Abstract

Bystanders play a potentially important role in sexual harassment, but they often fail to intervene. Previous research has linked bystander failure to a host of situational and individual factors. In this brief study, we investigated the Dark Triad (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and social anxiety (i.e., fear of negative social evaluation) in relation to five bystander barriers. In an online study, 295 participants (mostly from United Kingdom) completed questionnaires on the Dark Triad, Fear of Negative Social Evaluation, and five Bystander Barriers. In regression analyses, psychopathy and fear of negative evaluation were significant positive predictors for failure to notice harassment. For failure to identify the situation as high risk and failure to take intervention responsibility, Machiavellianism was the only significant positive predictor. For skills and audience inhibition, Machiavellianism and fear of negative evaluation were significant positive, and psychopathy a significant negative predictor. Our results suggest that personality and social anxiety independently predict different difficulties in bystander intervention.

Key Words: Dark Triad; Social Anxiety; Bystander Barriers; Sexual Harassment

Introduction

Bystanders, individuals who witness sexual harassment, play a crucial role in intervening before, during, or after the harassment takes place (McMahon & Banyard, 2012). However, bystanders often fail to help, which could be due to the presence of several barriers. According to the situational model (Burn, 2009), there are five barriers for bystanders to overcome in order to intervene (i.e., notice the event, regard it as high risk, take intervention responsibility, have the skills to intervene, and help despite other audience members). These barriers are related to a host of individual and situational factors, from gender (Lyons et al., 2022a; Yule & Grych, 2020), rape myths and sexism (Jozkowski et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2022a,b; Yule et al., 2022) to bystander intoxication (Melkonian et al., 2020) and friendship status of the bystander and victim (Katz et al., 2015). Indeed, decisions to intervene depend on a complex interplay between social factors and individual characteristics (e.g., Kaya et al., 2020). In this study, we aim to investigate the relative contribution of social anxiety (i.e., fear of negative social evaluations) and the Dark Triad (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in five barriers to bystander intervention (Burn, 2009).

The Dark Triad of personality has become a popular area of research in attempting to understand the driving forces behind social behaviour. The three traits share a common core of antagonism (Vize et al., 2020). However, the traits are also thought to have unique characteristics, such as tactical manipulation in Machiavellianism, callousness in psychopathy, and grandiosity in narcissism (Lyons, 2019). There is very little knowledge currently on how these traits relate to barriers to bystander behaviour in sexual harassment situations. The Dark Triad correlates with other variables that have been identified as barriers to intervention (e.g., empathy; rape myth acceptance; see Lyons et al., 2022b). However, relatively few studies have investigated the Dark Triad with regards to barriers to bystander intervention. In a previous study in Indonesia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, Lyons et

al. (2022b) found that Machiavellianism had a positive correlation with failure to identify risk, failure to take responsibility, skills deficit, and audience inhibition. However, narcissism and psychopathy seemed to facilitate bystander behaviour in relation to lower self-perceived skills deficits, and reduced audience inhibition. We wanted to explore this further by exploring the relative contribution of social anxiety (i.e., fear of negative social evaluations) and the Dark Triad in perceived bystander barriers.

The fear of being evaluated by other people in a negative light is a core component of social anxiety. In a similar way to Machiavellianism (Lyons et al., 2022b), social anxiety has been associated with bystander barriers of failing to identify situations as high risk, skills deficits, and audience inhibition (Uhrig, 2018). Social anxiety (or aspects of it) has also been correlated positively with Machiavellianism (Birkás et al., 2016; Láng et al., 2018; Lucas & Chang, 2022). Features of psychopathy and narcissism could, however, protect individuals from social anxiety (Akehurst & Thatcher, 2010; Hoffmann et al., 2007; Latzman et al., 2019; although see also Lucas & Chang, 2022). Taking the above associations into account, it is important to investigate the Dark Triad, social anxiety, and bystander barriers together.

In summary, this study aims to understand the relative contribution of social anxiety (namely, the fear of negative social evaluation) and the Dark Triad of personality in five barriers (see Burn, 2009) to bystander behaviour. We expect that Machiavellianism and high social anxiety correlate with multiple bystander barriers. In addition, we expect there to be negative correlations between bystander barriers and fear of negative evaluation, narcissism, and psychopathy.

Method

Participants

Participants (40 male, 254 female, and one individual who indicated non-binary / prefer not to say) were recruited via social media and a University Participation Point

Scheme. Participants were aged 18 – 48 years (M = 19.21, SD = 2.92) and typically enrolled on an undergraduate course (99.7%) on a full-time basis (98.6%). Relatively few participants (n = 15) were not British, or British who resided outside the United Kingdom (n = 5).

Materials and Procedure

Advertisements were placed on social media and a University Participation Point Scheme. Those responding to the advertisement were provided with an information sheet and consent form. Following completion of the consent form, participants provided demographic information (e.g., age, gender (coded 1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = non-binary / prefer not to say), nationality) and completed a series of standardized self-report measures. All questionnaires were completed online via the Qualtrics survey platform.

The Short Dark Triad Scale (SD3, Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a 27-item measure of the Dark Triad (nine items per trait). Example items include 'People see me as a natural leader' (narcissism), 'It is not wise to tell your secrets' (Machiavellianism), and 'People often say I am out of control' (Psychopathy). Items are answered on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Five items are reverse coded.

The Bystander Barrier Scale (Burn, 2009) is a 16-item measure containing five subscales. These subscales are Failure to Notice (one item), Failure to Identify Situation as High Risk (three items), Failure to Take Intervention Responsibility (eight items), Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit (two items), and Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition (two items). Example items include 'At a party or bar, I am probably too busy to be aware of whether someone is at risk for sexual assault' (Failure to Notice), 'In a party or bar situation, I think I might be uncertain as to whether someone is at risk for being sexually assaulted' (Failure to Identify Situation as High Risk), 'If I saw someone I did not know was at risk for being sexually assaulted, I would leave it up to his/her friends to intervene' (Failure to Take Intervention Responsibility), 'Although I would like to intervene when a

guy's sexual conduct is questionable, I am not sure I would know what to say or do' (Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit), and 'I am hesitant to intervene when a man's sexual conduct is questionable because I am not sure other people would support me' (Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition). Items are answered on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

The Brief Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Leary, 1983) is a 12-item measure. Example items include 'I worry about what other people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference' and 'I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make'. Items are answered on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = not at all characteristic to 5 = extremely characteristic. Four items are reverse coded.

For the present study Cronbach's alphas were narcissism (α = .72), Machiavellianism (α = .71), psychopathy (α = .73.), Failure to Identify Situation as High Risk (α = .72), Failure to Take Intervention Responsibility (α = .82), Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit (α = .92), (v) Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition (α = .76), and Fear of Negative Evaluation (α = .93).

Results

Pearson's correlations revealed that narcissism was significantly negatively associated with Failure to Identify a Situation as high risk and Machiavellianism was significantly positively related to Failure to take Intervention Responsibility, Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit, and Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition. Psychopathy was significantly negatively related to Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit only. Fear of Negative Evaluation was significantly positively related to Notice, Failure to Identify Situation as High Risk, Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit, and Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition. These data are shown in Table 1.

Linear multiple regressions were conducted with the Dark Triad traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) and Fear of Negative Evaluation entered as predictor variables. The barriers to bystander intervention (Failure to Notice, Failure to Identify Situation as High Risk, Failure to Take Intervention Responsibility, Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit, and Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition) were criterion variables.

The overall model predicted Failure to Notice, $F(4, 290) = 2.60$, $p = .037$, explaining 3.5% of the overall variance ($R^2 = .04$, $Adj\ R^2 = .02$). Psychopathy ($B = .15$, $t = 2.26$, $p = .025$) and Fear of Negative Evaluation ($B = .14$, $t = 2.24$, $p = .026$) were the only significant individual predictors. The overall model predicted Failure to Identify Situation as High Risk, $F(4, 290) = 3.66$, $p = .006$, explaining 4.8% of the overall variance ($R^2 = .05$, $Adj\ R^2 = .04$). Machiavellianism ($B = .13$, $t = 1.99$, $p = .047$) was the only significant individual predictor. The overall model predicted Failure to Take Intervention Responsibility, $F(4, 290) = 3.16$, $p = .015$, explaining 4.2% of the overall variance ($R^2 = .04$, $Adj\ R^2 = .03$). Machiavellianism ($B = .121$, $t = 3.19$, $p = .002$) was the only significant individual predictor.

The overall model predicted Failure to Intervene Due to a Skills Deficit, $F(4, 290) = 10.30$, $p < .001$, explaining 12.4% of the overall variance ($R^2 = .12$, $Adj\ R^2 = .11$). Machiavellianism ($B = .21$, $t = 3.43$, $p < .001$), Psychopathy ($B = -.23$, $t = -3.64$, $p < .001$), and Fear of Negative Evaluation ($B = .21$, $t = 3.52$, $p < .001$) were each significant individual predictors. The overall model predicted Failure to Intervene Due to Audience Inhibition, $F(4, 290) = 7.64$, $p < .001$, explaining 9.5% of the overall variance ($R^2 = .10$, $Adj\ R^2 = .08$). Machiavellianism ($B = .26$, $t = 4.15$, $p < .001$), Psychopathy ($B = -.20$, $t = -3.11$, $p = .002$), and Fear of Negative Evaluation ($B = .13$, $t = 2.12$, $p = .035$) were each significant individual predictors.

Discussion

Our research adds to the sparse literature on the Dark Triad of personality and bystander behaviour in sexual harassment. Using a cross-sectional approach, we investigated the relative contribution of the three personality traits and fear of negative evaluation in five bystander barriers. As predicted, both Machiavellianism and fear of negative social evaluation were significant positive predictors of audience inhibition and skills deficits, whereas psychopathy was a significant negative predictor of both these barriers. Psychopathy and fear of negative evaluation were significant positive predictors for failure to notice. For failure to identify the situation as high risk and failure to take intervention responsibility, Machiavellianism was the only significant positive predictor. Narcissism did not have a relationship with any of the barriers.

The first barrier, failure to notice harassment was positively predicted by psychopathy and fear of negative evaluation. This could be potentially explained by sensory distractions related to alcohol consumption. The question concerning failure to notice harassment was specifically noticing harassment at a bar or parties, where drinking is common. Psychopathy (Nnam et al., 2021) and social anxiety (Buckner et al., 2020) both relate to excessive drinking. This could create a sensory distraction that stops bystanders from helping, especially at the earlier stages of information processing that could later lead to intervention (Leone et al., 2018; Melkonian et al., 2020). Future studies should investigate the potentially mediating role of bystander alcohol consumption in the relationship between psychopathy/social anxiety, and the failure to notice.

For failure to identify the situation as high risk and failure to take intervention responsibility, Machiavellianism was the only significant positive predictor. This mirrors the findings of a previous study (Lyons et al., 2022b), replicating the unique association of Machiavellianism with a host of intervention barriers. Machiavellianism relates to a perceived lack of ability to control external events (Aldousari, & Ickes, 2021) which has also

been associated with failure to identify risky situations and take responsibility (Bennett et al., 2014). Locus of control has been related to perceived responsibility in a host of pro-social settings (Andor et al., 2022; Fielding & Head, 2012), and could provide an explanation for why higher scores in Machiavellianism relate to failure to take responsibility as a bystander in sexual harassment scenarios.

For audience inhibition and skills deficits, Machiavellianism and fear of negative evaluation were significant positive, and psychopathy a significant negative predictor. Higher psychopathy scores have been associated with reduced audience inhibition in a previous bystander study (Lyons et al., 2022b), and could relate to the disinhibition linked with this trait (Mullins-Sweatt et al., 2019). In line with results from Uhrig (2018), social anxiety related to intervention barriers in the presence of an audience. Although Machiavellianism has been related to social anxiety (e.g., Birkás et al., 2016; Láng et al., 2018; Lucas & Chang, 2022) and audience inhibition (Lyons et al., 2022b), it could be that these associations are independent from each other. In our study, the correlation between Machiavellianism and fear of social evaluation were positive but weak, and not statistically significant. The regression analyses demonstrated that Machiavellianism was more strongly related to audience inhibition than fear of negative evaluation was. Perhaps the relationship between audience inhibition and Machiavellianism relates to tendency for high Machiavellian individuals to hide their feelings and intentions (e.g., Geng et al., 2022), which could facilitate long-term strategic goals.

Our study has some limitations, which we will discuss briefly here. Although a previous study in Indonesia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom reported similar findings to ours (Lyons et al., 2022b), the results of this study cannot be generalised beyond those from Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic background (WEIRD; see, for example, Muthukrishna et al., 2020). Our participants were self-selected, mainly young,

educated female university students from the United Kingdom. We cannot assume that the associations between the Dark Triad, social anxiety, and bystander barriers would be the same in other contexts (e.g., in the very rich or the very poor; see also Leckelt et al., 2019). In addition, the instrument that measures bystander barriers (Burn, 2009) has either very generic statements, or statements that relate to night-time settings (e.g., parties or bars). Knowing that a substantial amount of harassment takes place in the workplace, public places, public transport, and on the internet (e.g., Cuenca-Piqueras et al., 2020; Ding et al., 2020; Fileborn et al., 2023), the items in the questionnaires may not be suitable for broader contexts. It would be useful to investigate each context thoroughly, utilising a bottom-up approach and qualitative methods in developing quantitative questionnaires more suitable for understanding context-specific barriers.

In conclusion, our results add to the sparse evidence base linking the Dark Triad and social anxiety to bystander barriers in sexual harassment. Machiavellianism especially, and to some extent, social anxiety, were related to multiple bystander barriers. Psychopathy was a facilitator of bystander behaviour in terms of reduced skills deficits and audience inhibition, and a barrier in terms of failure to notice harassment. It is clear that individual differences play an important role in bystander behaviours. We need a better understanding of how individual differences influence bystander barriers, and what strategies would be useful in targeting the barriers. Future research should deepen our knowledge on the Dark Triad/social anxiety, and how to reduce bystander barriers taking these individual differences into account. This could benefit the development of future interventions, harnessing a wider range of populations with the willingness and ability to intervene to prevent harassment,

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