The study tested the hypothesis that subclinical psychopathy, unlike Machiavellianism and subclinical narcissism, is intrinsic to the image of a positive character, and thus that respondents evaluating characters based on Dark Triad traits would attribute a lower level of Machiavellianism and narcissism but a higher level of psychopathy to the characters than to themselves. The participants of the study (n = 72, 63% women, aged 16–69, M = 27,8, SD = 9,11) filled out questionnaires for Dark Triad traits (SD3), the Big Five (Short Measure of the Big Five Personality Domains), and tolerance for ambiguity (brief measure). The respondents first completed the questionnaires for themselves and then filled out the same forms for four characters from two films ("The Rifleman of the Voroshilov Regiment" and "Leviathan"). The film characters were selected based on a moral assessment ("positive" or "negative") and whether they were able to achieve their goals ("successful" or "unsuccessful"). The instructions emphasized that respondents should answer questions not to reflect their perceptions of a given film character, but as the character himself would answer if he were being completely honest. As expected, the resulting correlation of Dark Triad scores in self-evaluations and evaluations of film characters showed that negative characters were ascribed higher Dark Triad levels. Positive characters had lower narcissism and Machiavellianism scores than negative characters and respondents' self-evaluations on corresponding traits. However, the correlation of psychopathy scores in self-evaluations and in evaluations of film characters was different. The lowest psychopathy scores were found in respondents' self-evaluations. Study participants attributed higher psychopathy scores to positive characters than to themselves; the scores of negative characters were higher still. Thus, the study hypothesis was confirmed: the image of a positive character presumes a relatively high level of psychopathy. A comparison of Big Five and tolerance for ambiguity scores demonstrated that positive characters were ascribed higher levels of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness and lower levels of tolerance for ambiguity, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience.

Keywords: Dark Triad, Machiavellianism, subclinical psychopathy, subclinical narcissism, Big Five, tolerance for ambiguity, self-evaluation, evaluations of film characters
Each year, there is a growing number of studies on Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, subclinical narcissism, and subclinical psychopathy) and an expanding range of fields in the context of which there is interest in analysis of the Dark Triad. This reflects the demand for systematic exploration of negative personality traits and of their effect on various aspects of life that arose in the psychological community a long time ago. In this sense, the most important contribution of Delroy Paulhus and Kevin Williams [Paulhus, Williams, 2002], who proposed viewing Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy as a single set of traits, is that they were able to bring into focus the interest in negative personality characteristics, selecting from the countless characteristics that have been studied for a long time the three that cover a gamut of negative personality aspects—undesirable, frowned-upon, troublesome to others, and yet quite commonplace.

Are Dark Triad Traits Truly “Dark”?

The negative nature of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy is underscored by the descriptor for the triad (“dark”), and it is supported empirically. Individuals with high levels of Dark Triad traits are prone to deception-related behavior [Baughman et al., 2014; Jonason et al., 2014; Azizli et al., 2016], bullying [Baughman et al., 2012; Book, et al., 2012], low moral development [Campbell et al., 2009; Jonason et al., 2015], utilitarianism [Djeriouat, Trémolière, 2014], and moral disengagement [Egan, 2015]. They have reduced levels of empathy [Jones, Figueredo, 2013] and are unconcerned about the possibility of doing harm to those around them [Ritchie, Forth, 2016; Carton, Egan, 2017; Kiire, 2017]. Hedonism and power both play an important role in their value systems [Kajonius et al., 2015]. In personal relationships, they prefer short-term mating without commitment [Adams et al., 2014; Koladich, Atkinson, 2016], and they are likely to take advantage of and manipulate those close to them [Jonason, Kavanagh, 2010]. In cross-group relationships, Dark Triad personalities are susceptible to prejudice [Hodson et al., 2009; Jones, 2013]. In their professional lives, they are frequently counterproductive [Harms et al., 2011; O’Boyle et al., 2012; Smith, Lilienfeld, 2012; Spain et al., 2014; Mathieu, Babiak, 2015; Cohen, 2016]. When correlated with the factor-level personality traits, Dark Triad traits have an inverse relationship with Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Honesty-Humility [Lee, Ashton, 2014; Pailing et al., 2014; Book et al., 2015; Pilch, Górnik-Durose, 2016; Wertag, Bratko, 2016; DeShong et al., 2017].

One illustration of the negative nature of Dark Triad traits was an interesting research project conducted by Laura Crysel and her colleagues, which invoked Hogwarts—the school that Harry Potter attends in the fictional series. Students who enroll at Hogwarts are “sorted” into four houses based on their strengths and weaknesses. Gryffindors are known for their bravery, chivalry, and honesty; Hufflepuffs are characterized by their dedication and hard work; and Slytherins are famous for their cunning and end-justifies-the-means attitude. Harry Potter fans who had filled out a “sorting quiz” on the www.pottermore.com website were asked to complete questionnaires intended to assess Dark Triad levels. The results showed that individuals who had been “placed” in Gryffindor through the online quiz had above-average Extraversion (though the differences were insignificant); Hufflepuffs exhibited greater Conscientiousness; Ravenclaws displayed an elevated need for cognition; and Slytherins scored higher on all Dark Triad traits [Crysel et al., 2015].
“Bright” Aspects of “Dark” Personality Traits

At the same time, the negative image of “dark” individuals is not as uniform and unequivocal as it appears at first glance. Socially undesirable behavior depends on the configuration of the three “dark” traits—as an example, narcissists are unlikely to violate group morals, in contrast to individuals with higher levels of Machiavellianism and subclinical psychopathy (for instance, [Jonason et al., 2015; Zuo et al., 2016]). Narcissists are agreeable in interpersonal relationships and, although their agreeableness largely depends on the extent to which they are able to dominate, they are much more likeable than individuals with higher scores on the other Dark Triad components, who tend to be more hostile [Rauthmann, Kolar, 2012].

High Dark Triad levels result not only in the violation of social norms but also in a certain prosocial orientation. Empirically, the prosocial orientation of Machiavellianism and psychopathy was demonstrated through the correlation of these traits with the General Factor of Personality (GFP). Since the GFP reflects behavior that is socially desirable and—according to researchers who favor an evolutionary interpretation of personality traits—biologically adaptive, the positive correlation of the GFP with Machiavellianism and psychopathy suggests that Dark Triad traits do not always lead to behavior that is contrary to societal interests [Kowalski et al., 2016].

The prosocial behavior of Dark Triad personalities was also demonstrated through a comparison of Dark Triad traits with more common psychological aspects—for example, gossip [Lyons, Hughes, 2015]. Gossip is not the most desirable social trait, and yet it performs a range of critical functions that bolster group unity (strengthening interpersonal relations, defining group borders, collecting information, and warning of dangers). By focusing on why a respondent gossips (listens to and transmits information that might not be true), researchers showed that Machiavellian personalities are interested primarily in damaging the reputation of the gossip targets, while the psychopathy and narcissism of respondents is additionally linked with deriving pleasure from the process itself and with a desire to protect their group. The idea of protecting a group is very important in the context of “bright” aspects of “dark” traits.

The link between the Dark Triad (above all, psychopathy) and low Conscientiousness (Factor “C” in the five- and six-factor models of personality structure) also undermines the idea that “dark” traits are unequivocally “negative.” High Conscientiousness manifests as diligence, organization, and perfectionism, but has a flip side of dependency, lack of flexibility, excessive investment of time and emotional resources, and reduced capacity for change. It has been shown that leaders with high Factor C levels are rarely charismatic and tend to fear making strategic decisions [Bono, Judge, 2004]. When a situation requires change rather than maintaining the status quo, Dark Triad personalities (inversely correlated with Factor C) are more effective as well as more desirable [Judge et al., 2009].

Society particularly values a set of traits related to risk-taking, ability to remain calm and maintain control of oneself and the situation, and capacity to confront and triumph in dangerous situations. All of these traits can be described in everyday terms and in
personality psychology as “fearless dominance,” and they are correlated with psychopathy [Lilienfeld et al., 2016]. This works the other way as well—the fear of physical danger and of the social consequences of non-conformist behavior corresponds to low psychopathy. In other words, high psychopathy scores are linked with fearlessness, reckless courage, and the ability to experience, as Russian poet Alexander Pushkin wrote, “intoxication in battle and on the brink of the dark abyss,” and they are the main reason for the so-called “psychopathic charm.”

The proximity of “dark” and “bright” personality traits is also supported by research into psychopathy that considers the main indicator of the trait to be fearlessness and defines heroism as the exhibition of altruism in conditions of physical and social risk. Such research is based on the idea that certain unidentified and potentially genetically influenced predispositions for courage can lead with equal probability, depending on the circumstances, either to heroic deeds or to criminal activity. There are many examples of individuals who acted with unparalleled bravery in catastrophes, natural disasters, or military conflicts, but were then unable to adapt to civilian life and sought solace in alcohol or drugs, or committed crimes [Lykken, 1996; Smith et al., 2013; Lilienfeld et al., 2016].

Such research is structured in a way to compare psychopathy (and specifically, fearless dominance) with heroism and antisocial behavior. The resulting significant correlation with both heroism and altruism supports the hypothesis about the close determinants of psychopathy and heroism: “the hero and the psychopath may be twigs on the same genetic branch” [Lykken, 1996, p. 32].

A study of war heroism and its links with personality traits was conducted using a sample that included 42 U.S. presidents (for the presidents, a retrospective assessment of actual behavior in military conditions was analyzed). Incidents related to war heroism were selected based on the work of military historians, while the personality traits, including those linked with fearlessness, were assessed by 121 experts, among them presidential biographers. The results supported the link between fearless dominance and personality traits such as risk-taking and courage in war conditions [Smith et al., 2013].

Attribution of “Dark” Personality Traits

The studies of Dark Triad traits discussed so far have uncovered certain “bright” aspects of “dark” traits. The studies of attributions that will be discussed henceforth point to the implicit or overt conviction that “dark” traits are commonly perceived as necessary and unavoidable elements of the personality structure of individuals one admires.

As an example, we can cite one study [Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012] that sought to identify the psychological connotations of the word “cool” as an expression of an overall positive evaluation and perhaps even admiration. The word was first used in its slang sense by jazz musicians and fans, was later revived by young people, and was then rapidly picked up by older age groups, advertisers, marketers, and the media. Research into the connotations and significance of the word was carried out in several stages. In the first, respondents described the personality characteristics that they associate with the word. Based on this
feedback, a list of the most common descriptors was compiled. In the second stage, the descriptors were evaluated from the viewpoint of both their social desirability and their “coolness.” In the third stage, respondents evaluated their friends based on these descriptors. This demonstrated that all assessments of social desirability and “coolness” of the descriptors correlate with each other. Factorization of the respondents’ assessments of friends highlighted two factors. The first was characterized by prosocial values such as friendliness, personal competence (charisma), attractiveness, drive for success (ambition), confidence, and trendiness. The second had to do with assessments of rebelliousness, irony, and roughness. Thus, a positive assessment was ambiguous, containing both socially desirable traits and characteristics viewed as manifestations of Dark Triad personalities.

Our study (Egorova, Sitnikova, not published) asked respondents to list the most defining characteristics of their popular peers—both those whom the respondents liked and those whom they disliked. Descriptions of both types contained characteristics associated with the Dark Triad: sociability combined with lack of consideration for those around them, egocentricity, egoism, ostentation, superficiality, vanity, lack of empathy, yearning for leadership, ambition, etc.

The duality of those who stand out from the crowd and attract attention is not lost on creators of mass culture. On the one hand, they cannot ignore the expectations of mass culture consumers—expectations that are to some degree a reflection of reality. On the other hand, they themselves generate this reality, propagating the image in books, films, and television shows of main heroes who possess both unquestionably positive qualities and clearly perceptible Dark Triad traits [Jonason et al, 2012].

**Current Study**

**Aims and Hypotheses**

The current study tests a hypothesis regarding mixed feelings about Dark Triad traits—above all, psychopathy. Psychopathy is viewed not only as a set of negative traits and flaws, but also as the ability and willingness to fight injustice in situations that most people consider hopeless. To test this hypothesis, we collected self-evaluations from respondents, as well as their evaluations of conditionally positive and negative characters from films. Hypothesis One was that assessed subclinical psychopathy indicators of positive characters would exceed self-evaluations of this same trait, but be below the assessed subclinical psychopathy indicators of negative characters. In other words, we posited that respondents would reason as follows with regard to the subclinical psychopathy levels of positive characters: “A hero does not give in without a fight, and if he must violate some laws or conventions to restore justice, then this is warranted and deserves commendation, but I would not be able to do the same thing.” Hypothesis Two is that results for the other two Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism and narcissism) would be different: indicators attributed to positive characters would be lower than the respondents' self-evaluations. The presumed logic for this is: “A hero does not manipulate others, isn't full of himself, and does not consider himself superior to others; in this sense, he is more virtuous than I am.”
Participants and Procedure

The study had 72 participants (63% women) aged 16 – 69 (M = 27.8, SD = 9.11). All participants were volunteers. Respondents were asked to fill out questionnaires that measure the Dark Triad, the Big Five, and Ambiguity Tolerance-Intolerance. Respondents completed questionnaires first for themselves and then for four characters from two films.

Prior to working on the questionnaire for each film character, the respondents were given the following instructions: “Imagine that the film character (film name, character name) is filling out this questionnaire. How do you think he would respond if he were being completely honest?” The instructions also provided a brief reminder of the character's profile.

The first two characters are from the film “The Rifleman of the Voroshilov Regiment,” which follows the classic Western genre. An old man, a veteran of World War II and a former railroad worker, lives with his granddaughter, a kind and pure young woman who is raped one unfortunate day by some lowlifes. The offenders are easy to catch, since one of them is her former classmate. However, his father heads the local police precinct. The father uses all of his powers to interfere with the investigation, and the case hits a dead end. Having failed to obtain justice, the grandfather recalls his life as a soldier, illegally acquires a telescopic rifle, and delivers justice personally to the approval of others who surmise what he has done. Respondents were asked to fill out a questionnaire for the old man (referred to going forward in the questionnaire as a “positive successful character”) and for the police chief (“negative unsuccessful character“).

The second pair of characters comes from the film “Leviathan,” a drama quite close to modern-day realities. A car mechanic from a provincial town goes up against the municipal government. The mayor wants to seize the land lot with the mechanic's house and shop, offering such miserly compensation that it would be impossible to buy another house, not to mention rebuild the shop. The mechanic fights for justice in court, but the court is subordinate to the mayor and rules against the mechanic. The mechanic continues to fight, appeals the case in court, and even attempts to use blackmail (which has potential — the mayor is involved in numerous unsavory and unlawful affairs), but ultimately loses. The mechanic's wife dies under mysterious circumstances, and he is arrested on suspicion of murder; the house is demolished; the corrupt mayor gets everything he wanted. Participants were asked to respond for the mechanic and for the mayor. Further in the questionnaire they were cited as the “positive unsuccessful character” (though it should be noted that the “positive” nature of the character is fairly conditional; like the character of any realistic drama, he has a lot of flaws) and the “negative successful character.”

The “positive” characters are all “normal” people who don't harbor particular ambitions and live “as others do.” Circumstances push them into the dilemma of either swallowing their pride and giving up, or fighting for their rights, protecting their families, and not allowing anyone to humiliate them.

Both of the “negative” characters have power and don't shy away from using it in their interests. They look down on those who are weaker, and they are infuriated by those who
dare oppose their abuse of authority.

Measures

Dark Triad scores were assessed with the Short Dark Triad (SD3) brief measure [Jones, Paulhus, 2014], validated for Russian participants [Egorova et al., 2015]. Like the original, it contains 27 statements and measures subclinical narcissism, Machiavellianism, and subclinical psychopathy using the 5-point Likert scale. The scores obtained were divided by the number of items corresponding to a particular trait, and thus are all comparable in dimension and range from 1 to 5.

The Big Five traits were measured with the ten-item personality inventory [Egorova, Parshikova, 2016] that consists of ten profiles such as “He doesn't talk a lot, does not attract attention at a party, and doesn't like being the center of attention.” The respondent had to evaluate his or her similarity to the character on a 6-point scale ranging from “not at all like me” to “very much like me.” The aggregated values were divided by the number of items and thus all scales range from 1 to 6.

A brief personality inventory was used to diagnose Ambiguity Tolerance-Intolerance. It contained three statements such as “He dislikes uncertain situations. He prefers the familiar to the novel and believes that a good job is one where it is always clear what should be done and how.” As with the previous questionnaire, a 6-point scale was used and the overall score was divided by the number of items.

Results

Descriptive Statistics for Dark Triad Indicators

Average Dark Triad scores corresponded to the results of the SD3 validated for Russian participants [Egorova et al., 2015]. Of the three Dark Triad traits, indicators were highest for Machiavellianism and lowest for psychopathy. Men had higher scores for all three traits than women, though the difference in narcissism was not significant (p < 0.10). The measure of internal consistency for the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha) was in the 0.71–0.72 range (the alpha range for the representative sample was 0.70–0.74).

Means of Dark Triad traits for film characters and their variability differed from self-evaluations in both means (Figure 1) and the extent of sex differences (which were absent in the evaluations of film characters). The only trait where the difference between evaluations by men vs. by women reached a significant level of 5% was the narcissism attributed to the positive unsuccessful character (women ascribed higher narcissism to him).
Figure 1. Means for narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (self-evaluations and evaluations of film characters).
As expected, Dark Triad scores were higher in evaluations of negative characters than in self-evaluations (Figure 1). For positive characters, assessed narcissism and Machiavellianism levels were lower than both self-evaluations and the evaluations of negative characters. For psychopathy, scores were lowest in self-evaluations, higher for positive characters, and higher still for negative characters.

Means differences (based on the t-criterion) were calculated for each of the traits. These differences are illustrated in Figure 1 for the five narcissism scores, five Machiavellianism scores, and five psychopathy scores. Almost all of the differences were significant (0.01 < p < 0.000): (1) self-evaluations of Dark Triad traits were appreciably different from levels of Dark Triad traits ascribed to positive and negative characters; (2) there was a significant difference between the assessments of the two positive characters; (3) there was a significant difference between the assessments of the two negative characters; and, predictably, (4) there was a significant difference between the assessments of positive vs. negative characters. There were only two exceptions to the above: first of all, self-evaluations of Machiavellianism did not differ from evaluations of Machiavellianism in the positive successful character; second, there was no significant difference in the narcissism scores of the two positive characters.

Variability of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy was highest in self-evaluations and lowest in the evaluations of negative characters, an arrangement that is opposite to the levels for means (Figure 2). It appears that emphasizing particular personality traits in film
storylines (especially for negative characters) triggers stereotyping, which reduces variation.

Results of Correlation Analysis for Dark Triad traits

Correlation (r Spearman) between Dark Triad traits in self-evaluations was significant in 5 out of 6 categories at a level of at least 0.01% (Table 1). Correlation between Dark Triad indicators is not as strong for the positive characters and the negative unsuccessful character. For the most negative character (the corrupt mayor, whom we describe as a “negative successful character”), correlation between Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy was not significant. For the negative successful character, only the correlation between separate Dark Triad traits and the Dark Triad composite remains significant. Thus, the correlation between Dark Triad traits obtained from the respondents’ self-evaluations corresponds to the results described in literature and measured in a representative Russian sample. The scores ascribed by respondents to film characters are less consistent with the structure of Dark Triad links, which is most likely a consequence of the reduced distribution of indicators.

Table 1. Correlation between Dark Triad traits for respondents (self-evaluations) and each of the characters (based on the respondents’ evaluations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject of Evaluation</th>
<th>Correlation Between Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N-M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-evaluation</td>
<td>53***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive successful</td>
<td>51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive unsuccessful</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative unsuccessful</td>
<td>34**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative successful</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. * – p < 0.05 **– 0.05 < p < 0.01 ***– 0.01 < p < 0.001; N – narcissism, M – Machiavellianism, P – psychopathy, DT – Dark Triad composite.

Table 2. Correlation between corresponding Dark Triad traits for positive vs. negative characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters Compared</th>
<th>Narcissism</th>
<th>Machiavellianism</th>
<th>Psychopathy</th>
<th>Composite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correlation with self-evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Correlation between evaluations within positive and negative categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive characters</th>
<th>25*</th>
<th>39**</th>
<th>25*</th>
<th>26*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative characters</td>
<td>32**</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31**</td>
<td>41***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation between evaluations across positive vs. negative categories

| Pos. successful vs. neg. unsuccessful | -23* | 02 | 11 | -12 |
| Pos. successful vs. neg. successful | 00 | -05 | 02 | 02 |
| Pos. unsuccessful vs. neg. unsuccessful | -07 | 10 | -12 | -09 |
| Pos. unsuccessful vs. neg. successful | 02 | 06 | 04 | -01 |

Notes. * – p < 0.05 **- 0.05 <p < 0.01 ***– 0.01 < p < 0.001; N – narcissism, M – Machiavellianism, P – psychopathy, DT – Dark Triad composite.

Correlation (r Spearman) between Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy for the two positive characters equals 0.39 (p < 0.01), 0.25 (p < 0.04), and 0.25 (p < 0.04), respectively. The correlation for narcissism and for psychopathy is statistically significant for the two negative characters at 0.32 (p < 0.006) and 0.31 (p < 0.008), respectively. In other words, when respondents evaluate film characters, they rely on a moral assessment of their actions.

Correlation between self-evaluated Dark Triad traits and the corresponding traits as evaluated for film characters is not significant, which shows that the evaluation of fictional characters is not related to the respondents' identification with the characters. Correlation between the scores of the positive vs. negative characters in each pair is also not significant, which indicates that evaluations of positive vs. negative characters are not mirror images.

Descriptive Statistics for Big Five Traits and Tolerance for Ambiguity

A comparison of Ambiguity Tolerance-Intolerance and Big Five traits in self-evaluations and
evaluations of characters provides a useful supplement to the Dark Triad data. Tolerance for ambiguity and the Big Five traits do not reflect any sex differences and do not affect evaluations of film characters. The only trait that demonstrated a weak sex difference was self-evaluated neuroticism ($p < 0.08$).

Means for Big Five traits and Ambiguity Tolerance-Intolerance in self-evaluations and evaluations of film characters (Diagram 3) demonstrated both expected results (lower Agreeableness and Conscientiousness for negative characters) and paradoxical ones (negative characters were ascribed higher tolerance for ambiguity, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience).

As with the analysis of Dark Triad traits, differences between means in each of the Big Five traits were calculated (for example, Extraversion of positive successful character vs Extraversion of negative successful character). Differences between characters were only observed in two comparisons of Openness to Experience. Self-evaluations did not differ from evaluations of positive characters for a quarter of the traits. In particular, respondents attributed similar levels of Agreeableness to themselves as to the positive successful character, similar levels of tolerance for ambiguity, Extraversion and Conscientiousness as to the positive unsuccessful character.
Figure 3. Means for the Big Five and tolerance for ambiguity (evaluations of film characters).

Discussion

The study tested the hypothesis that the image of a positive character presupposes a higher level of subclinical psychopathy and a lower level of Machiavellianism and subclinical narcissism than a respondent's self-evaluation. It is easy to understand and unnecessary to explain why a positive character would have less pronounced “dark” traits (Machiavellianism and narcissism). Why is the situation with psychopathy different? The hypothesis regarding the higher level of psychopathy was based on research into clinical and subclinical psychopathy that demonstrates a link between indicators of heroic and antisocial behaviors and additionally suggests the existence of a common biological basis for such behaviors.

The research results supported the hypothesis of the study. Psychopathy scores were lowest in respondents’ self-evaluations, somewhat higher for positive characters, and highest for negative characters. The results cannot reflect distortion stemming from the respondents’ identification with the characters, since the correlation between self-evaluations and evaluations of characters based on the Dark Triad is insignificant. The results likewise do not suggest misalignment in self-evaluations of Dark Triad levels in the particular sample, because the scores were not appreciably different from means for a representative sample.
At the same time, some differences do exist between the sample of respondents in the given study and the representative sample. In the representative sample, most respondents did not watch and had no plans to watch independent films in general and “Leviathan” in particular. The fact that a difference exists was clear before the start of the experiment. However, the dilemma that had to be confronted in planning the experiment was whether to use action films and melodramas that prompt stereotyped responses or to accept the fact that the sample would be biased. The second option was chosen, so the interpretation of the results must take into account the fact that the sample represents a more educated segment of the population.

It is possible that the fear of receiving stereotyped responses was excessive, since the data patterns for the positive character from “Leviathan” were not particularly different from those for the other positive character (from “The Rifleman of the Voroshilov Regiment”).

Analysis of means assigned to the film characters based on factor-level personality traits and tolerance for ambiguity produced somewhat unexpected results. In addition to the fact that positive characters were associated with a certain level of psychopathy, they were also ascribed higher Agreeableness than negative characters, and the positive successful character was also attributed higher Conscientiousness. At the same time, the positive characters were perceived as less extraverted, less open to new experience, and less tolerant of ambiguity. The image of a positive character was thus slightly lackluster. It appears that a “good” person is expected to experience a psychopathic surge in a stressful situation, is convenient for others, but his conscientiousness is excessive (everyone probably takes advantage of him) and his life is a little boring; he does not have strong interests and avoids situations of choice. It is not surprising that negative characters who encounter the positive character have no doubt that they will triumph.

In conclusion, we should note that the search for “bright” aspects of “dark” traits is a relatively new topic in Dark Triad research, but it already has a certain history in the research of other negative characteristics, such as authoritarianism and perfectionism. This research could be viewed as a separate field in personality studies if it were not as weakly structured. It is possible that the emergence of the Dark Triad—which has been much more popular than anyone, including its authors, expected—has served as a trigger that currently shapes this direction.

References


Baughman H.M., Dearing S., Giammarco E., Vernon P.A. Relationships between bullying


Mathieu C., Babiak P. Tell me who you are, I'll tell you how you lead: Beyond the Full-Range Leadership Model, the role of corporate psychopathy on employee attitudes. Personality and Individual Differences, 2015, Vol. 87, 8–12.


Received 22 August 2016. Date of publication: 29 December 2016.

About authors

Egorova Marina S. Ph.D., Professor, Corresponding Member, Russian Academy of Education; Head, Department of Behavioral Genetics, Faculty of Psychology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, ul. Mokhovaya, 11–9, 125009 Moscow, Russia.
E-mail: ms_egorova@mail.ru

Sitnikova Maria A. Lomonosov Moscow State University, ul. Mokhovaya, 11–9, 125009 Moscow, Russia.
E-mail: Mary-sit@mail.ru

Parshikova Oxana V. Ph.D., Senior lecturer, Department of Behavioral Genetics, Faculty of Psychology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, ul. Mokhovaya, 11–9, 125009 Moscow, Russia.
E-mail: ksapa2003@mail.ru

Chertkova Yulia D. Ph.D., Associate Professor, Faculty of Psychology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, ul. Mokhovaya, 11–9, 125009 Moscow, Russia.
E-mail: y_chertkova@mail.ru

Suggested citation

Egorova M.S., Sitnikova M.A., Parshikova O.V., Chertkova Yu.D. “Dark” personality traits in evaluations of positive and negative film characters. Psikhologicheskie Issledovaniya, 2016,