Survival of the Scheming: A Genetically Informed Link Between the Dark Triad and Mental Toughness

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Abstract

The present study is the first behavioral genetic investigation of the Dark Triad traits of personality, consisting of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, and the variable of mental toughness, reflecting individual differences in the ability to cope when under pressure. The purpose of this investigation was to explore a potential explanation for the success of individuals exhibiting the Dark Triad traits in workplace and social settings. Participants were adult twins who completed the MACH-IV, the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, and the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale assessing Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, respectively, as well as the MT48, measuring mental toughness.

Correlational analyses of the data revealed significant positive phenotypic associations between mental toughness and narcissism. Psychopathy and Machiavellianism, however, both showed some significant negative phenotypic correlations with mental toughness.

Bivariate behavioral genetic analyses of the data were conducted to assess the extent to which these significant phenotypic correlations were attributable to common genetic and/or common environmental factors.

Results indicate that correlations between narcissism and mental toughness were attributable primarily to common non-shared environmental factors, correlations between Machiavellianism and mental toughness were influenced by both common genetic and common non-shared environmental factors, and the correlations between psychopathy and mental toughness were attributable entirely to correlated genetic factors.

Implications of these findings in the context of etiology and organizational adaptation are discussed