

## Schadenfreude as a Mediator between Dark Triad Personality and Sensational Interest

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### ABSTRACT

There are different types of people with different feelings some are those who feel sad on someone's failure whereas other people feel joyful about the same which is termed as 'Schadenfreude'. Personality may play an important role in this or it may be just different interest and perspective, it may also be situation specific. When we talk about the dark side of human nature, the famous Dark Personality traits can be the way to understand these feelings of schadenfreude whereas sensational interest may also explain the reasons for the same. The aim of the study is to assess the relationship between Schadenfreude, Dark Triad and Sensational Interest in the sample of 130 participants with the age group of 18 to 25 (girls and boys). This is a quantitative analysis based research and the scales to measure these variables are Short Dark Triad (SD3), Sensational Interest Questionnaire Revised (SIQ-R) and Schadenfreude Scale. This research results revealed significant positive relationship between dark triad personality traits, sensational interest and schadenfreude which may explain the reason behind the feeling of schadenfreude. This study inferred that dark triad personality and sensational interest play an important role for the joyful feeling on misfortune of others as they are interconnected to each other because of their shared characteristics.

**Keywords:** *Schadenfreude, Dark Triad, Sensational Interest*

**S**chadenfreude is an emotion of one's feeling pleasure in the misfortune or unfavourable situation that the other person faces. This emotion arises as to the response in a competitive situation where the availability of sources is limited. In the German language, the term Schaden means "damage, harm" whereas "Freude" stands for "joy" which jointly form schadenfreude. It is a complex emotion, where when someone facing a failure gives an immense pleasure or a joyful feeling rather than feeling sympathetic for that person. Children easily display this emotion, however adults conceal this emotion. According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) part of social identity is constituted by belonging to a certain group. Upward and downward social-comparison is an important method of self-evaluation by individuals.

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Downward social comparison can give rise to positive self-assessment, whereas upward social comparison can lead to feelings of inferiority which in turn also threatens sense of self. This negative evaluation might be associated with feelings of envy. This envy rising out of native evaluation has also been linked to evolutionary adaptive changes. People having envy due to upward social comparison will be more competitive and try harder to change their circumstances (Hill & Buss, 2008).

### Dark triad personality

Narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy are the pillars of dark triad personality traits. They are designated "dark" due to malicious characteristics they possess; Narcissism is portrayed by affectedness, pride, pretention, and an absence of empathy. Machiavellianism is portrayed by control and misuse of others, no presence of morality, apathetic hardness, and a more significant level of self-interest. Psychopathy is portrayed by consistent antisocial behaviour, impulsivity, self-centeredness, insensitive and apathetic characteristics and callousness.

Dark triad traits can be connected to schadenfreude as the individuals who are high on the dark triad qualities are highly motivated to achieve their goals. Their lack of compassion makes it easier for them to ignore the needs of others in case it becomes a barrier in attaining their goals.

### Sensational interest

Sensational interest indicates an interest in those objects which are bizarre and dramatic, these interests were seen in the offenders of the law. Sensational interest perhaps characterized as an interest that is sadistic and or abnormal. These kinds of interest are frequently sensationalized in the media drawing in a lot of consideration.

Numerous studies have been done linking schadenfreude, dark triad and sensational interest together. It has been found that more sensational interests and schadenfreude were present in an individual with high dark triad traits. (James et al, 2014). Schadenfreude is more prominent in individuals with high dark triad personality traits (Erzi, 2020). It has been found that there is a critical impact of sensational interest and personality on schadenfreude (Egan et al., 2015). There is a positive correlation in schadenfreude, smile intensity and the dark triad personality (Porter et al, 2014).

Through the above mentioned studies, it can be seen that schadenfreude, dark triad personality, and sensational interest are theoretically linked together. Therefore, a conceptual framework was built to study the direct and indirect effect of these variables together.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

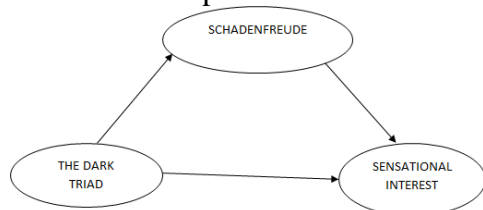
Generally, we encounter people who feel sympathy and empathy if something wrong/bad happens to someone. This is a very obvious response of humans to be humane towards other people, feel bad for their misfortune. But, there are few people, who feel pleasure for other's misfortune which is the interest of the study. This has been a concept that has received limited attention. Psychologist termed such people as "schadenfreude" and their characteristics include resentment, deservingness, envy, likability, self-esteem and competition. People with dark triad tend to be quite similar to those with schadenfreude. When reacting to another's misfortunes, people can show sympathy or can react with schadenfreude.

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People high on dark triad traits are primarily driven to achieve their own goals and in their relentless pursuit of their goals it is characteristic of them to disregard the feelings of others. Those individuals characterized by dark triad traits may view another's misfortune more favourably as it positions them closer to achieve their own goals.

The study aims to assess the direct and indirect relationship between the Dark Triad and Sensational Interest via Schadenfreude. The present study focuses on emerging adults (18-25 years) as they are in the phase of continuous contact with the new world and are in competition to make themselves stand in this world.

The relationship between the constructs is conceptualized as shown below:



*Figure 1: Conceptual Relationship*

## METHODOLOGY

### Objectives

1. To assess the direct relationship between the dark triad and sensational interest.
2. To assess the indirect relationship between the dark triad and sensational interest via schadenfreude.

### Hypotheses

- **H1:** There will be a significant relationship between the dark triad and sensational interest.
- **H2:** Schadenfreude will mediate the relationship between dark triad and sensational interest.

### Sample of the study

The sample consisted of 130 students in the age range of 18 to 25 years. The sample had 72 females and 58 males with minimum qualification of senior secondary.

### Measures

- **Sensational Interest Questionnaire-Revised (SIQ-R)** (Weiss, Egan & Figueredo, 2004) consists of 19 topics over three subscales (eg. Militarism, Paranormal Interests and Criminal Identity) using 7 point Likert Scale from “great disinterest” to “great interest”.
- **Schadenfreude scale** (Crysel & Webster, 2018). This 12 item measure consists of two factors benign and malicious schadenfreude. The first six items are benign items and seven to twelve are malicious items. The response scale was from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). Negatively valence items were reversed scored.
- **The Short Dark Triad (SD3)** developed by Jones & Paulhus (2017) consists of 27 items with nine items of each dark triad trait. Responses are given on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly”.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics

*Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and bivariate correlation of dark triad (DT), sensational interest (SI) and schadenfreude (S)*

	MEAN	SD	S	SI
DT	85.14	12.476	0.358**	0.328**
S	49.32	12.348		0.262**
SI	2.41	12.223		

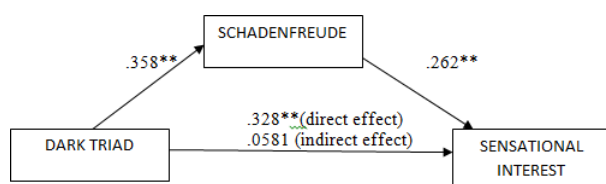
\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The bivariate correlation shows a positive association between dark triad personality and schadenfreude.

Sensation seeking is also positively associated with schadenfreude and dark triad personality.

### Mediation Analysis



\*\* significant at 0.01 level

*Figure 2: Showing the coefficients of direct and indirect effect of dark triad and sensational interest, via schadenfreude.*

Mediation analysis was performed to assess the mediating role of schadenfreude on the relationship between dark triad personality and sensational interest. Analysis confirmed that dark triad was indirectly linked to sensational interest.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the direct relationship between dark triad personality and sensational interest and also indirect relationship mediated by schadenfreude. The results revealed that there is a significant positive correlation between the Dark Triad and Sensational Interests, which support the hypothesis.

The mediation analysis indicated that schadenfreude mediated the relationship between dark triad and sensational interest. The finding can be supported by a similar study by James et al. (2014) who found that higher levels of the dark triad were associated with higher levels of sensational interests and higher levels of schadenfreude; psychopathy was the most strongly related to both. Those higher on the dark triad engage in more antisocial activities and experience greater satisfaction at the misfortune of others.

Other existing studies help us to understand the meditational effect. The finding can also be supported by Mangera (2019) who investigated the relationship between dark triad and sensational seeking in which the results suggested that sensational seeking is only predicted

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by Machiavellianism. Also, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody & Scrutton (2014) studied the relation between sensational interest and psychopathy which resulted in the significant correlation between them and concluded that psychopathy predicts sensational interest. Additionally, Skovran, Huss, & Scalora (2010) examined the psychopathy relation with sensational seeking behaviour. Results demonstrated a higher degree of sensational interest in psychopaths' offenders in comparison to those sexual offenders who were not psychopaths.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests that schadenfreude mediated the relationship between dark triad and sensational interest. Implications suggest that individuals should monitor their level of schadenfreude.

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### Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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