures, casual sex may be more accepted or even encouraged, affecting how these traits manifest (Lammers et al., 2011). These variables are not being studied but may provide a more nuanced understanding of how these variables interact and influence individuals' sexual behaviour and preferences.

The study aims to illuminate the interplay between personality traits and gender, shaping individuals' sexual attitudes and sociosexual conduct. The Dark Triad traits encompass manipulative and exploitative actions (Machiavellianism), an inflated self-perception (narcissism), and empathy deficiency (psychopathy). This research examines the impact of these traits, both individually and collectively, on individuals' sexual outlook and sociosexual behaviour, while also accounting for potential gender variations. The results enhance our comprehension of how personality and gender jointly influence individuals' sexual attitudes and readiness to partake in casual sexual connections.

The theoretical framework that guides the study will be based on evolutionary psychology and social exchange theories. Evolutionary psychology suggests that sociosexual orientation may be influenced by reproductive strategies and mate selection. For all sexually dimorphic species, the desire to mate is a universal drive that promotes reproductive success. Evolutionary theories, such as sexual strategies theory and parental investment theory, are often used to understand the adaptive significance of these traits in the context of mating strategies and reproductive success. According to evolutionary theory, sociosexuality can be understood as an evolved adaptation rooted in human evolutionary history. From an evolutionary perspective, males and females may have different sociosexual strategies due to differences in reproductive investment. Men, with lower parental investment, may have evolved to be more inclined towards short-term, casual sexual encounters to maximise their reproductive success.

Social exchange theory examines how individuals manage interpersonal relationships by weighing the relative importance of costs and benefits (Homans, 1961). The theory emphasises the trade-offs individuals make in pursuing short-term sexual relationships without commitment, which may be relevant in the context of sociosexual behaviours. The concept of social exchange theory is interconnected with theories concerning social status,

social networks, notions of fairness, the formation of coalitions, the sense of solidarity, trust dynamics, as well as emotions and affective experiences (Emerson, 1987). According to this idea, those who have a higher propensity for sociosexuality are more inclined to engage in these behaviours if they think the benefits could exceed the risks. An individual's decision-making is influenced by a variety of factors, including emotional requirements, partner availability, and physical attractiveness. Furthermore, according to the idea, those who exhibit higher degrees of the dark triad features are driven by a desire to attain favourable results, frequently at the expense of moral considerations and other people's feelings. Dark Triad traits may lead individuals to engage in sociosexuality as a way to extract resources from partners, with men using sociosexuality to gain access to sexual opportunities and women using it to obtain material resources.

Gender role theory emphasises that traditional gender roles and societal expectations can influence sociosexuality. Men and women may conform to different sociosexual norms based on societal beliefs about masculinity and femininity. Dark Triad traits may align with certain aspects of traditional masculinity, leading men to exhibit more unrestricted sociosexuality. The opposite may also happen. Women with dark triad traits have attitudes disapproving of short-term sexual relationships. Contradictorily, those women engage in casual sex more often. This implies that women exhibiting these traits may engage in casual sex as a way to challenge conventional gender roles (Mauda, 2013). Sociosexuality is influenced not only by gender but also by other social identities and factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. Dark Triad traits may interact with these intersecting identities, leading to diverse patterns of sociosexual behaviour.

A fast life-history strategy (F-LHS), involves behaviours like having more sexual partners, engaging in uncommitted relationships, and displaying traits such as impulsivity, manipulation, and selfishness (Jonason et al., 2010; Stolarski et al., 2017). This strategy is linked to life-history theory (Figueredo et al., 2006), which revolves around the allocation of biological resources for either immediate reproduction or long-term well-being. One characteristic that has been directly linked to F-LHS is psychopathy (the more compliance there is, the more beneficial to cheat) (Mealey, 1995). Within the realm of reproduction, resources are divided between efforts directed at parenting and those aimed at mating. When faced with a challenging or uncertain environment, both men and women can adopt an F-LHS, utilising tactics like increased psychopathy and willingness for casual sex to expand their range of potential partners. This is believed to enhance their chances of reproducing and gaining resources through exploitative relationships. In contrast, in a stable and resource-rich environment with lower risks, individuals are more likely to prioritise parenting efforts over short-term mating, casual sex, and antisocial behaviours.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for shedding light on the complex interplay between personality traits, gender, and sociosexual behaviour, which can have implications for individual relationships, social dynamics, and sexual health.

The Dark Triad traits are known to be associated with manipulative and exploitative behaviours in interpersonal relationships. By exploring their impact on sociosexuality, the study can contribute to a better understanding of how these traits may influence sexual attitudes and behaviours. Understanding the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality may have practical implications in relationship counselling and sexual health education. Engaging in casual sex has been associated with higher chances of risky sexual behaviours. This heightened risk could contribute to a rise in sexually transmitted infections

and unplanned pregnancies (Bersamin et al., 2012). Therefore, obtaining a deeper understanding of the factors influencing casual sex could hold significant implications for public health strategies implemented by various organisations (Wesche et al., 2017). For example, this knowledge could be valuable in shaping the development of sexual health initiatives and programs. It can provide insights into the factors that influence individuals' propensity for casual or uncommitted sexual relationships, potentially helping to develop targeted interventions or support for those with high levels of these traits. Evolutionary psychologists propose that sociosexuality may be linked to reproductive strategies and mate selection. By examining the association between the Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality, the study can provide insights into the evolutionary underpinnings of these personality traits and their potential role in mating behaviours.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Objectives

The objectives are,

- To find the relationship between the three Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality in individuals.
- To find the gender differences in Dark Triad and sociosexuality.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses are,

- H01: There is no significant correlation between Machiavellianism and sociosexuality.
- H02: There is no significant correlation between narcissism and sociosexuality.
- H03: There is no significant correlation between psychopathy and sociosexuality.
- H04: There is no significant gender difference in Dark Triad traits.
- H05: There is no significant gender difference in sociosexuality.

Participants

The sample included individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 who are citizens of India. A total of 132 university students and graduates were included in the study.

Materials

- **Socio-demographic questionnaire.** The questionnaire asked participants about their sex, age, and relationship status (whether they were in a committed relationship, married or single).
- **Short Dark Triad Traits (SD3).** The Short Dark Triad Traits Scale (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a widely used psychological assessment tool designed to measure the Dark Triad personality traits in individuals. The SD3 typically consists of 27 items, with nine items for each of the three Dark Triad traits. The scale uses a Likert-type response format, where respondents indicate their level of agreement on a scale, often ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores on the SD3 indicate higher levels of Dark Triad traits in an individual. (Jones, 2014) The internal consistency is $\geq .72$ and the test-retest reliability is $\geq .73$. Concurrent validity was also proven to be good (Malesza, 2019).
- **Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI-R).** The Revised Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) is a psychometric instrument designed to measure an individual's sociosexual orientation, which reflects their attitudes and behaviours regarding short-term and long-term sexual relationships. It is an updated version of the original SOI developed by Simpson and Gangestad in

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1991). The SOI-R assesses individuals on three main components – attitudes, behaviour, and desire. The SOI-R consists of multiple items that participants rate based on their level of agreement using a Likert-type scale, often ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). The scale is designed to provide a continuous measure of sociosexual orientation, rather than categorising individuals into distinct types (Penke, 2011). The scale is internally consistent at .75 and the test-retest reliability is .94.

Data Collection

The data was collected through self-report measures through online surveys using a secure and confidential platform where individuals provided informed consent before beginning the survey.

Scoring

Statistical analyses were conducted to examine the potential interactions and associations among the variables. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the participants' characteristics, gender, and the variables of interest. Correlation analysis will examine the relationships between the Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality. Independent t-test is used to identify gender differences.

Variables

- **Dark Triad traits (D3).** Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy are the three personality types that have been referred to as the "dark triad."
- **Machiavellianism.** A manipulative personality, when the use of a means justifies the purpose, despite the suffering of human beings.
- **Narcissism.** A personality type when the person frequently feels a greater sense of entitlement, a need to accomplish, and a need to be esteemed.
- **Psychopathy.** A personality type characterised by impulsivity, thrill-seeking, carelessness, cold effect, and other anti-social tendencies.
- **Sociosexuality.** Also known as sociosexual orientation, it is the difference in people's willingness to have sex without commitment. The behaviour, attitude, and desire regarding promiscuous sexual behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among the 132 participants, there were 68 females (51.5%) and 64 males (48.4%). The mean age of the participants is $M=21.4$, $SD=2.42$. The descriptive statistics of participants can be found in *Table 1*.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation
Machiavellianism	28.6	5.83
Narcissism	27.3	6.27
Psychopathy	23.0	6.04
Behaviour	4.27	2.32
Attitude	7.52	3.35
Desire	6.14	2.83
Sociosexuality	17.9	6.61

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The Shapiro-Wilk Normality test was conducted to check the normality of the data. It was found that the variable measures, Machiavellianism ($p=.041$), narcissism ($p=.037$), psychopathy ($p=.002$), behaviour ($p<.001$), attitude ($p<.001$), desire ($p<.001$) and sociosexuality ($p<.001$) departed significantly from normality. The statistical measures are given in *Table 2*.

Table 2 Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test

	Statistic	Sig. Diff
Machiavellianism	.979	.041
Narcissism	.979	.037
Psychopathy	.967	.002
Behaviour	.613	<.001
Attitude	.943	<.001
Desire	.903	<.001
Sociosexuality	.941	<.001

As the data was not normally distributed, a non-parametric test Spearman's rank correlation was used to determine the relationship between Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality. There is a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and sociosexuality ($r=.371$, $p<.001$). There is a positive correlation between narcissism and sociosexuality ($r=.196$, $p=.024$). There is a positive correlation between psychopathy and sociosexuality ($r=.433$, $p<.001$). The results showed that there is a significant correlation between the variables, rejecting the null hypotheses H01, H02 and H03. The results of the same are provided in *Table 3*.

Table 3 Spearman's rank correlation to determine the relationship between Dark Triad and sociosexuality

		Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy	Sociosexuality
Machiavellianism	rho	–			
	Sig. Diff	–			
Narcissism	rho	.312***	–		
	Sig. Diff	<.001	–		
Psychopathy	rho	.436***	.410***	–	
	Sig. Diff	<.001	<.001	–	
Sociosexuality	rho	.371***	.196*	.433***	–
	Sig. Diff	<.001	.024	<.001	–

Note. * $p <.05$, ** $p <.01$, *** $p <.001$

To test the hypothesis (H04) of determining the gender differences in Dark Triad, the Mann-Whitney U test was performed. The results showed that there was no significant difference in gender between Machiavellianism ($p=.127$) and narcissism ($p=.112$). The findings showed that there was a significant difference between males and females in psychopathy ($p<.001$). The results of the same are provided in *Table 5*.

Table 4 Mann-Whitney U test to determine gender differences in Dark Triad

	Statistic	Sig. Diff
Machiavellianism	1841	.127
Narcissism	1827	.112
Psychopathy	1394	<.001

The Mann-Whitney U test was done to find out whether there are any gender differences in sociosexuality. The findings showed that there was a significant difference between males and females in sociosexuality ($p=.025$). Hence, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. The results of the same are provided in *Table 6*.

Table 5 Mann-Whitney U test to determine gender differences in sociosexuality

	Statistic	Sig. Diff
Sociosexuality	1686	.025

DISCUSSION

The current study aimed at investigating the relationship between Dark Triad, sociosexuality and gender. The present study sought to contribute to the existing literature by investigating the relationship between the variables.

The normality of the data was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk Normality test and two non-parametric tests, Mann-Whitney U test and Spearman Rank Correlation Test were carried out. Based on Spearman's rank correlational findings, there is a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and sociosexuality. There also exists a positive correlation between narcissism and sociosexuality, as well as psychopathy and sociosexuality. The study hypothesised that there would be no significant relationship between the Dark Triad and sociosexuality, hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. Previous studies have shown that individuals higher in the Dark Triad were more prone to engage in casual and risky sexual behaviours (Garcia, 2020; Freyth & Jonason, 2023).

Mann-Whitney U test showed that there is no significant gender difference in Machiavellianism and narcissism, but there are gender differences when considering psychopathy and sociosexuality measures. Previous studies suggested that in women, psychopathy seems to be more strongly associated with desire and attitudinal aspects of sociosexuality (Moore, 2020), and in men, psychopathy had a negative correlation with serious long-term relationships (Jones & de Roos, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The main aim of the study was to identify the relationship between Dark Triad, sociosexuality and gender. The data was gathered from 132 participants and analysed. Based on the results, there exists a significant positive correlation between the three Dark Triad traits and sociosexuality. There is no significant difference between males and females for Machiavellianism and narcissism, but there exists a significant difference in gender for psychopathy and sociosexuality.

The research intends to advance understanding of the Dark Triad traits and their relationship to sociosexuality, which will benefit the larger field of personality research. Counselling relationships and educating people about sexual health may benefit from an understanding of

the connection between these variables. Gaining more insight into the variables driving casual sex could have a big impact on public health initiatives.

Some major limitations are that the sample size is small and is primarily South Indian population, hence there is no diversity, which limits the generalisation of the results. The tools are susceptible to response and social desirability biases impacting the validity of the data. The cross-sectional design used limits causal conclusions. Since the study only considers a binary gender framework (male and female), it may overlook the experiences and attitudes of individuals with non-binary or other gender identities. The research findings can guide future investigations by motivating researchers to look into relevant relationships among various populations and contexts, and use different approaches. This can strengthen the case for the phenomenon being seen and deepen our understanding.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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