



# **Examining the Relationship between Dark Side Personality Characteristics, Health, and Workplace Stress**

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## Introduction

Difficulties at work may appear as problematic behaviors in interpersonal interactions. These problematic behaviors arise from any number of common dysfunctional dispositions that reflect people's distorted beliefs about themselves, how others will treat them, and the best means to achieve their goals. More importantly, these maladaptive behavioral patterns, the dark side of personality, can negatively influence people's careers and life satisfaction (Hogan & Hogan, 2009).

We know little about the relationship between dark side personality characteristics and health outcomes (cf. bright side personality; Bogg & Roberts, 2004; Jokela et al., 2013; Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007; Steel, Schmidt, & Schultz, 2008). The limited research conducted in this area shows that among the dimensions of the Dark Triad, Machiavellianism and psychopathy are generally negatively associated with health and wellbeing, but narcissism is generally positively associated with it (Jonason, Baughman, & Carter, 2015).

The maladaptive behaviors that comprise dark side personality may become more pronounced and less manageable in times of high stress (Hogan & Hogan, 2009), likely making dark side personality characteristics as important as bright side personality characteristics in the study of personality and health. As such, our research sought to examine the relationships between dark side personality characteristics and health and to determine the degree to which work-related stress may mediate some of those relationships.

## Method

### Participants

We collected data from 285 individuals using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Our sample included 56% female respondents. Average age was 34.43 years. Research indicates that MTurk provides a viable means for collecting data relating to a range of constructs including body image (Gardner, Brown, & Boice, 2012) and narcissism (Carlson, 2013; Greenwood, Long, & Dal Cin, 2013; Miller, Gentile, Wilson, & Campbell, 2013).

### Measures

The individuals in our sample completed the Hogan Development Survey (HDS; Hogan & Hogan, 2009), a well-known and validated measure of dark side personality characteristics. Table 1 provides names and definitions for each HDS scale. Principal component analysis (PCA) results suggest that the HDS scales group into three factors resembling Horney's (1950) flawed themes of interpersonal interaction. The Excitable, Skeptical, Cautious, Reserved, and Leisurely scales fit a pattern of managing feelings of inadequacy by avoiding close connections with others. The Bold, Mischievous, Colorful, and Imaginative scales describe a pattern of managing self-doubt through dominance, manipulation, or intimidation. Finally, the Diligent and Dutiful scales fit a pattern of managing insecurities by building alliances to minimize the perceived threats of criticism.

Individuals completed the 36-item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36), which measures quality of life across various health-related dimensions including emotional, physical, and social functioning. We also used items from Holmes and Rahe's (1967) Social Readjustment Rating Scale as a proxy for work-related stress and the Hogan Personality Inventory's (HPI; Hogan & Hogan, 2007) Validity scale to identify random responding.

## Procedure

We used Pearson correlation coefficients to examine the relationships between HDS and SF-36 scale scores. We corrected correlations for unreliability in both scales. We also tested work-related stress as a potential mediator for dark side personality and fatigue.

## Results

Table 2 provides corrected correlation coefficients between HDS and SF-36 scale scores. We observed no significant relationships between scale scores on any HDS scale and measures of physical functioning or physical limitations from the SF-36.

More notably, scores on the HDS Excitable, Skeptical, Cautious, Reserved, and Leisurely scales showed moderate-to-strong positive relationships with fatigue (mean corrected  $r = .43$ ), and negative relationships with emotional wellbeing (mean  $r = -.46$ ), social functioning (mean  $r = -.34$ ), and general health (mean  $r = -.27$ ). These relationships appeared stronger for the Cautious and Excitable scales such that elevated tendencies to respond to stress by becoming reluctant to act or emotionally volatile were associated with greater fatigue and lower levels of emotional wellbeing, social functioning, and health in general. Conversely, scores on the HDS Bold and Colorful scales showed negative relationships with fatigue (mean  $r = -.28$ ) such that excessive levels of self-confidence and attention-seeking were associated with increased perceived energy levels. HDS Bold, Colorful, and Imaginative scale scores were also associated with higher levels of general health (mean  $r = .22$ ). We observed no statistically significant relationships between HDS Diligent and Dutiful scale scores and SF-36 dimensions.

Table 3 provides results from our mediation analyses. Workplace stress partially mediated the relationships between dark side personality and fatigue for scores on the HDS Excitable, Skeptical, Cautious, Reserved, and Leisurely scales. Effect sizes of the indirect effects were small using the  $R^2$ -based benchmarks suggested by Kenny (2016). We observed only direct effects for scores on the HDS Bold, Mischievous, Colorful, and Imaginative scales.

## Discussion

Despite the associations between dark side personality and stress and the evidence of relationships between stress and health outcomes, research examining relationships between dark side personality and health-related outcomes has been sparse to date. We filled this significant gap in the literature by demonstrating that dark side personality is related to people's perceptions of their socioemotional health. Specifically, individuals who tend to react to stressful situations by becoming emotionally volatile (Excitable), overly

suspicious (Skeptical), reluctant to act (Cautious), aloof and detached (Reserved), or passive-aggressive (Leisurely) report higher levels of fatigue and lower levels of emotional wellbeing and general health than individuals who react to these same stressful situations by becoming overly self-confident (Bold) or attention-seeking (Colorful). There appear to be no significant beneficial or detrimental relationships between being perfectionistic (Diligent) or overly eager to please (Dutiful) and these socioemotional health outcomes.

Workplace stress partially mediates the relationships between dark side personality scale scores and fatigue for the Excitable, Skeptical, Cautious, Reserved, and Leisurely scales. Employee health is an important focus for many real-world organizations, and our research demonstrates that employee development efforts aimed at strategic self-awareness around individual dark side personality characteristics could reap benefits in outcomes such as organizational healthcare expenditures. As such, future research should examine the impact of strategic self-awareness of dark side personality on improved fatigue and socioemotional functioning. During this symposium, we will discuss limitations and implications of the current study.

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Table 1

<i>HDS Scales and Definitions</i>	
HDS Scale	Definition
Excitable	Moody and hard to please, with intense but short-lived enthusiasm for things
Skeptical	Cynical, distrustful, and quick to doubt others' true intentions
Cautious	Reluctant to take risks or initiative due to fear of failure or criticism
Reserved	Aloof, detached, uncommunicative, and disinterested in others' feelings
Leisurely	Independent and quietly resentful of interruptions or others' requests
Bold	Unusually self-confident and reluctant to admit shortcomings
Mischievous	Charming and friendly, but impulsive, non-conforming and manipulative
Colorful	Expressive, dramatic, distractible, attention seeking, and disorganized
Imaginative	Creative, eccentric, impractical, and idiosyncratic in ideas
Diligent	Meticulous, perfectionistic, critical, and inflexible about rules
Dutiful	Eager to please, reliant on others for guidance

Table 2

*Corrected Correlations for the HDS and SF-36*

Scale	Physical Functioning	Physical Limitations	Emotional Limitations	Fatigue	Emotional Wellbeing	Social Functioning	Pain	General Health
EXC	-.09	-.10	-.36*	.51*	-.57*	-.39*	-.12	-.35*
SKE	-.08	-.01	-.23*	.26*	-.34*	-.26*	-.10	-.15
CAU	.01	-.14	-.38*	.61*	-.59*	-.41*	-.16*	-.43*
RES	-.03	-.11	-.23*	.35*	-.37*	-.28*	-.12	-.16*
LEI	-.05	-.14	-.30*	.37*	-.40*	-.33*	-.12	-.26*
BOL	-.04	.02	.02	-.27*	.19*	.07	.06	.28*
MIS	.03	.03	-.03	-.13	-.01	-.02	.05	.11
COL	-.02	.12	.05	-.30*	.19*	.12	.09	.19*
IMA	-.04	.00	-.04	-.19*	.08	-.03	-.03	.18*
DIL	.06	.05	.02	-.00	.02	-.03	.02	.11
DUT	.09	.00	-.10	.16	-.12	-.14	-.07	-.05

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; EXC – Excitable; SKE – Skeptical; CAU – Cautious; RES – Reserved; LEI – Leisurely; BOL – Bold; MIS – Mischievous; COL – Colorful; IMA – Imaginative; DIL – Diligent; DUT – Dutiful.

Table 3

*Analysis of Workplace Stress as Mediator of HDS Scale (IV) Relationships with Fatigue (DV)*

Scale	Direct Effect				Indirect Effect			<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Estimate	95% LLCI	95% ULCI	
EXC	2.37	0.34	7.06	.00	0.17	0.05	0.38	.03
SKE	1.06	0.33	3.20	.00	0.16	0.03	0.37	.03
CAU	2.77	0.30	9.33	.00	0.12	0.02	0.28	.02
RES	1.55	0.35	4.41	.00	0.15	0.02	0.35	.02
LEI	1.66	0.42	4.00	.00	0.29	0.11	0.59	.04
BOL	-1.37	0.33	-4.21	.00	0.13	-0.02	0.35	.02
MIS	-0.79	0.38	-2.06	.04	0.12	-0.04	0.35	.02
COL	-1.61	0.37	-4.37	.00	0.09	-0.06	0.30	.01
IMA	-1.14	0.37	-3.07	.00	0.13	-0.07	0.39	.02
DIL	0.11	0.49	0.23	.82	-0.10	-0.45	0.19	.01
DUT	0.75	0.43	1.75	.08	0.11	-0.06	0.33	.02

Note: *R*<sup>2</sup> is a measure of effect size for the indirect effect, with small, moderate, and large benchmarks of .01, .09, and .25, respectively (Kenny, 2016); EXC – Excitable; SKE – Skeptical; CAU – Cautious; RES – Reserved; LEI – Leisurely; BOL – Bold; MIS – Mischievous; COL – Colorful; IMA – Imaginative; DIL – Diligent; DUT – Dutiful; 95% LLCI – Bootstrapped 95% Confidence Interval Lower Limit; 95% ULCI – Bootstrapped 95% Confidence Interval Upper Limit.