

The links of subjective and psychological well-being with the Dark Triad traits: A meta-analysis

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study is to investigate the specific links that the Dark Triad traits have with subjective and psychological well-being through a meta-analysis of the existing literature.

Background: Over the past few years, associations between the Dark Triad traits and well-being have been a stimulating but understudied topic in personality research. Method: Cross-sectional, correlational studies examining these relationships were searched in the PsycINFO, PubMed, and Web of Science databases. Meta-analyses were performed at the dimension- and facet-level to account for the multidimensional structure of the Dark Triad traits.

Results: A total of 55 studies were included ($n = 26,252$). In general, grandiose narcissism and boldness/dominance related to higher well-being, while vulnerable narcissism, antagonism, disinhibition, and Machiavellianism related to lower levels of well-being. Age and gender moderated few of these associations.

Conclusions: We recommend including multidimensional measures of the Dark Triad traits as an essential step to move the field forward.

KEYWORDS

Dark Triad, personality, psychological well-being, subjective well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

Central to the study of well-being is the identification of the mechanisms that enable people to lead a life full of happiness beyond the absence of disease (World Health Organization, 2001). Studying the link between personality and well-being has been prominent because personality is regarded as one of the most known predictors of subjective experiences (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006). So far, the information available on the correlates between personality and well-being relates to basic, broad personality traits

(Anglim et al., 2020; Steel et al., 2008). Recently, however, researchers have started paying attention to narrower traits, such as the antagonistic side of personality (Rogoza et al., 2019). Among the most widely studied constructs of the antagonistic side of personality is the “Dark Triad”, which comprises three traits of narcissism psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Although the Dark Triad traits have been usually studied in relation to negative outcomes, research has revealed a common pattern regarding their links with well-being. Despite being frequently studied as one-dimensional

constructs, each of these antagonistic traits has a rich and qualitative multidimensional structure, which might impact on their relationship to well-being indicators (Miller et al., 2021; Patrick et al., 2009; Rauthmann & Will, 2011). Because evaluations of well-being encompass a great part of the content of personality (Zillig et al., 2002), studying subjective and psychological well-being in relation to personality can offer a closer look into the more concatenate dynamics of antagonistic personality. The current study is an attempt to synthesize previous findings on this topic.

1.1 | The Dark Triad of personality

Narcissism, in its broadest sense, is defined as the entitled sense of self-importance (Krizan & Herlache, 2018). Within the literature, there is an agreement that narcissism has a hierarchical structure composed of dimensions and facets (Miller et al., 2021). The more traditionally studied dimensions of narcissism are typically labeled as grandiose and vulnerable narcissism (Wink, 1991). The first is characterized by a blend of aggrandized self-view, self-promoting behaviors, and general entitlement, while the latter is characterized by heightened levels of neuroticism (resulting in e.g., anxiety and hypersensitivity), social withdrawal in the anticipation of experiencing negative feelings (e.g., shame, envy, and spitefulness) and general hostile attribution of others (Di Sarno et al., 2020; Miller & Campbell, 2008; Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017; Rogoza, Ciecuch, et al., 2022; Wright & Edershile, 2018).

These dimensions further disentangle onto three facets—agentic (i.e., self-promotion, assertiveness, and charmingness), antagonistic (i.e., rivalry, enmity, and feelings of superiority), and neurotic (i.e., hypersensitivity, insecurity, and need for social approval; Back, 2018; Crowe et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2021; Rogoza, Ciecuch, et al., 2022; Wright & Edershile, 2018). However, most research in the context of the Dark Triad focuses on assessing grandiose narcissism (Paulhus & Williams, 2002) rather than the trifurcated model (Miller et al., 2021). This is a common practice despite the fact that the literature highlights that antagonistic narcissism is more strongly related to Machiavellianism and psychopathy than agentic narcissism, and that neurotic narcissism is connected with the Dark Triad (Trahair et al., 2020; Truhan et al., 2021). In light of this, to facilitate the research on the Dark Triad, we investigated narcissism as a multidimensional and hierarchical construct within the current meta-analysis (Crowe et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2021).

Psychopathy, in its broadest sense, could be defined as a manipulative and exploitative lifestyle orientation underpinned by robust antisocial tendencies (Cleckley, 1941;

Hare, 1985; Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017; Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2020). Similar to the case of narcissism, most researchers acknowledge the multidimensional structure of this trait (Levenson et al., 1995; Lilienfeld et al., 2012; Lynam & Miller, 2012; Patrick et al., 2009). In fact, all major models of psychopathy acknowledge the two distinct dimensions of antagonism (i.e., callousness, deceitfulness, and aggression) and disinhibition (i.e., impulsivity and irresponsibility; Lynam & Miller, 2015). For instance, Hare and colleagues (Hare, 1991; Hare & Neumann, 2008) defined Factor 1 in terms of interpersonal (e.g., grandiosity and manipulateness) and affective (e.g., callousness and lack of remorse or guilt) aspects, representing antagonism, and Factor 2 in terms of lifestyle (e.g., impulsivity and stimulation seeking) and antisocial domains (e.g., poor behavioral control and criminal versatility), referring to disinhibition. In a similar vein, Levenson et al. (1995) argued that primary and secondary psychopathy converge with Factor 1 and Factor 2, respectively, suggesting that this model is consistent with the distinction between antagonism and disinhibition (Lynam & Miller, 2015).

Nevertheless, some models acknowledge that psychopathy might also entail some additional aspects related to emotional stability and interpersonal assertiveness (e.g., boldness and fearless dominance), which have a distinct nomological network than antagonism and disinhibition (Crowe et al., 2021; Lilienfeld et al., 2012, 2005; Lynam et al., 2011; Lynam & Miller, 2012; Patrick, 2022; Patrick et al., 2009). Nevertheless, research on the Dark Triad typically employs brief assessments of psychopathy (e.g., the Dirty Dozen; Jonason & Webster, 2010) that do not capture dimension-specific variance, as compared to multidimensional measures of psychopathy (Miller et al., 2012). Therefore, like in the case of narcissism, we conceptualized psychopathy as a multidimensional construct within the current investigation.

Machiavellianism is usually defined as an “ends justify the means” orientation, which includes strategical manipulateness, lack of conventional morality, and cynical worldview in addition to antisocial tendencies (Christie & Geis, 1970). Although its multidimensional structure has been acknowledged (Rauthmann & Will, 2011), similar to narcissism and psychopathy, Machiavellianism is commonly interpreted as a one-dimensional construct within the Dark Triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Contrary to the advancements in the research on narcissism and psychopathy (e.g., Miller et al., 2021; Patrick, 2022), Machiavellianism is most frequently analyzed in the context of the Dark Triad (Kowalski et al., 2021). As a result, despite the existence of well-acknowledged multidimensional models of narcissism and psychopathy and some promising investigations about the multidimensionality of Machiavellianism, further research is needed to better

understand this construct (Collison et al., 2018; Sharpe et al., 2021).

An additional issue in the study of Machiavellianism is that most of the existing measures show substantial overlap with psychopathy (McHoskey et al., 1998). In fact, trait profiles of Machiavellianism are more related to expert-rated profiles of psychopathy than Machiavellianism; for instance, experts rated Machiavellianism to be positively related to conscientiousness, while most measures of this trait were negatively related (Miller, Hyatt, et al., 2017). Thus, although we recognize the multidimensionality of Machiavellianism as a construct, within the current investigation we decided to rely on total scores according to the inconsistencies that characterize the existing theoretical models.

1.2 | The Dark Triad traits and their associations with well-being

The literature on well-being has broadly differentiated two operationalizations: subjective well-being and psychological well-being. On the one hand, subjective well-being is typically defined as the subjective perception of one's life conditions (Ng & Fisher, 2013) and is composed of life satisfaction and positive (i.e., happiness) and negative affect (Diener, 1984). On the other hand, psychological well-being expresses how one functions psychologically in response to life's demands in order to reach one's full potential (Vittersø, 2016), and it typically involves the dimensions of self-acceptance, autonomy, positive relationships, personal growth, and environmental mastery (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). While subjective well-being focuses on the maximization of pleasure and avoidance of pain, psychological well-being emphasizes the self-realization of individuals, engaging in one's personal strengths to ensure optimal development and find meaning in life (Huta & Waterman, 2014).

The conceptualization and measurement of subjective and psychological well-being as two separate forms of well-being has been reflected in the scientific literature, wherein the components of well-being are assembled differently in various theories and models (Joshi, 2016). However, some authors have criticized this arbitrary separation based on the high correlations between the two forms (e.g., Kashdan et al., 2008), which can range from 0.47 to 0.85 depending on the statistical approach employed (Gallagher et al., 2009; Joshi, 2016). These results support the notion that both forms of well-being are considered as correlated yet distinct factors (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Joshi, 2016).

Taking into account the unidimensional perspective of the research on the Dark Triad, subjective and psychological well-being are related positively to grandiose narcissism

and negatively to psychopathy and Machiavellianism (e.g., Jonason et al., 2015; Limone et al., 2020; Womick et al., 2019). However, the multidimensional conceptualization of the Dark Triad traits might yield different associations with well-being. For instance, subjective well-being related negatively to vulnerable narcissism and positively to psychopathic boldness (Durand & Lobbestael, 2023; Rose, 2002). Therefore, relying on more nuanced models at the facet-level seems an appropriate approach to disentangle the associations between antagonistic traits and well-being.

1.3 | Current study

The question regarding how personality can account for well-being has been extensively investigated in research on individual differences. Despite the increasing scientific interest in the study of the Dark Triad traits and their link to well-being, only a few studies have addressed the question of how they are specifically related to subjective and psychological well-being. To that end, the aim of the present study is to synthesize the existing literature describing the relationships between the Dark Triad traits and subjective and psychological well-being through a meta-analysis.

To prevent misleading assumptions, it is crucial to consider the multidimensionality of the constructs being analyzed (e.g., Miller et al., 2021; Patrick et al., 2009; Rauthmann & Will, 2011). In the case of subjective well-being, relations will be examined separately for the positive (i.e., positive affect, happiness, and life satisfaction) and negative indicators (e.g., negative affect).¹ Regarding narcissism, we analyzed the relations at two different levels of structural organization; we compared the relationships at the level of dimensions (i.e., grandiose and vulnerable) and facets (i.e., agentic, antagonistic, and neurotic; Crowe et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2021; Rogoza, Crowe, et al., 2022). When analyzing psychopathy, we examined the associations at a general and at a more refined level because some Dark Triad measures seem unable to capture the distinction between antagonism and disinhibition. (Lynam & Miller, 2015). Finally, given the difficulty to conceptualize Machiavellianism as a multidimensional construct, we only examined the associations with the general score of this trait.

Regarding grandiose and agentic narcissism, we expect to find positive associations with subjective and psychological well-being. In contrast, as vulnerable narcissism is mostly underpinned by neuroticism (Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017) and antagonistic narcissism is related to more fragile and unstable evaluations of self-esteem (Geukes et al., 2017), we expect to find negative

associations with well-being for vulnerable, neurotic, and antagonistic narcissism. Regarding psychopathy, we expect to find negative associations with subjective and psychological well-being in the case of antagonism and disinhibition, which are linked to the lack of empathy and low agreeableness, and positive associations in the case of boldness, which is linked to greater self-confidence and lower neuroticism (Collison et al., 2018; Patrick et al., 2009). Finally, given the overlap between Machiavellianism and psychopathy (especially with antagonism and disinhibition), we also expect negative associations with the indicators of well-being (Miller, Hyatt, et al., 2017). This study was registered at PROSPERO (#CRD42021240913).

2 | METHODOLOGY

We followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA-P) to conduct systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Moher et al., 2015) in the planning, implementation, and reporting of the present meta-analysis.

2.1 | Search strategy

A systematic search of the literature was performed in PsycINFO, PubMed, and Web of Science. The first search was performed in December 2020, and a second search was conducted in May 2022 in order to update the systematic search of the literature. The search strategy comprised the following terms and text words: psychological well-being, subjective well-being, well-being, happiness, affect, life satisfaction, Dark Triad, dark personality, dark traits, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The search strings were combined according to the database (see Table S1).

2.2 | Selection of studies

Selection of eligible studies was performed according to the PICOS approach and the following inclusion criteria: the studies should (1) report at least one measure referring to Dark Triad traits (narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) and to subjective or psychological well-being, (2) provide correlation matrices or raw data needed to calculate correlations, (3) include cross-sectional measurements, and (4) involve standardized validated measures. If any study did not explicitly provide correlation coefficients, we contacted the corresponding author of that study to request the necessary information.

Ten studies presented incomplete data (missing correlations). As a consequence, we contacted the reference authors and only four of them responded; however, one could not locate the data and two did not have the specific data that we requested. We excluded studies that (1) were not written in English, Spanish, or Polish; (2) were randomized controlled trials or longitudinal studies; (3) had incomplete or unidentified data; (4) included different population subgroups (e.g., clinical populations); and (5) involved individuals under 18 years of age.

2.3 | Data extraction

Data extraction was performed by the first and second authors. Potentially eligible studies ($k=8,736$) were checked after the duplicates were removed, following a standardized procedure by the two authors. First, the title and abstract were screened, and then the full text was examined for eligible studies. In order to measure the level of agreement between the authors, an inter-rater reliability was obtained using Cohen's kappa coefficient, which was 0.71, demonstrating substantial agreement between them. Finally, disagreements were resolved together with the rest of the authors and the data (i.e., correlation coefficients) were extracted on the measures used to assess well-being and the Dark Triad traits.

2.4 | Quality assessment

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Quality Assessment and Validity Tool for Correlational Studies, adapted from previous studies (e.g., Cicolini et al., 2014; Cummings & Estabrooks, 2003). This tool includes 13 items for assessing the study design, sample, measurement, and statistical analysis in a dichotomous answer format (yes = 1 or 2 points, no = 0 points). The final quality score of each study was summed and categorized as low (0–4 points), medium (5–9 points), or high (10–14 points; see Table 1). The two first authors conducted independently the quality review of the included studies and agreed on a common score for each.

2.5 | Analytic approach

Pearson's correlations (r) were used to calculate the effect size for the relationships of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Correlation coefficients were transformed to Fisher's Z scores, and random-effects models were used to determine the mean effect sizes. Values below 0.29 were considered low, and values above 0.50

TABLE 1 Screening tool for correlational studies.

	No	Yes
Design		
1. Was the study prospective?	0	1
0. Was probability sampling used?	0	1
Sample		
1. Was sample size justified?	0	1
0. Was sample drawn for more than one site?	0	1
0. Was anonymity protected?	0	1
0. Response rate was more than 60%?	0	1
Measurement		
1. Was the outcome measured reliably?	0	1
0. Was the outcome measured using a valid instrument?	0	1
0. Was the dependent variable measured using a valid instrument?	0	1
0. If a scale was used for measuring the dependent variable, was the internal consistency ≥ 0.70 ?	0	2
0. Was a theoretical framework used for guidance?	0	1
Statistical analysis		
1. If multiple outcomes were studied, are correlations analyzed?	0	1
0. Were outliers managed?	0	1
Overall study validity rating (0–4 = Low; 4–9 = Medium; 10–14 = High)	Total:	

were considered high, with values in between considered moderate (Cohen, 1992).

Following the empirical investigation of the structure of narcissism (Rogoza, Crowe, et al., 2022), we used the following scales as indicators of grandiose narcissism: Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Hall, 1979), Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; Back et al., 2013)—admiration, Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI; Pincus et al., 2009)—grandiosity, Five Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI)—grandiose narcissism, Narcissistic Grandiosity Scale (NGS; Crowe et al., 2016; Rosenthal et al., 2020), Short Dark Triad (SD3; Jones & Paulhus, 2014)—narcissism, Dirty Dozen (DD; Jonason & Webster, 2010)—narcissism, Raskin and Novacek Narcissism Scale (RNNS; Raskin & Novacek, 1989); and the following scales as indicators of vulnerable narcissism: Hypersensitive Narcissism

Scale (HSNS; Hendin & Cheek, 1997), FFNI-vulnerable narcissism, NARQ-rivalry, and PNI-vulnerability, which were further disentangled onto agentic (NPI, NARQ-admiration, PNI-grandiosity, FFNI-agentic, NGS, SD3-narcissism, DD-narcissism), antagonistic (NARQ-rivalry, FFNI-antagonistic), and neurotic narcissism (HSNS, PNI-vulnerability, FFNI-neurotic).

For psychopathy, we only analyzed the general score for the scales that do not capture the distinction between antagonism and disinhibition: SD3-psychopathy (Jones & Paulhus, 2014), DD-psychopathy (Jonason & Webster, 2010), Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (SRP; Paulhus et al., 2016), and Psychopathic Personality Inventory (PPI; Lilienfeld et al., 2005)—self-centered impulsivity. When appropriate, we differentiated among psychopathic antagonism (Triarchic Psychopathy Measure [TriPM]-meanness; Patrick et al., 2009, Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale [LSRP]-primary psychopathy; Levenson et al., 1995), disinhibition (TriPM-disinhibition, LSRP-secondary psychopathy), and boldness (TriPM-boldness, PPI-fearless dominance). Finally, we used all available Machiavellianism scores as indicators (i.e., SD3-Machiavellianism; Jones & Paulhus, 2014, DD-Machiavellianism; Jonason & Webster, 2010, MACH-IV; Christie & Geis, 1970).

The measurement of subjective well-being included scales that evaluated the cognitive (e.g., Satisfaction With Life Scale [SWLS]; Diener et al., 1985) and affective components (e.g., Positive And Negative Affect Schedule [PANAS], Watson et al., 1988; Subjective Happiness Scale [SHS], Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), while psychological well-being included measures that evaluated indicators contemplated within theoretical eudaimonic models of well-being (e.g., Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale; Ryff, 1989, Flourishing Scale; Diener et al., 2010).

If a study reported more than one correlation coefficient for the same indicator (e.g., as a result of using multiple measures), the statistical dependency between effect sizes was handled using robust variance estimation (RVE; Hedges et al., 2010). By estimating a weighted mean of the observed effect size, the RVE method allows accounting for studies that violate the independent assumption because more than one effect size per outcome variable is reported. We used the *robu* function of the *robmeta* R-package version 2.0 (Fisher & Tipton, 2015) and we specified a hierarchical weighing scheme to reflect the study-level dependence structure (Tipton, 2015). In RVE, Tau-squared (τ^2) quantifies the between-study variance. Regardless of the advantages of RVE to address statistical dependency (Moeyaert et al., 2017), this method does not focus on heterogeneity parameters, which are simply used as estimation of inverse variance weights. To account for this limitation, we analyzed the I^2 statistics to report the

proportion of variance in estimates that is due to heterogeneity. The I^2 was calculated using the *metabias* function of the meta R-package version 6.2-0 (Balduzzi et al., 2019).

In meta-analytic studies, it is important to rely on multiple methods to assess different sources of publication bias (Coburn & Vevea, 2019). Egger's test (Egger et al., 1997) was analyzed to inspect publication bias based on the statistical significance of the included studies. However, Egger's test may yield inaccurate results if heterogeneity is present. Therefore, we analyzed and focused on weight-function (or selection) models (Hedges & Vevea, 2005) because they are better suited to assess publication bias in the presence of heterogeneity. Based on weighted distribution theories, weight-function models first model an unadjusted random- (or fixed-) effects model in which the observed effect sizes are assumed to follow a normal distribution as a function of predictors. As a second step, this function estimates an adjusted model that includes a set of weights for the specified p -values intervals ($p < 0.025$ by default) and produces estimates adjusted for publication bias. Then, the likelihood-ratio test compares the unadjusted and adjusted models. Significant values indicate potential threat of publication bias. To calculate the (adjusted and unadjusted) meta-regression coefficients, we used the *weightfunct* function of the *weightr* R-package version 2.0.2. (Coburn & Vevea, 2019). Although a good practice to detect publication bias is to include a minimum of 10 studies, it is possible to proceed with six studies (Lin et al., 2018). Therefore, these statistics should be interpreted cautiously in meta-analyses involving less than six studies. All meta-analyses including less than two studies were not assessed for publication bias.

Pre-planned sub-group analyses were performed to identify other sources of publication bias and analyze potential differences depending on the scale used to assess the Dark Triad traits. Pre-planned moderator analyses were conducted for age and gender (% of females) at the facet-level. Subgroup and moderation analyses (controlling for effect size dependency) were conducted using the *rma* function of the *metafor* R-package version 3.8-1 (Viechtbauer, 2010). All analyses were carried out in RStudio version 2021.9.1.372 (RStudio Team, 2021). The data, Rcode, and all supplementary materials are available at: <https://osf.io/c5xmt/>.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Selection of studies and quality assessment

A total of $k=55$ studies were included out of the initial 8,736 (Figure 1). The total number of participants was

26,252, involving undergraduate and adult samples. Table S2 shows the main characteristics of the selected studies (split according to the study code).

According to the tool for screening the quality of the included studies, we found no study with low quality. Of the final 55 studies, only 14 reported moderate quality and 41 high quality, indicating low risk of bias. Given that we only considered cross-sectional studies, the first question of the screening tool was not scored by any study. Overall, the domains with the lowest rates concerned the management of outliers and the justification of the samples, whereas the strongest domains regarded the measurement and statistical analysis.

3.2 | How do the Dark Triad traits relate to well-being?

Meta-analytic effect sizes are presented in Table 2. A total of 371 effect sizes were calculated: 272 for narcissism (182 for subjective well-being, 51 for negative affect, and 39 for psychological well-being), 64 for psychopathy (45 for subjective well-being, 11 for negative affect, and eight for psychological well-being), and 35 for Machiavellianism (25 for subjective well-being, six for negative affect, and four for psychological well-being).

3.3 | Associations between narcissism and indicators of well-being

Grandiose and agentic narcissism reported low, positive associations with positive indicators of subjective well-being, while vulnerable and neurotic narcissism displayed low, negative associations. Antagonistic narcissism also showed low, negative relations with this outcome, but the coefficient turned out nonsignificant when controlling for effect size dependency. Overall, the effect estimates showed high variability, suggesting that a high proportion of variability was due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error (all $I^2 > 86\%$). Vulnerable, antagonistic, and neurotic narcissism reported moderate, positive relations with negative affect. Nevertheless, the analysis of these three facets only included four, two, and three studies, respectively. Grandiose and agentic narcissism were unrelated to negative affect. The variability among effect estimates was high, suggesting high heterogeneity among studies (all $I^2 > 75\%$). Vulnerable and neurotic narcissism were also negatively related to psychological well-being. Each of the studies included in these meta-analyses provided two effect sizes, but the RVE coefficients controlling for statistical dependency revealed nonsignificant relations. Antagonistic narcissism also reported significant

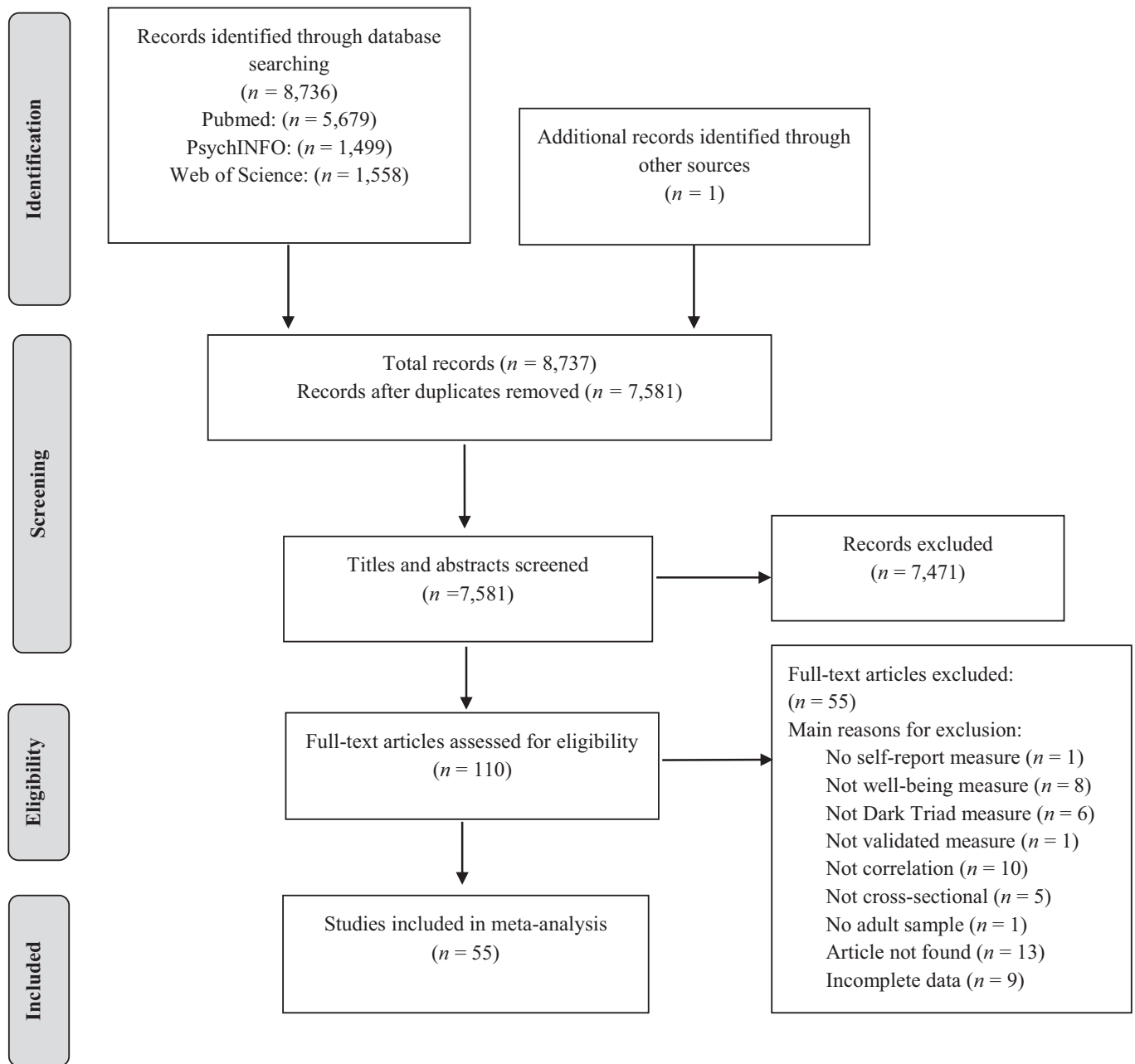


FIGURE 1 Flow-chart of the literature search and selection process.

relations with psychological well-being. Notwithstanding, this effect size was based on a single study, therefore the final estimate should be interpreted with caution. There was indication of high heterogeneity among studies (all $I^2 > 93\%$).

3.4 | Associations between psychopathy and indicators of well-being

Boldness/Dominance was moderately and positively related to positive indicators of subjective well-being. Variability between studies represented low heterogeneity

($I^2 < 45\%$). In contrast, negative associations with positive indicators of subjective well-being were found for disinhibition (moderate) and general psychopathy (low). The negative correlation with antagonism turned out non-significant after accounting for effect size dependency. Between-study variability was high (all $I^2 > 83\%$). In general, few studies assessed the associations of psychopathy with negative affect and psychological well-being. Both antagonism and disinhibition were positively related to negative affect, with disinhibition reporting the highest coefficient. By contrast, boldness/dominance showed positive relations with psychological well-being (although $k=1$), whereas disinhibition and general psychopathy

TABLE 2 Effect sizes (*r*'s) of the associations between the different facets of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism with indicators of well-being.

Measure	Outcome	K (effect sizes)	N	Random-effects model		Robust variance estimation	
				<i>r</i> (95% CI)	<i>I</i> ²	<i>r</i> (95% CI)	τ^2
<i>Narcissism</i>							
Grandiose	Subjective well-being (Positive affect and life satisfaction)	52 (72)	24,677	0.21 (0.17, 0.24)	86.1%	0.21 (0.17, 0.24)	0.01
Vulnerable		12 (16)	6290	-0.22 (-0.30, -0.15)	89.8%	-0.22 (-0.31, -0.13)	0.00
Agentic		52 (76)	24,015	0.21 (0.18, 0.24)	86.5%	0.21 (0.18, 0.25)	0.01
Antagonistic		7 (8)	4100	-0.13 (-0.23, -0.04)	89.3%	-0.13 (-0.29, 0.02)	0.02
Neurotic		7 (10)	3469	-0.26 (-0.35, -0.16)	86.4%	-0.26 (-0.39, -0.12)	0.02
Grandiose	Subjective well-being (Negative affect)	19 (21)	7785	0.02 (-0.03, 0.06)	75.1%	0.02 (-0.03, 0.06)	0.02
Vulnerable		4 (4)	1610	0.55 (0.39, 0.71)	93.0%		
Agentic		19 (21)	7785	0.01 (-0.03, 0.05)	75.3%	0.01 (-0.04, 0.05)	0.00
Antagonistic		2 (2)	1341	0.41 (0.32, 0.50)	80.3%		
Neurotic		3 (3)	1160	0.50 (0.41, 0.60)	40.6%		
Grandiose	Psychological well-being	11 (14)	4491	0.07 (-0.05, 0.19)	96.0%	0.07 (-0.11, 0.25)	0.04
Vulnerable		3 (6)	1394	-0.37 (-0.54, -0.20)	94.8%	-0.37 (-0.99, 0.25)	0.05
Agentic		9 (12)	3836	0.05 (-0.08, 0.18)	96.0%	0.05 (-0.15, 0.25)	0.03
Antagonistic		1 (1)	388	-0.35 (-0.45, -0.26) ^a	NA		
Neurotic		3 (6)	1034	-0.36 (-0.51, -0.20)	93.9%	-0.36 (-0.92, 0.21)	0.04
<i>Psychopathy</i>							
Boldness/dominance	Subjective well-being (Positive affect and life satisfaction)	3 (5)	1801	0.28 (0.23, 0.32)	44.7%	0.28 (0.14, 0.41)	0.00
Antagonism		6 (8)	2907	-0.13 (-0.23, -0.03)	91.0%	-0.13 (-0.31, 0.04)	0.02
Disinhibition		6 (8)	2907	-0.30 (-0.39, -.21)	89.4%	-0.30 (-0.50, -0.10)	0.02
General		17 (24)	9341	-0.14 (-0.18, -0.09)	83.6%	-0.14 (-0.20, -0.07)	0.01
Boldness/dominance	Subjective well-being (Negative affect)	1 (1)	615	-0.25 (-0.32, -0.17)	NA		
Antagonism		1 (2)	1230	0.20 (0.06, 0.34)	NA		
Disinhibition		1 (2)	1230	0.44 (0.28, 0.59)	NA		
General		5 (5)	2851	0.19 (0.14, 0.24)	57.3%		
Boldness/ Dominance		1 (1)	554	0.35 (0.27, 0.44)	NA		
Antagonism	Psychological well-being	2 (2)	1085	-0.13 (-0.38, 0.11)	96.9%		
Disinhibition		2 (2)	1069	-0.45 (-0.68, -0.22)	96.6%		
General		3 (3)	932	-0.26 (-0.33, -0.19)	40.3%		

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Measure	Outcome	K (effect sizes)	N	Random-effects model		Robust variance estimation	
				r (95% CI)	I ²	r (95% CI)	τ ²
<i>Machiavellianism</i>							
Unidimensional model	Subjective well-being (Positive affect and life satisfaction)	18 (25)	9336	-0.11 (-0.17, -0.06)	86.0%	-0.11 (-0.17, -0.05)	0.01
Unidimensional model	Subjective well-being (Negative affect)	6 (6)	2846	0.12 (0.01, 0.22)	82.8%		
Unidimensional model	Psychological well-being	4 (4)	1365	-0.29 (-0.47, -0.11)	88.4%		

Note: k, number of studies; N, sample size; r, meta-analyzed correlation coefficient; I², proportion of variance that it is due to heterogeneity; τ², variability in study-average effect sizes.
 *The six subscales of the PWBS were weighted in FFNI-G and FFNI-V, making it possible to report the CI.

showed negative relations. No significant associations emerged for antagonism. Except of general psychopathy, the variability among the rest of the facets was high (all I² > 95%).

3.5 | Associations between Machiavellianism and indicators of well-being

Machiavellianism showed negative associations with positive indicators of subjective well-being (low) and psychological well-being (moderate), and positive associations with negative affect (low). Effect estimates were non-homogeneous (all I² > 82%).

3.6 | Publication bias

Table 3 shows the heterogeneity parameters calculated through the Egger's and likelihood-ratio tests. Due to evidence of heterogeneity among the meta-analyses, the likelihood-ratio test provides a more appropriate assessment of publication bias. Results revealed potential threats only between subjective well-being and the facets of grandiose, vulnerable, antagonistic, and neurotic narcissism. When accounting for this bias, the positive association of grandiose narcissism slightly decreased, while the negative associations of vulnerable and neurotic narcissism slightly increased. Meta-analyses for psychopathy and Machiavellianism did not present evidence of publication bias.

3.7 | Subgroup and moderator analyses

The sub-group analysis revealed significant differences on effect sizes depending on the measure used to assess the Dark Triad traits (see Table S3). In narcissism, the relationship with positive indicators of subjective well-being decreased or turned out nonsignificant when the DD, PNI-G, PNI-V, and FFNI-AN were used, although most of the significant subgroup analyses included three or less studies, except for the NPI (k = 32), the SD3 (k = 9), and the NARQ-R (k = 5). In relation to negative affect and psychological well-being, measures reported a significant, positive (SD3 and DD) or negative (SD3, PNI-G, and PNI-V) relationship, with the exception of the NPI. In psychopathy, only the PPI-CH did not report a significant relationship with positive indicators of subjective well-being. Lastly, for Machiavellianism, the negative association with positive indicators of subjective and psychological well-being was higher for the MACH (k = 2), while the

TABLE 3 Heterogeneity parameters for the Dark Triad traits facets analysis in relation to well-being indicators.

Measure	Outcome	Egger's test	Weight-function models	
			Likelihood ratio test (<i>p</i> -value)	<i>r</i> (95% CI)
<i>Narcissism</i>				
Grandiose	Subjective well-being (Positive affect and life satisfaction)	$\beta = 2.26, t = 2.03, p = 0.045$	0.018	0.16 (0.09, 0.22)
Vulnerable		$\beta = 2.79, t = 1.00, p = 0.335$	0.001	-0.26 (-0.30, -0.21)
Agentic	Subjective well-being (Negative affect)	$\beta = 1.98, t = 1.75, p = 0.084$	0.076	0.17 (0.11, 0.23)
Antagonistic		$\beta = -0.02, t = -0.00, p = 0.996$	0.047	-0.19 (-0.27, -0.13)
Neurotic	Psychological well-being	$\beta = 3.75, t = 1.56, p = 0.158$	0.015	-0.29 (-0.35, -0.22)
Grandiose		$\beta = -2.84, t = -2.29, p = 0.033$	0.845	0.01 (-0.05, 0.07)
Vulnerable	Psychological well-being	$\beta = -6.80, t = -1.88, p = 0.201$	0.804	0.55 (0.42, 0.67)
Agentic		$\beta = -1.92, t = -1.44, p = 0.167$	0.792	0.01 (-0.05, 0.08)
Neurotic	Psychological well-being	$\beta = -2.35, t = -5.29, p = 0.119$	0.982	0.53 (0.49, 0.57)
Grandiose		$\beta = 7.87, t = 1.37, p = 0.194$	0.348	0.15 (-0.07, 0.37)
Vulnerable	Psychological well-being	$\beta = 11.88, t = 0.53, p = 0.624$	0.674	-0.36 (-0.55, -0.17)
Agentic		$\beta = 6.96, t = 1.12, p = 0.287$	0.426	0.13 (-0.11, 0.36)
Neurotic	Psychological well-being	$\beta = 9.20, t = 0.44, p = 0.680$	0.726	-0.35 (-0.52, -0.18)
<i>Psychopathy</i>				
<i>Boldness/dominance</i>				
Antagonism	Subjective well-being (Positive affect and life satisfaction)	$\beta = 14.48, t = 0.33, p = 0.764$	0.947	0.28 (0.24, 0.32)
Disinhibition		$\beta = -7.01, t = -0.82, p = 0.445$	0.256	-0.17 (-0.25, -0.08)
General	Subjective well-being (Negative affect)	$\beta = -15.54, t = -2.88, p = 0.028$	0.860	-0.30 (-0.39, -0.20)
General		$\beta = 0.93, t = 0.41, p = 0.688$	0.660	-0.14 (-0.19, -0.09)
General	Psychological well-being	$\beta = 0.03, t = 0.01, p = 0.995$	0.358	0.21 (0.15, 0.26)
General		$\beta = 3.28, t = 0.50, p = 0.704$	0.961	-0.45 (-0.68, -0.22)
<i>Machiavellianism</i>				
Unidimensional model	Subjective well-being (Positive affect and life satisfaction)	$\beta = 0.08, t = 0.03, p = 0.973$	0.245	-0.07 (-0.19, 0.04)
Unidimensional model	Subjective well-being (Negative affect)	$\beta = -6.31, t = -2.43, p = 0.072$	0.357	0.05 (-0.17, 0.26)
Unidimensional model	Psychological well-being	$\beta = 0.13, t = 0.01, p = 0.990$	0.999	-0.29 (-0.34, -0.24)

Note: β , Egger's test regression coefficient; *r* = meta-analyzed correlation coefficient controlling for publication bias.

positive relationship with negative affect was greater for the DD ($k = 6$).

Table S4 presents the results of the moderation analyses. Studies with a mean age ranging from 18 to 42 years old moderated positively the relationship between grandiose narcissism and negative affect. Likewise, age moderated negatively the relationship between positive indicators of subjective well-being and vulnerable narcissism, neurotic narcissism, and disinhibition. Gender (a higher percentage of females than males in the samples) moderated positively the relationship between grandiose narcissism and psychological well-being, and between general psychopathy and negative affect. Conversely, gender moderated negatively the relationship between general psychopathy and positive indicators of subjective well-being. In all these cases, the regression coefficients were very low, suggesting that increases in the sample size and in the percentage of females were slightly related to changes in the associations between the Dark Triad traits and indicators of well-being. It is also worth noting that disinhibition and general psychopathy explained a substantial amount of the differences in true effect sizes in their relationship with positive indicators of subjective well-being ($R^2 = 93.25$; $I^2 = 39.64$) and negative affect ($R^2 = 99.97$; $I^2 = 0.05$), respectively.

4 | DISCUSSION

With the increasing interest in understanding the psychological factors tied to individuals' subjective evaluations of their lives and the scientifically based roots of personality in these evaluations, it is paramount to investigate how different traits can account for the experience of well-being. Although several lines of evidence are available concerning the role of normal personality traits, there is still much to investigate regarding the role that antagonistic forms of personality have in well-being. In seeking answers to these questions, we meta-analyzed the existing studies addressing the link between the Dark Triad traits and subjective and psychological well-being.

4.1 | Narcissism and well-being

The results of the current meta-analysis support the claim that narcissism is a hierarchical and multidimensional construct (Miller et al., 2021). At the dimension-level, we found strong evidence that grandiose narcissism was positively linked solely to positive indicators of subjective well-being, whereas vulnerable narcissism was negatively related to these indicators and to psychological well-being, and positively related to negative affect. These results are congruent with previous findings in that vulnerable

narcissism is characterized by elevated levels of neuroticism, high psychological distress, and general psychological fragility (Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017; Rogoza, Crowe, et al., 2022).

The differentiation of narcissistic facets shed further light onto these associations. While agentic and neurotic narcissism presented a similar pattern of associations with well-being to those of grandiose and vulnerable narcissism, respectively, antagonistic narcissism reported a slightly different pattern. Antagonistic narcissism (when controlling for effect size dependency) was unrelated to all indicators of well-being. Nevertheless, the number of effect sizes analyzed for antagonistic narcissism was fewer than for the other facets, which constraints more in-depth comparisons.

Although there seems to be an association between grandiose narcissism and desirable outcomes, it is important not to fall under the certainty that narcissism entails psychological adjustment. For example, Zuckerman and O'Loughlin (2009) found that improvements in well-being predicted higher narcissism over time, whereas increases in grandiose narcissism did not predict gains in well-being. Individuals scoring high on grandiose narcissism seek continuous bolstering from the people they try to exploit as a means to endorse their self-esteem and achieve their goals (Back, 2018). Given that narcissism could be considered as a process that fluctuates from feeling agentic to neurotically narcissistic (e.g., Back, 2018; Edershile & Wright, 2021), the changes in the perception of well-being might be part of the same process, fluctuating together with the changes from feeling momentarily agentic to neurotic.

Our results informed that the relationship between narcissism and well-being depended on the measure used to assess the Dark Triad traits. More specifically, we found that two of the narcissism scales deviated from the general pattern of associations. The DD and the PNI-G were unrelated to positive indicators of subjective well-being, while all the remaining grandiose narcissism measures were positively related to them. Furthermore, we observed that the DD was positively related to negative affect (as confronted to the nonsignificant relations of other grandiose narcissism measures). Likewise, we found mixed results regarding psychological well-being, as the NPI was unrelated, the SD3 was positively related, and the PNI-G was negatively related to it.

The discrepancies between the DD and the PNI-G are somewhat unsurprising. In fact, extant research revealed that the nomological network of the DD deviates from traditional measures of narcissism (Maples et al., 2014; Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017). Similarly, the content of the PNI-G as pure indicator of grandiose narcissism was also a subject of discussion (Miller et al., 2016). Recent research

has revealed that, within the structure of narcissistic personality, the PNI-G is the only scale of grandiose narcissism that shares a considerable amount of variance with vulnerable narcissism (Rogoza, Ciecuch, et al., 2022). Our results replicated this finding, highlighting the elevated negative relationship between the PNI-G and psychological well-being. Summing up, these findings build upon a body of research pointing out that grandiose narcissism, as typically studied in the context of the Dark Triad traits, only captures a specific amount of variance that does not exhaust the breadth of narcissistic personality (Miller et al., 2021). Thus, researchers should take into account the multidimensional structure of narcissism in order to advance the study of the Dark Triad.

4.2 | Psychopathy and well-being

Psychopathy, in its broadest sense, was a negative correlate of well-being, as it showed negative relations to positive indicators of subjective and psychological well-being, and positive relations to negative affect. Nevertheless, when differentiated from more specific aspects, we found a corresponding pattern of associations only for disinhibition. Antagonism, although related to elevated levels of negative affect, was unrelated to subjective and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the boldness/dominance facet revealed contradictory results. Unlike any other psychopathy facet, it related positively to positive indicators of subjective and psychological well-being, and negatively to negative affect. This finding confirms that this facet captures qualitatively different aspects of psychopathy (Evans & Tully, 2016; Lynam & Miller, 2012; Patrick, 2022). The results of the current meta-analysis support the concerns raised by Miller and Lynam (2012), and further reinforced by Crowe et al. (2021), regarding the inappropriateness of including boldness/dominance within the structure of psychopathy. Notwithstanding, similar to the case of narcissism, the results of the current meta-analysis supported the importance of acknowledging the multidimensional nature of psychopathy.

4.3 | Machiavellianism and the issue of redundancy

Although psychopathy is perceived as the most malevolent trait within the Dark Triad, the considerable overlap shared with Machiavellianism has led researchers to argue about their redundancy (McHoskey et al., 1998; Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017; Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2019). Indeed, psychopathy and Machiavellianism tap similar antagonistic content, but psychopathy seems to be more robust in

its assessment (Rogoza, Crowe, et al., 2022). The associations between Machiavellianism and well-being expectedly replicated most of the findings observed for general psychopathy. The results of the current meta-analysis are no different from those of previous self-report studies; therefore, future research should use multidimensional measures of Machiavellianism matching the expert ratings (Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017) in efforts to move the field forward (Collison et al., 2018).

Machiavellianism, as it is currently measured, seems to lack complexity as compared to narcissism and psychopathy. This is evidenced by the expert ratings of the basic personality traits profiles of a prototypical case of Machiavellianism (Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017). Compared to psychopathy, theoretical ratings of experts marked Machiavellianism with, for instance, lower impulsiveness and sensation seeking and higher self-discipline and dutifulness. However, empirical results suggested that the existing Machiavellianism measures are more closely related to the expert profiles of psychopathy (Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017). There were some recent attempts to move this issue forward (e.g., through the development of the Five-Factor Machiavellianism Inventory; Collison et al., 2018), but the lack of empirical data did not allow us to analyze this question more in-depth.

4.4 | The whole picture: What is the footprint of antagonistic traits on well-being?

Overall, we can highlight two general patterns that can explain the associations between the Dark Triad traits and well-being. First, based on research showing that the experience of positive affect is linked positively to well-being and negatively to psychopathology (Watson et al., 1988), the tendency to feel negative emotions in a recurrent way (vulnerable and neurotic narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) regardless of serving as a means to accomplish goals (e.g., avoiding trust on others) can be detrimental to well-being. Second, problems with social connections can serve as a basis that precludes well-being, which is especially viable for vulnerable and neurotic narcissism (Rogoza & Danieluk, 2021). Extant research demonstrated that healthy relationships are a prominent predictor of mental health and a necessary component of well-being (Keyes, 1998; WHO, 2001). In fact, social functioning problems are highlighted as the foremost features of personality disorders in DSM-5 Section III (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Nevertheless, the fact that vulnerable narcissism showed the greatest associations with negative affect and psychological well-being is unsurprising given the neurotic tendency and psychological

fragility that characterize this trait, as well as the deficits in interpersonal relations that it can further catalyze (Miller et al., 2021; Rogoza, Ciecuch, et al., 2022).

This combination of findings increases the need to promote strategies focused on being overt to nurturing healthy relationships with others (Lucas & Diener, 2001), maximizing pleasant experiences (Jose et al., 2012), or self-generating positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) as prescriptive pathways to enhance well-being. Although personality traits are considered fairly stable over time (McCrae & Costa, 1990), it is possible to *modify* them in an attempt to boost well-being (Margolis & Lyubomirsky, 2019). According to this, and in light of our findings, the negative influence of some Dark Triad traits may, to some extent, be targeted and attenuated through strategies aimed at promoting well-being.

4.5 | Limitations and future avenues

Despite the significance of the present findings, our investigation has several limitations. Meta-analyses were based on correlational studies, preventing interpretations about causality. Research might benefit from exploring this question in longitudinal studies. The inclusion criteria were restrictive to studies measuring subjective and psychological well-being. In view of the academic debates regarding the conceptual divergence between indicators of well-being, the results should be interpreted in light of the chosen features. The small number of studies included in some of the meta-analyses (e.g., antagonistic narcissism or boldness/dominance) can be hindered by the fact that small *ks* can influence random-effect model estimates of heterogeneity (Viechtbauer, 2005). Additionally, the Dark Triad traits measures are frequently criticized as a result of measurement and validity issues (Maples et al., 2014; Miller, Lynam, et al., 2017; Persson et al., 2019; Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2019). The results obtained from the meta-analysis warrant caution when interpreting them because of the sample variability of the included studies. Hence, an interesting line of inquiry would be to investigate whether other variables, such as the year of publication or country, can moderate the relationship between the Dark Triad traits and well-being. Future studies on these links are needed to draw firmer conclusions.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ana Blasco-Belled developed the research idea. Radosław Rogoza and Carles Alsinet supervised the development

of the research. Ana Blasco-Belled and Claudia Tejada-Gallardo searched, cleaned, and analyzed the data. Ana Blasco-Belled, Claudia Tejada-Gallardo and Radosław Rogoza drafted the manuscript and completed the revisions. Carles Alsinet edited and refined the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data and code associated with the analysis are available at <https://osf.io/c5xmt/>.

ETHICS STATEMENT

No ethical approval was needed to conduct this research.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE MATERIAL FROM OTHER SOURCES

No permission to reproduce material was needed to conduct this research.

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ENDNOTE

¹ We separately meta-analyzed the effects on negative affect because, despite being defined as a component of subjective well-being, it is considered a negative indicator of this construct and it deviates from the results of the positive indicators.

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