Repelled by Virtue? The Dark Triad and Eudaimonic Narratives

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Abstract

We propose that the dark triad of personality predicts how recipients respond to eudaimonic narratives (stories dealing with purpose in life, the human condition, and human virtue). Matched eudaimonic or non-eudaimonic videos were presented via random assignment. The more individuals lack empathy and organize their world around self-promotion – reflected in the so-called dark triad of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy – the more they perceived the eudaimonic stories (vs. control) to be inauthentic and corny (perceived corniness). This effect translated to a more negative overall evaluation of the eudaimonic videos (moderated mediation). Self-reported feelings of being touched, moved, and inspired (meaningful affect) were largely unaffected by the dark triad, suggesting that these personality factors do not disable emotional responses to eudaimonic narratives.

Keywords: Eudaimonia; Meaningful Affect; Narcissism; Machiavellianism; Psychopathy; Dark Triad; Corniness

**Repelled by Virtue? The Dark Triad and Eudaimonic Narratives**

Recently, scholars have turned their attention to the ways that media may be harnessed for positive outcomes (Reinecke & Oliver, 2017).  This growing body of literature on the positive sides of media paints a hopeful picture, suggesting that "meaningful" media narratives are not only ones that many individuals deeply appreciate, but are also ones that hold promise of being a catalyst for personal and social good, such as reducing stereotyping, increasing altruism, enhancing well-being, and heightening feelings of gratitude (Oliver, Ash, & Woolley, 2012; Oliver et al., 2015).

However, as with many forms of media, there are likely variations in how "meaningful media" are perceived by audience members – what may be inspiring or elevating for one person may seem silly or sentimental to another.  The purpose of the present research is to examine viewer characteristics that may prevent or diminish responses to eudaimonic stories that prior research has identified as consequential to positive media influence, consistent with recent calls to examine differential susceptibility to effects of mediated communication (e.g., Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).  In particular, our research has focused on the role of the "dark triad" (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy) in negative responses to media content that may otherwise be perceived as meaningful or elevating.

Examining the moderating impact of dark triad personality factors speaks to the premise that eudaimonic narratives affect recipients by eliciting emotions related to perceptions of human connectedness or compassion (Oliver et al., 2015).  Persons who are temperamentally disinclined to such perceptions should not respond to eudaimonic narratives in the same way as those more open to such perceptions.  Such an examination may also help increase the understanding of recipient responses to eudaimonic stories more generally.  If dispositionally inclined to do so, people may protect themselves from stories of human virtue and related content that is characteristic of eudaimonic media by judging these stories to be inauthentic, mawkish, and corny.  We introduce and

test as an outcome and mediator a construct we call *perceived corniness* as an indicator of distancing oneself from eudaimonic content.

Substantively, this study is also of potential interest. Persons that score high on the dark triad personality dimensions are known to be attracted to positions of power and influence in business and in politics (Spurk, Keller, & Hirschi, 2016). Gaining insights into how such persons respond to narrative information that may be intended to provide a more empathetic understanding of others may prove significant practically as well as theoretically.

**Eudaimonic Narratives and the Experience of Meaningfulness**

Foundational theories of media entertainment have tended to focus on enjoyment or pleasure as a primary and desired audience response (Zillmann, 2000; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985).  More recent theorizing has expanded the view of audience gratifications to also recognize that media content can not only be frequently *enjoyed* by audiences and address hedonic concerns, but that it can also be deeply *appreciated* by audiences and address *eudaimonic* (or meaningful) needs (Bartsch et al., 2016; Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Rieger, Reinecke, Frischlich, & Bente, 2014). These eudaimonic responses appear to consist of complex affective and cognitive blends, with individuals reporting feelings of being moved, touched, and tender, and experiencing bodily responses such as feeling chills, choked up, or an open or warm chest (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012; Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012).  A variety of media portrayals can undoubtedly inspire insight and meaning.  That said, we – along with previous conceptions – suggest that content that grapples with questions such as purpose in life, the human condition, or human virtue are particularly likely to elicit eudaimonic responses (Oliver & Raney, 2011).  In other words, we consider stories that deal with purpose in life, the challenges of the human condition, and/or human virtue (in short: eudaimonic stories) to have a higher propensity to elicit eudaimonic responses than stories in which purpose in life, the human condition, or human virtue are not a prominent part of the storyline (in short: non-eudaimonic stories).

Given the emotional, tender, and empathic qualities of meaningful media experiences, it is not surprising that research has started to examine whether individual-difference variables are predictive of eudaimonic motivations for consuming media as well as favorable responses to eudaimonic content.  For example, Oliver and Raney (2011) reported that eudaimonic motivations for media consumption (e.g., "I like movies that focus on meaningful human conditions") were positively correlated with greater reflectiveness, intellectualism, searching for meaning in life, need for cognition, and need for affect.  Likewise, Diessner, Iyer, Smith, and Haidt (2013) found that self-reported engagement with beauty, including natural beauty, moral beauty, and artistic beauty, was associated with greater benevolence, spirituality, and feelings of connectedness with others.  Finally, Aquino, McFerran, and Laven (2011) found that individuals scoring high on a measure of moral identity reported greater elevation in response to a moving news story and reported that the story motivated them to be a better person.

Together, studies on eudaimonic entertainment suggest that people can be very moved and touched by meaningful experiences, media experiences included.  Such responses to eudaimonic stories, however, are likely influenced by stable individual differences among audience members. Initial findings have directed the attention to those who are more introspective, spiritual, aware of the human condition, concerned with morality, and compassionate.  What, then, might these studies imply about people who score low on (or lack) these traits?

**The Dark Triad**

Since scholars began thinking about life and the human condition, individuals have been identified who are driven by desires for domination and for whom justice, temperance, generosity and the like seem to be of little or no value (e.g., Aristotle, 350 B.C.E.).  Much of the current theoretical and empirical work is guided by the belief that such dark personalities are best described with the help of several distinct but related traits, and that there are meaningful individual differences in the everyday (non-incarcerated, non-clinical) population with respect to these traits.  The arguably

most prominent line of research in the field is based on the *dark triad* of personalities consisting of the traits narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.  The core defining aspect of all three traits is callousness toward others (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Paulhus, 2014): "all three entail a socially malevolent character with behavior tendencies toward self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness" (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, p. 557).  Thus, the dark triad factors center on a disposition that is – as we suggest – incompatible with the recognition of human virtues, questions of a deeper purpose in life, or the human condition. A focus on the dark triad allows us to independently examine different components within the dark personalities spectrum, and the dark triad is specifically conceptualized to describe everyday personality differences with respect to empathy in the non-clinical realm (unlike, for example, autism or alexithymia).  We will briefly outline the main properties of the three traits before we explicate their relationship to the experience of eudaimonic stories in greater detail.

*Narcissism* is characterized by an inflated sense of the self and by feelings of self-entitlement (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006; Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013).  Most often researchers have investigated grandiose narcissism which involves a sense of self-importance, uniqueness, dominance, and grandiosity (Furnham et al., 2013).  Individuals with pronounced grandiose narcissism perceive themselves as gifted, remarkable, and successful, and they engage in active self-presentation (they tend to brag about their accomplishments).  Narcissists possess a high self-esteem, but their self-esteem is unstable and they likely react aggressively when their embellished self-concepts are threatened (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998).  The large majority of empirical findings on narcissism within the non-clinical range of personality variation is based on a variant of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI, Raskin & Terry, 1988) to measure this trait. An introduction to narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), which is not focused on in the present study, is provided by Pincus and Lukowitsky (2010). In the field of communication and media, a recent surge in studies has connected narcissism to the use of social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and

Instagram. Indeed, SNSs entail particular features of communication that might suit narcissistic tendencies (for a meta-analytic overview see Gnambs & Appel, 2018).

*Machiavellianism* is "a strategy of social conduct that involves manipulating others for personal gain, often against the other's self-interest" (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996, p. 285).  It is characterized by a striving for long-term achievement, which is sought to be accomplished through any means necessary.  A strong emphasis on preparation and planning prior to social interactions, flexible tactics, alliance building as well as the control of short-term impulses are typical features. The concept is closely linked to the writings of 15th and 16th century Italian politician and author Niccolo Machiavelli.  His writings were used to develop a self-report scale and a conceptual framework of this trait (Christie & Geis, 1970).  Today the Mach IV scale originally introduced by Christie and Geis is still frequently employed to measure Machiavellianism.  More recently, researchers who wish to measure Machiavellianism along with one of both other dark triad factors can use the Dirty Dozen Scale (DDS, Jonason & Webster, 2010) or the Short Dark Triad scale (SD3, Jones & Paulhus, 2014), which show good reliability and validity. Despite historical and contemporary interest in Machiavellianism, research that connects Machiavellianism to media use is rare with the possible exception of some research on violent and sexual media (e.g., Tamborini, Stiff, & Zillmann, 1987) and on social networking sites (e.g., Fox & Rooney, 2015).  For example, one study showed that all three components of the dark triad were related to trolling behavior online (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014).

*Psychopathy* is characterized by high impulsivity and thrill-seeking along with a tendency for norm-transgressions and criminal behavior (Jones & Paulhus, 2011).  The psychopathy addressed here exhibits meaningful and fine-grained variations in the general public.  It should not be confused with the personality constellation of serial killers and other "psychopaths" or with antisocial personality disorder, which represent far extremes in the willingness to transgress norms and in the absence of empathy.  Psychopathy, in the sense studied here, is associated with reduced learning

from mistakes or negative feedback, and the trait seems to be connected with deficits in higher moral reasoning (Jones & Paulhus, 2011).  Recent theory has emphasized, however, that psychopathy is distinct from sadism (Paulhus, 2014).  Like both other traits discussed before, it is unrelated to intelligence (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Story, & Banks, 2013), so neither an evil genius-hypothesis nor a compensation hypothesis finds support.  Self-report scales like the self-report psychopathy scale (SRP, Hare, 1985) have been introduced for non-criminal samples; both dark triad scales (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Jonason & Webster, 2010) are increasingly used to measure psychopathy as a personality trait.  Research that relates psychopathy to media use is scarce, with scattered research in the fields of media violence (e.g., Coyne, Nelson, Graham-Kevan, Keister, & Grant, 2010) and social networking sites (Garcia & Sikström, 2014).[1]

**The Dark Triad and Responses to Eudaimonic Narratives**

To date, little is known about general aspects of personality that explain interindividual differences in the experience of eudaimonic narratives.  Initial research describes – rather than explains – stable individual differences in the choice of and response to eudaimonic media. Addressing this research lacuna, our aim was to examine the role of the dark triad of personality – narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy – regarding recipients' responses to more or less eudaimonic stories.  Extending prior research, we not only examined affirmative responses such as meaningful affect but more negative responses to eudaimonia that we believe would arise from the dark triad.

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[1] All three major stand-alone measures, the NPI (grandiose narcissism), the Mach IV (Machiavellianism), and the SRP (psychopathy), have shown good reliability and validity in many studies over the past decades (cf. Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013). Among the three measures, the NPI has been used most extensively to date, and a short form (NPI-16) as well as translations and adapted versions are available in several languages.  Whereas all three constructs are often conceived as one-dimensional, different researchers have argued for a varying number of facets (see Furnham et al., 2013, for a summary of previous findings).  The psychometric properties of both measures aimed at assessing all three constructs have been discussed intensely.  The DDS emphasizes brevity and includes 4 items per construct. Analyses of its psychometric properties have been mixed.  The SD3 incorporates 9 items per construct with generally positive results on its reliability and validity. When comparing both measures, Jones and Paulhus (2014) found greater predictive power for the SD3.

Eudaimonic narratives should pose a challenge for persons high in narcissism, psychopathy, and/or Machiavellianism.  Eudaimonic narratives result in emotions such as being moved, inspired, and touched (Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al., 2012) and experiencing poignant responses (Slater, Oliver, & Appel, 2016).  These emotions are essentially empathetic, involving recognition of universalities of human experience: love, loss, the transience of life itself (Slater et al., 2016; Slater, Oliver, Appel, Tchernev, & Silver, 2017).  Such responses inherently involve recognition of the humanity of others.  To recognize the humanity of others is to recognize oneself in them, and vice versa—that their most essential hopes and needs are ours as well. Such recognition should be antipathetic to narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism.  Narcissists place their own needs and desires above those of any one else.  Psychopathy involves a lack of concern regarding the impact of one's actions on others.  Machiavellianism describes a tendency to maneuver for one's own benefit at the expense of others.

These assumptions follow the theoretical foundations of the dark triad (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Paulhus, 2014) as well as previous research on the relationships between the three dark triad dimensions and empathy.  Prior research has consistently reported a negative relationship between overall trait empathy on the one hand and narcissism (e.g., Watson & Morris, 1991), Machiavellianism (e.g. Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010), and psychopathy (e.g., Mahmut, Homewood, & Stevenson, 2008) on the other hand.  In recent years, affective and cognitive components of empathy have been distinguished (Vreeke & van der Mark, 2003; cf. Hepper, Hart, & Sedikides, 2014).  Affective empathy describes the feeling of other-oriented emotions. This includes the vicarious experience of others' emotions and the experience of sympathy (i.e., feeling for another person).  Cognitive empathy describes understanding others' thoughts and feelings (i.e., inferring mental states in a sense of mentalizing or theory of mind), but also considering, appreciating, and taking into account others' mental states.  Theoretically, the mentalizing (theory of mind) aspect of cognitive empathy should precede the consideration aspect of cognitive empathy and emotional

empathy (Vreeke & van der Mark, 2003).  In that sense, Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy could interfere at different stages with an empathetic response to eudaimonic stories.

Likewise, when bad things happen to others, dark personalities tend to respond more often with a smile and they report experiencing more Schadenfreude in response to others' misfortunes (James, Kavanagh, Jonason, Chonody, & Scrutton, 2014; Porter, Bhanwer, Woodworth, & Black, 2014), demonstrating a lack of affective empathy.  A study by Porter and colleagues (2014) further showed that dark personalities tend to seek out media portrayals of misfortunes (i.e., "watch videos on YouTube of people accidently getting hurt", p. 65).

The literature provides mixed evidence regarding the origin of this lack of affective empathy. Are dark personalities unable to decode others' thoughts and feelings?  Whereas some studies show lower mentalizing skills among individuals scoring high on the dark personality dimensions, (e.g., Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010; Lyons, Caldwell, & Shultz, 2010; van Zwieten et al., 2013; Vonk, Zeigler-Hill, Mayhew, & Mercer, 2013), a lack of associations or even positive associations were observed in other studies regarding psychopathy (Richell et al., 2003; Wai & Tiliopulos, 2012), Machiavellianism (Barlow, Qualter, & Stylianou, 2010; Esperger & Bereczkei, 2012; Wai & Tiliopulos, 2012), and narcissism (Hepper et al., 2014; Stellwagen & Kerig, 2013).  One recent study (Vonk, Zeigler-Hill, Ewing, Mercer, & Noser, 2015) highlighted potential differences between the three dimensions; they found moderately negative relationships between the performance on several mentalizing tasks and psychopathy, small negative relationships between performance scores and Machiavellianism, and zero to small positive relationships with grandiose narcissism.  In another series of studies that focused on narcissism exclusively (Hepper et al., 2014), this trait was negatively related to self-reported empathetic responses to a person who suffered from a relationship breakup (Study 1), but narcissism was unrelated to state empathy in response to a 10 minute documentary about domestic violence (Study 2).  The results further indicated that an instruction to take the perspective of a victim increased empathy among recipients that were high on narcissism.

In sum, the findings on the origins of a lack of empathy are mixed and point out the possibility that early stages of empathetic processing could be functional among dark personalities. Moreover, the literature suggests that potential differences between the three dark triad dimensions and audience responses to affective stimuli need to be taken into account.

Connecting research on empathy to the processing of eudaimonic stories, we can expect audience members high in the dark triad personality characteristics to respond in distinctive ways to eudaimonic narratives.  One possibility, of course, is that they simply do not have the same kind of emotional responses to a eudaimonic narrative—that their personality structures preclude the emotional resonance to these stories that lead to feeling moved, touched, or inspired.  A second possibility is that dark personalities, while having emotional responses consistent with eudaimonic stories, are inclined to distance themselves from these eudaimonic stories via negative assessments of these stories.  They may be more likely to perceive stories as corny or overly sentimental that most viewers would not, as a means of minimizing the experience of emotions dissonant with their self-system. As such, distancing oneself from an emotionally moving story should have much in common with the concept of reactance.  Brehm and Brehm (2013) suggest reactance is a response to perceived constraints on freedom.  Reactance may be considered a state response to a given message as well as a trait (Quick & Stephenson, 2008).  Recently, Kloss and Bartsch (2015) demonstrated the importance of reactance to prosocial messages, and particularly ones that are evidently persuasive in intent. Specifically, these authors found that when an advertisement about charitable giving was personalized to the viewer, individuals were more likely to report reactance to the message (e.g., "I feel resistance and rejection against the recommendations given in the ad," cf. Hastall & Sukalla, 2012, in Kloß & Bartsch, 2015), thereby canceling out the effects that it had on prosocial outcomes via increased empathic involvement.

We suggest that perceptions of emotional manipulation are akin to perceptions of attempts to constrain freedom: emotional manipulation may be viewed as an effort to force a message recipient

to feel a way he or she would prefer not to.  In the present research, we propose that aspects of the viewer (as opposed to a message variable such as personalization) may heighten the likelihood of such a negative and distancing response.  Specifically, we reason that the story might be perceived by those who dislike empathetic emotions and wish to distance themselves from such feelings as emotionally manipulative in trying to induce emotions they prefer not to feel.  The concept of emotional manipulation, however, is not thought to be intuitive on the part of the recipient, and thus, explaining and probing this concept too explicitly is likely to cause a recipient high in dark triad qualities to perceive a eudaimonic message that way.  More common, intuitive responses to a story perceived as emotionally manipulative might be that it is not authentic, that it is mawkish or corny. Accordingly, we refer to this response as "perceived corniness"—a concept akin to reactance but specific to stories, in which the emotion-evoking aspect of the story is dismissed as contrived and artificial.

The alternative explanations of emotional incapacity or emotional distancing, of course, are not mutually exclusive.  Persons high in dark triad traits are likely to generate evaluations of corniness as soon as they start feeling meaningful affect, suppressing such affective responses.  They may be also less likely to experience the meaningful affect in the first place.  And, if they have generated percepts of corniness, they are less likely to report meaningful affect.  Conversely, to the extent that a story does generate substantial experience of meaningful affect, one is unlikely to judge it as corny or sentimental.  Thus, the causal processes underlying the relationship between meaningful affect and corniness are complex and likely intertwined during the process of watching or reading a story.  Therefore, we propose a correlational hypothesis: The experience of meaningful affect and perceptions of corniness are negatively related (Hypothesis 1).

Based on the negative relationship between emotional empathy and the dark triad outlined above, we further expected that whenever individuals follow eudaimonic stories (vs. non-eudaimonic stories), both perceived corniness and meaningful affect would be contingent on the three dark triad

dimensions.  Moreover, meaningful affect and perceived corniness should be related to the overall evaluation of a story or media product.  A media product that elicits meaningful affect is likely evaluated positively, whereas perceived corniness contributes to a more negative evaluation.  Thus, meaningful affect and perceived corniness could mediate the interactive influence of eudaimonic content and dark triad traits on the overall evaluation of a story from negative to positive – one of the arguably most relevant outcome variables in media psychology and related disciplines (e.g., attitude towards the ad in consumer research, cf. Albarracin, Zanna, Johnson, & Kumkale, 2005).  The resulting moderated mediation model is depicted in Figure 1.

With respect to narcissism, we expected that eudaimonia in stories would yield higher perceived corniness ratings in individuals with strong narcissism, consistent with the explanation of distancing from empathetic stories that deal with fundamental human questions such as the human condition or human virtue.  This would be statistically represented by an interaction between the eudaimonia in stories and trait narcissism scores (Hypothesis 2a).  Similarly, complementary effects are hypothesized for reduced meaningful affect in response to the dark triad personality dimensions, based on the proposition that persons relatively high on narcissism would be less emotionally susceptible to feeling empathetic emotions.  We expected that the effect of eudaimonic stories eliciting more meaningful affect than non-eudaimonic stories would decrease with increasing narcissism scores, statistically represented by an interaction between the eudaimonia in stories and trait narcissism scores (Hypothesis 2b).  We further assumed that finding a video clip to be mawkish or corny would translate to a more negative evaluation of the clip.  Thus, higher corniness should be associated with a more negative overall evaluation of the video, establishing a moderated mediation effect (Hypothesis 3a).  We further assumed that higher meaningful affect would be associated with a more positive overall evaluation of the video.  As a result, a second moderated mediation effect was expected (Hypothesis 3b).

Similar predictions were made for Machiavellianism. We expected that eudaimonic stories would lead to higher perceived corniness ratings in individuals with strong Machiavellianism, statistically represented by an interaction between story eudaimonia and trait Machiavellianism scores (Hypothesis 4a). Likewise, higher Machivellianism scores were expected to minimize the difference between eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic videos regarding experienced meaningful affect (Hypothesis 4b). Within a moderated mediation model, corniness was expected to translate the interactive effect of story eudaimonia and Machiavellianism on the overall evaluation of the video (Hypothesis 5a). As a second pathway in our moderated mediation, meaningful affect was expected to translate the eudaimonia by Machiavellianism interaction effect on the overall positive evaluation of the video (Hypothesis 5b).

Our third set of predictions addressed psychopathy. We expected that eudaimonia in stories would lead to higher perceived corniness ratings in individuals with strong psychopathy, statistically represented by an interaction between eudaimonic content and trait psychopathy (Hypothesis 6a). A complementary effect was expected for meaningful affect; we assumed that eudaimonia in stories would lead to lower meaningful affect in individuals with strong psychopathy (Hypothesis 6b). Both variables should mediate the interactive influence of eudaimonia in stories and psychopathy to the overall evaluation of the video, with perceived corniness (Hypothesis 7a) and meaningful affect (Hypothesis 7b) constituting parallel mediators in the moderated mediation model.

**Method**

In an experimental study, participants initially indicated their levels of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (the dark triad of personality). Following a between-subjects experimental design with random assignment, participants subsequently watched one brief video clip from a pool of four eudaimonic video clips and four control clips of similar length and topic. Our measures included responses indicating meaningful affect (Oliver et al., 2012), a measure indicating negative responses to the videos (perceived corniness), as well as an overall evaluation of the videos.

Note that we administered the personality scales prior to the clips and the dependent variables in order to guarantee independence of the personality scores and the experimental treatment.

**Participants**

The number of participants was determined a priori to reach or exceed 200. This would have allowed us to identify interaction effects (treatment by personality) of $f^2$ = .040, representing a small to medium effect size ($f^2$ = .02 and $f^2$ = .15 correspond to small and medium effect sizes, respectively, cf. Cohen, 1988). The underlying sensitivity analysis was conducted using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner & Lang, 2009), given α = .05 and power (1-β) = .80.

A total of 258 people completed the study via the Internet (more than 200 individuals were allocated as some percentage of careless responding and individual technical problems were expected). All participants gained access to the experiment via MTurk and received a compensation of US$ 1.[2] The survey software (Unipark) prohibited repeat responding. The time to complete each part of the survey was monitored, and we excluded 13 participants from further statistical analyses who did not watch the presented video completely. An additional 11 participants indicated that they had technical problems with the video or that they had watched the video without sound. Seven participants further failed to answer our control question correctly.[3] The remaining 227 participants (96 women) were between 18 and 67 years old (*M* = 33.02; *SD* = 10.14).

**Experimental Stimuli**

We selected four eudaimonic videos that incorporated key aspects of eudaimonic stories according to the literature (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011).[4] The eudaimonic videos displayed human virtues together with emotional contexts, human connection, and contemplative scenarios. For the non-eudaimonic content, we used selective stimulus sampling and

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[2] The invitation to MTurk participants led them to a page which randomly assigned them to the present experiment or another, unrelated experiment.

[3] The control question asked participants to check "strongly agree". Participants who did not respond as requested were excluded. The control question was meant to identify participants that provided answers without reading the item texts.

[4] The stimuli are available on request. Please feel free to send an e-mail to Mary Beth Oliver or Markus Appel.

matched each eudaimonic video by a non-eudaimonic video that shared potentially relevant variables (e.g., genre, context, ethnicity/gender/age of characters).  This was meant to reduce the number of potential confounds that are associated with a comparison between eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic examples.

The resulting stimulus videos were identical to those used by Slater, Oliver, & Appel, (in press) and consisted of four eudaimonic narratives and four non-eudaimonic narratives.  The two experimental conditions were each represented by a news story, an advertisement, a short narrative, and a movie trailer.  The eudaimonic narrative in the news category was about a middle-school football team that let a disabled classmate score a touchdown (201 seconds), whereas the non-eudaimonic news narrative featured the effects of a drought and reported that a high-school football team was nonetheless able to play (178 seconds).  In the ad category, the eudaimonic and the non-eudaimonic video were both for Google.  The eudaimonic advertisement (91 seconds) focused on a father's record of his daughter's childhood; the non-eudaimonic ad (91 seconds) focused on the advantages of Google's search engine.  The eudaimonic short narrative (182 seconds) was an Asian-produced commercial message about a man who helps an impoverished little boy.  Thirty years later the boy has become a surgeon; remembering his benefactor the surgeon saves the man who is in a health crisis.  The non-eudaimonic narrative (254 seconds) was produced in Asia as well and featured the perils and pains of procrastination.  The eudaimonic movie trailer (107 seconds) was about the documentary *Life in Day* that employed user-generated home videos to show the common connections of love, hope, and fear among people throughout the world; the non-eudaimonic movie trailer (134 seconds) was about the documentary *Wordplay* that portrayed crossword puzzle creators and aficionados (e.g., celebrities such as Jon Stewart) and a cross-word puzzle conference.  One of the videos was randomly assigned and presented after the dark triad measures, before the assessment of meaningful affect, perceived corniness, and overall evaluation.

**Manipulation Check of the Experimental Stimuli**

We assessed the effectiveness of our manipulation of eudaimonic videos by having a separate sample of participants view and rate the videos in terms of their focus on issues associated with eudaimonic concerns.  A total of 160 participants recruited from Mechanical Turk participated in the pretest, with three dropped because they failed an attention-check item (final $N$ = 157; males = 46.5%; $M_{age}$ = 36.79, $SD$ = 11.79).  Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the eight videos employed in the study, and were then asked to rate the extent to which the video: 1) grappled with issues pertaining to purpose in life, 2) the human condition, and 3) human virtue (7-point scales ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*).  These three items were averaged to reflect perceptions that the video pertained to eudaimonic concerns, $M$ = 4.80, $SD$ = 1.58, Cronbach's α = .81).

An independent sample *t*-test showed that scores for perceived eudaimonia were higher for participants who watched a eudaimonic video ($M$ = 5.63, $SD$ = 1.27) than the for those who watched a non-eudaimonic video, $M$ = 3.94, $SD$ = 1.40, $t(155)$ = 7.93, $p$ < .001, Cohen's $d$ = 1.26.  This large effect size supports the validity of our manipulation.  Next, we employed a 2 (Eudaimonic Focus: no, yes) X 4 (Genre: trailers, advertisements, news, narratives) ANOVA to examine whether the treatment effect of eudaimonic vs. non-eudaimonic videos was consistent across all four different genres.  Aside from the main effect for eudaimonic focus, $F$ (1, 149) = 61.98, $p$ < .001, $\eta_p^2$ = .29, this analysis showed no significant main effect for genre, $F$ (3, 149) = 1.66, $p$ = .18, $\eta_p^2$ = .03, and no significant interaction effect, $F$ (3, 149) = 0.24, $p$ = .87, $\eta_p^2$ = .01.  Hence, these data provided evidence that our intended manipulation of eudaimonic themes was successful, and that our manipulation was consistent across the different genre instantiations.

**Measures**

**Narcissism.**  Trait narcissism was measured with the 16 items of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16, Ames et al., 2006), a standard instrument to quantify non-clinical narcissism. Each item consists of two statements, and the participants are requested to indicate, which of both statements represents him- or herself best (e.g., "I am more capable than other people - There is a lot

that I can learn from other people"). Among each pair of statements, one statement is indicative of a narcissistic tendency. The number of narcissistic answers was summed (Cronbach's α = .82).

**Machiavellianism.** We measured trait Machiavellianism with the help of the Short Dark Triad Scale (SD3, Jones & Paulhus, 2014) which includes nine items on Machiavellianism (e.g., "Make sure your plans benefit yourself, not others"). The items employed a 5-point scale ranging from 1= *disagree strongly* to 5 = *agree strongly* (Cronbach's α = .86).[5]

**Psychopathy.** Trait psychopathy was also assessed with the help of the Short Dark Triad Scale (SD3, Jones & Paulhus, 2014), which includes nine items on psychopathy (e.g., "People who mess with me always regret it"). The items were scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1= *disagree strongly* to 5 = *agree strongly* (Cronbach's α = .79).

**Perceived corniness.** Five items addressed the notion of corniness and inauthenticity of the video. Participants were asked to indicate their perception of the video with the attributes *silly*, *over-sentimental*, *corny*, *authentic*, and *genuine*. The latter two items were reverse-coded. All items were measured with a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much* (Cronbach's α = .77).

**Meaningful affect.** The extent to which watching the video narrative was considered to be personally meaningful and to constitute a eudaimonic experience was assessed with the help of nine items (*emotional*, *moved*, *touched*, *tender*, *compassionate*, *meaningful*, *inspired*, *elevated* and *uplifted*). We adapted these items from prior research examining meaningful affect in response to media (e.g., Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al., 2012). The items employed a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*, Cronbach's α = .97).

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[5] Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted with Amos for all measures with continuous response scales. Machiavellianism exhibited an acceptable model fit in a model in which the relationship between the errors of two items was freely estimated. Both items dealt with keeping secrets, $\chi^2$= 51.6 (df= 26), p = .002, TLI = .951, CFI = .965, RMSEA = .066. The model fit for psychopathy was acceptable when the relationship between the errors of two items that both described control issues was freely estimated, $\chi^2$= 46.6 (df= 26), p = .008, TLI = .943, CFI = .959, RMSEA = .059. Perceived corniness exhibited an acceptable model fit when two correlations between errors were freely estimated. The wordings of the related items were similar in a sense that agreement indicated higher corniness, $\chi^2$= 7.6 (df = 3), p = .054, TLI = .969, CFI = .991, RMSEA = .083. The model fit for meaningful affect was acceptable once two correlations between errors were freely estimated, $\chi^2$= 58.4 (df = 25), p < .001, TLI = .980, CFI = .986, RMSEA = .077.

**Overall evaluation.**  One item asked the participants about their overall evaluation of the video.  Response options ranged from very negative (-3) to very positive (3) on a seven-point scale (the results were transformed to a scale ranging from 1 to 7).[6]

## Results

### Main Effects of the Experimental Manipulation and Zero-Order Relationships

We first examined mean differences of meaningful affect in response to the eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic narratives.  As expected, scores of meaningful affect were higher for participants who watched a eudaimonic video ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.50$) than for those who watched a non-eudaimonic video, $M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.29$, $F(1, 219) = 225.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .51$.  Complementing the manipulation check reported above, this large effect size provides additional support for the validity of our manipulation.  Next, we inspected whether we could observe the treatment effect of eudaimonic vs. non-eudaimonic videos in all four different genres (news story, advertisement, short narrative, movie trailer).  An ANOVA with eudaimonia and genre as predictors showed a significant interaction effect for meaningful affect, $F(3, 219) = 12.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$.  The simple main effects revealed that for all four genres, the eudaimonic narrative elicited significantly more meaningful affect than the non-eudaimonic narrative, reflecting an ordinal interaction (movie trailers: $M_{low} = 3.41$; $SD_{low} = 1.29$; $M_{high} = 4.93$; $SD_{high} = 1.37$, Google advertisements: $M_{low} = 2.47$; $SD_{low} = 1.23$; $M_{high} = 5.04$; $SD_{high} = 1.63$, news: $M_{low} = 2.12$; $SD_{low} = 0.85$; $M_{high} = 5.48$; $SD_{high} = 1.43$, short Asian narratives: $M_{low} = 1.62$; $SD_{low} = 0.74$; $M_{high} = 5.36$; $SD_{high} = 1.60$), all $p$s $< .001$.  The effect sizes ranged from $\eta_p^2 = .07$ to $\eta_p^2 = .30$.  To summarize, although effects varied in size, eudaimonic stories elicited more meaningful affect than non-eudaimonic stories in all four genres.

Additionally, eudaimonic stories elicited less perceived corniness ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.17$) than non-eudaimonic stories, $M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.21$, $F(1, 219) = 39.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$, irrespective of

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[6] The survey further included measures on positive and negative affect, which were not analyzed in detail.  Moreover, it included an item on the potential sharing of the videos.  The overall evaluation and sharing items were strongly related, $r(227) = .69$, $p < .001$.  Results for the sharing item and the overall evaluation item were similar.

the video genre, $F(3, 219) = 1.83$, $p = .142$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. On average, eudaimonic stories were

evaluated more positively than non-eudaimonic stories, $M = 6.25$, $SD = 1.06$ vs. $M = 4.99$, $SD =$

1.30, $F(1, 219) = 65.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$, which varied significantly with respect to the video

genre, $F(3, 219) = 4.02$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. For all video genres, overall evaluation scores were

higher in the eudaimonic video condition than in the non-eudaimonic video condition, again

reflecting an ordinal interaction (movie trailers: $M_{low} = 5.60$; $SD_{low} = 1.37$; $M_{high} = 6.32$; $SD_{high} = 0.87$,

Google advertisements: $M_{low} = 5.27$; $SD_{low} = 1.16$; $M_{high} = 6.05$; $SD_{high} = 1.00$, news: $M_{low} = 4.41$;

$SD_{low} = 0.96$; $M_{high} = 6.39$; $SD_{high} = 1.16$, short Asian narratives $M_{low} = 4.65$; $SD_{low} = 1.37$; $M_{high} =$

6.18; $SD_{high} = 1.21$), all $p$s < .021.

Zero-order correlations between the measures (irrespective of experimental group) can be

found in Table 1.  Hypothesis 1 predicted a negative association between perceived corniness and

meaningful affect.  In line with this assumption perceived corniness and meaningful affect were

indeed negatively related, $r(227) = -.55$, $p < .001$.  As expected, recipients who were strongly moved

and touched by a story perceived the story to be corny and over-sentimental.  Moreover, the zero-

order correlations revealed moderate to strong positive correlations among the dark triad constructs,

and strong correlations between corniness, meaningful affect, and the overall evaluation.

Irrespective of the experimental story variations, psychopathy was positively related to perceived

corniness, and negatively related to the overall evaluation.

**Interactions between Eudaimonic (vs. Non-Eudaimonic) Stories and the Dark Triad**

In a series of analyses we examined the moderating role of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and

psychopathy on corniness and meaningful affect and whether this moderation effect translated to the

overall evaluation of the stories (moderated mediation).  Bootstrapping analyses were conducted

using the SPSS process syntax (Hayes, 2013), version 2.16.3, model 8, with default standard errors

and 1000 iterations.  Our analyses included the overall evaluation as the dependent variable and our

experimental treatment as the predictor.  The experimental condition as a categorical predictor was

dummy-coded, 0 = non-eudaimonic video, 1 = eudaimonic video, and narcissism, Machiavellianism,

and psychopathy were centered (*z*-standardized, Aiken & West, 1991).  Following our theoretical

model (Figure 1), corniness and meaningful affect served as parallel mediators within a single model.

Our first set of analyses focused on narcissism as the moderator.  As predicted in Hypothesis

2a, narcissism moderated the effect of eudaimonic (vs. non-eudaimonic) videos on perceived

corniness, as indicated by a significant interaction, coefficient = .58 (*SE* = .16), *p* < .001, 95%CI

[.25; .90], $\Delta R^2$ = .05[7].  The simple slopes reveal that differences between the corniness ratings

converge with increasing narcissism scores – the more narcissistic, the less recipients find non-

eudaimonic videos to be corny, and the more narcissistic, the more they find eudaimonic videos to be

corny.  Inference statistics show that the former effect is significant (effect = -0.49, *SE* = 0.13, *p* <

.001), whereas the latter is not (effect = 0.08, *SE* = 0.09, *p* = .37).  Thus, we find a significant

difference between the narcissism and corniness associations in both conditions, with slopes varying

in direction as predicted.  The interaction, however, is to a substantial extent, driven by a negative

association in the non-eudaimonic video condition.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that narcissism serves as a moderator of the effect of eudaimonic

(vs. non-eudaimonic) videos on meaningful affect.  The interaction failed to reach significance at the

conventional level (*p* = .05), coefficient = -.38 (*SE* = .20), *p* = .063, 95%CI [-.77; .02].  Thus, support

for Hypothesis 2b was not established.  The simple slopes for both experimental groups seemed to

converge with increasing narcissism (Figure 2b), i.e., narcissism was associated with more

meaningful affect in the non-eudaimonic video condition and narcissism was associated with less

meaningful affect in the eudaimonic video condition.  Both trends, however, were not significantly

different from zero (*B* = 0.24, $SE_B$ = 0.17, *p* = .15; *B* = -0.14, $SE_B$ = 0.12, *p* = .23).

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[7] The effect size estimates for the significant interaction effects are based on hierarchical regression analyses with the story factor (dummy-coded) and the personality factor (continuous, z-standardized) entered in the first step, and the interaction entered in the second step.

Our mediator corniness predicted the criterion overall evaluation, coefficient = -.45 (*SE* =

.05), *p* < .001, 95%CI [-.55; -.34], indicating that higher corniness was associated with a more

negative evaluation.  Likewise, meaningful affect predicted the overall evaluation, in a sense that

more meaningful affect predicted better evaluations, coefficient = .30 (*SE* = .04), *p* < .001, 95%CI

[.21; .39].  The moderated mediation proper yielded a significant effect for the mediator corniness,

estimate = -.26 (*SE* = .09), 95%CI [-.50; -.11].  In line with Hypothesis 3a, the more narcissistic, the

less recipients found non-eudaimonic videos to be corny, and the more they found eudaimonic

videos to be corny, which translates to differences in the overall evaluation of the videos.  The

moderated mediation effect for the mediator meaningful affect failed to be statistically significant,

estimate = -.11 (*SE* = .07), 95%CI [-.28; -.01], suggesting that in contrast to what was expected in

Hypothesis 3b, meaningful affect did not carry the influence of narcissism on the overall evaluation.

The second model focused on Machiavellianism.  In line with Hypothesis 4a,

Machiavellianism moderated the effect of eudaimonic (vs. non-eudaimonic) videos on perceived

corniness.  The interaction effect differed from zero, coefficient = .48 (*SE* = .16), *p* = .003, 95%CI

[.17; .80], $\Delta R^2$ = .03.  The interaction graph (Figure 2c) shows that Machiavellianism is negatively

associated with the ascribed corniness of non-eudaimonic videos, but positively associated with the

ascribed corniness of eudaimonic videos.  While the simple slope for the non-eudaimonic videos is

not significant (effect = -.20, *SE* = .13, *p* = .11), the simple slope for the eudaimonic videos is

significant (effect = .28, *SE* = .10, *p* = .004).  In contrast to hypothesis 4b, there was no such

moderation effect of Machiavellianism on the effect of video condition on meaningful affect,

coefficient = -.13 (*SE* = .19), *p* = .50, 95%CI [-.51; .25].  Corniness and meaningful affect predicted

the criterion as reported before.  The moderated mediation was significant for the mediator corniness,

estimate = -.21 (*SE* = .09), 95%CI [-.43; -.07].  The higher the Machiavellianism of the participants,

the more they found the video to be inauthentic and corny, which translated to relatively lower

overall evaluations of the eudaimonic video (Hypothesis 5a).  The moderated mediation effect for the

mediator meaningful affect (Hypothesis 5b) was not statistically significant, estimate = -.04 ($SE$ =

.06), 95%CI [-.16; .07], which could be expected from the missing interaction between

Machiavellianism and the experimental treatment reported above.

The third model included psychopathy as the moderator. Psychopathy moderated the effect

of eudaimonic (vs. non-eudaimonic) videos on perceived corniness, coefficient = .36 ($SE$ = .16), $p$ =

.02, 95%CI [.04; .68], $\Delta R^2$ = .02, as predicted in Hypothesis 6a. For the non-eudaimonic videos,

psychopathy was virtually unrelated to corniness (effect = .00, $SE$ = .13, $p$ = .99), whereas for the

eudaimonic videos, psychopathy predicted corniness (effect = .36, $SE$ = .10, $p$ < .001, Figure 2d).

As hypothesized, the higher recipients' psychopathy, the more they distance themselves from

eudaimonic stories, as indicated by higher perceived corniness scores, while they are indifferent to

non-eudaimonic stories. Hypothesis 6b predicted that psychopathy world moderate the effect of the

experimental factor on meaningful affect. The findings provide no support for this hypothesis,

coefficient = -.31 ($SE$ = .20), $p$ = .11, 95%CI [-.69; .07]. The moderated mediation was significant

for the mediator corniness, estimate = -.15 ($SE$ = .09), 95%CI [-.39; -.02], showing that the

differential effect of psychopathy on corniness affected the overall evaluation as well (Hypothesis

7a). In line with the missing interaction between psychopathy and the experimental treatment (no

support for Hypothesis 6b), the moderated mediation effect for the mediator meaningful affect was

not statistically significant, estimate = -.09 ($SE$ = .06), 95%CI [-.24; .01], demonstrating no support

for Hypothesis 7b.

## Discussion

The field of entertainment research has seen a proliferation of work on media content that

conveys feelings of appreciation, insight, and meaning (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver &

Bartsch, 2010). We used the term "eudaimonic narratives" to characterize stories that deal with

purpose in life, the human condition, human affections, or human virtues. Stories that are inspiring

or elevating for one person, however, may seem inauthentic and corny to another. Such stories

should be particularly objectionable for individuals who lack empathy and organize their world around self-promotion, irrespective of others and social norms. These characteristics are reflected in the dark triad of personality – narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Thus, we argued that the dark triad predicts whether eudaimonic narratives are appealing or repulsive, over and above more idiosyncratic story-, genre- or topic-related variations. In so doing, we provide a test of an underlying premise of research on eudaimonic narratives—that their impact depends on the capacity to engage recipient responses consistent with compassionate and connected responses (Oliver et al, 2015).

Given that the eudaimonic qualities of narratives, rather than narratives or media per se, were of focal interest, responses to eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic stories were compared. Individuals who scored high on the dark triad scales tended to express higher distancing (perceived corniness) in response to eudaimonic stories, whereas the opposite or no effect was found for non-eudaimonic stories – an interaction effect that translated to the overall evaluation of the videos. With respect to the possibility of dark triad personality characteristics being associated with diminished emotional responses of the type normally seen in response to eudaimonic narratives, little supporting evidence could be obtained. Most notably, there was no evidence for an interaction effect showing diminished meaningful affect by condition with these personality traits. The moderated mediation tests also indicated that perceptions of corniness on responses to the story mediated the interaction between the dark triad and the eudaimonic/non-eudaimonic story condition on overall evaluations, but differing amounts of meaningful affect did not. The moderated mediation effects highlight the value of considering distancing responses in the form of perceived inauthenticity and corniness in research on eudaimonic stories.

Our results not only add to the growing body of research on eudaimonic narratives, they contribute to the literature on behavioral and emotional consequences of the dark triad of personalities within the field of personality research. Experiencing meaningful affect was largely

unaffected by the dark personalities, indicating that stories can move people irrespective of their narcissistic, Machiavellianistic, and psychopathic tendencies.  This finding is in line with research that showed that the dark triad does not preclude basic empathetic responses (e.g., Hepper et al., 2014).  Rather, the effects of these touching eudaimonic stories appeared to be primarily filtered by distancing reactions to the story.  We explicitly accounted for potential negative reactions to eudaimonic media, emphasizing a rare theoretical perspective and providing a set of items on perceived corniness that in all likelihood will be valuable for ensuing explorations on the topic.

**Open Questions and Future Research**

We identified and explained interindividual differences in the experience and evaluation of eudaimonic stories. Thus, it was pivotal to disentangle the story factor (eudaimonic vs. non-eudaimonic clips) from recipients' responses (meaningful affect, corniness). Theory suggests that eudaimonic stories are characterized by events and plotlines that deal with purpose in life, the human condition, or human virtue. As more empirical research on such story factors is needed, future research is encouraged to address this research lacuna.

Although we observed meaningful variations in recipients' feelings of inauthenticity and corniness, our results also indicate that the eudaimonic videos were perceived to be rather authentic and genuine.  The eudaimonic videos were rated to be less corny than the non-eudaimonic videos. As this is among the first studies to include a measure of distancing, it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the prevalence of distancing to eudaimonic narratives (see Kloß & Bartsch, 2015). In all likelihood, variations in story characteristics such as acting, music, or simply the length of the story could play an important role.  Our five-item scale on corniness showed good reliability, it has high face validity, and our findings speak to its validity and usefulness for future studies.  On a more cautionary note, we wish to add that more research, preferably by independent labs, is needed to allow a comprehensive assessment of the scale's validity.

One of the dark triad dimensions, narcissism, was negatively associated with corniness in the non-eudaimonic video condition.  This finding was unexpected, but it is understandable within the current framework.  Corniness – as we conceived and operationalized it – encompasses the notion of perceiving a story to represent events in a plausible (or implausible) way with respect to affect.  Recipients high on narcissism might have perceived stories that do not allude to purpose in life, the human condition, or human virtue as plausible and reasonable, whereas recipients low on narcissism might have perceived these stories as emotionally inadequate and implausible, leading to the observed trend.

In our experiment, participants were required to watch one out of eight video clips, a clip that was randomly assigned to them.  Based on our assumption that eudaimonic narratives are inherently aversive to dark personalities, individuals who score high on these traits would have avoided watching a eudaimonic narrative in the first place.  Our design did not allow for assessing media choice.  Future studies seem warranted to test this prediction in a selective exposure framework.

Thirteen participants who pressed the forward button while the video was running were excluded from further analyses.  This was meant to guarantee that all members of our final sample were exposed to the allocated clip.  Like in almost all studies conducted online and many studies conducted in a lab, we did not monitor what exactly the recipients did while they supposedly watched the video (e.g., looking at their smartphone, watching their fingernails, daydreaming, etc.).  In our study, psychological distancing from content was measured with the corniness scale.  Future research could profit from additional, behavioral methods such as eye tracking or observational analyses.

We believe that research on the dark triad could enrich several fields of communication science.  In the field of political communication, for example, the dark triad or components thereof likely predict selective exposure to campaign ads as well as responses to candidate image and behavior (the 2016 US presidential campaign is a point in case).  Game studies can profit from

integrating the dark triad as a predictor of in-game behavior, for example of behavior in open world games such as *Grand Theft Auto,* as well as, possibly, an outcome.  The dark triad could further be integrated in attempts at tailoring messages in the fields of organizational communication or health communication.  Researchers may also consider everyday variations in sadism, which has recently been considered to complement the previous three to build a dark tetrad (e.g., Paulhus, 2014).

We had no a priori hypotheses on potential differences between the three dark triad factors in their potential to explain responses to eudaimonic stories, given that all three factors share a lack of emotional empathy (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012). Indeed our results showed more overlap than differences between the three dark triad components. For other research goals, however, differences between the three factors could be more prevalent.  Moreover, theory guided predictions on the responses of individuals with specific combinations of dark triad scores (e.g., individuals high on psychopathy and Machiavellianism, but low on narcissism) could be derived in certain communication contexts.

Like the great majority of research on narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, these constructs were conceived as stable traits, in our case as predictors of responses to eudaimonic media content.  It is intriguing to ponder on a reverse causal effect: Could eudaimonic stories reduce the lack of empathy, diminish the callousness, and change the tendency for self-promotion? On the one hand the characteristics of the dark triad seem to manifest themselves at an early age (Lau & Marsee, 2012) and all three seem to have substantial genetic origins (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008) suggesting little place for change by eudaimonic media.  On the other hand, theories as well as several recent cross-sectional and experimental studies suggest that literature (such as novels with eudaimonic content) regularly provide a simulation of social encounters and serve as a moral laboratory, leading to higher empathy (e.g., Kidd & Castano, 2013; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Mar, in press).  Relatedly, there is evidence for systematic situational variations in narcissism and the feasibility of measuring state narcissism (Giacomin & Jordan, 2015).  Our findings suggest that the

dark triad does not preclude the experience of meaningful affect, which might be a gateway for short term effects which could accumulate over time—if the distancing effects of evaluating the stories as corny or inauthentic can be overcome by repeated exposure or by social cues that counter this reactant response.

## Conclusion

Entertaining media products that deal with purpose in life, the human condition, or human virtue (eudaimonic media) have attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. We showed that individuals with higher scores on narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (the dark triad of personalities) dismissed eudaimonic videos (but not non-eudaimonic videos) by ascribing inauthenticity and corniness, leading to relatively more negative overall evaluations of the eudaimonic videos. This systematic influence of recipient personality informs theory, points out an important boundary condition for researchers and practitioners interested in eudaimonic media, and opens up new fields for further investigation, within and outside the domain of eudaimonic media.

Given our findings that the dark triad does not preclude the experience of meaningful affect, eudaimonic narratives, such as personal stories of the human condition, dramatic life events, and human virtues, could be a way to impress individuals with substantial narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (cf. Kidd & Castano, 2017).  Although the latter characteristics have negative psychological ramifications in other regards, dark triad personalities are often successful members of our societies, as they tend to seek out and often achieve power (Spurk et al., 2016).  Thus, eudaimonic stories, if they are constructed to minimize the ability to dismiss them as corny or mawkish, could be a way to increase motivations for prosocial behavior and feelings of connectedness to out-group members among influential individuals.  This might be an insight with substantial implications for both the theory and practice of communication.

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Table 1. *Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlations of the Continuous Variables*

|  | M | SD | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1)  Narcissism | 4.14 | 3.61 | | | | | |
| (2)  Machiavellianism | 2.84 | 0.78 | .30*** | | | | |
| (3)  Psychopathy | 2.03 | 0.66 | .39*** | .62*** | | | |
| (4)  Perceived Corniness | 2.68 | 1.28 | -.12 | .08 | .17* | | |
| (5)  Meaningful Affect | 4.09 | 1.97 | .07 | -.08 | -.09 | -.55*** | |
| (6)  Overall Evaluation | 5.74 | 1.31 | .00 | -.09 | -.18** | -.66*** | .68*** |

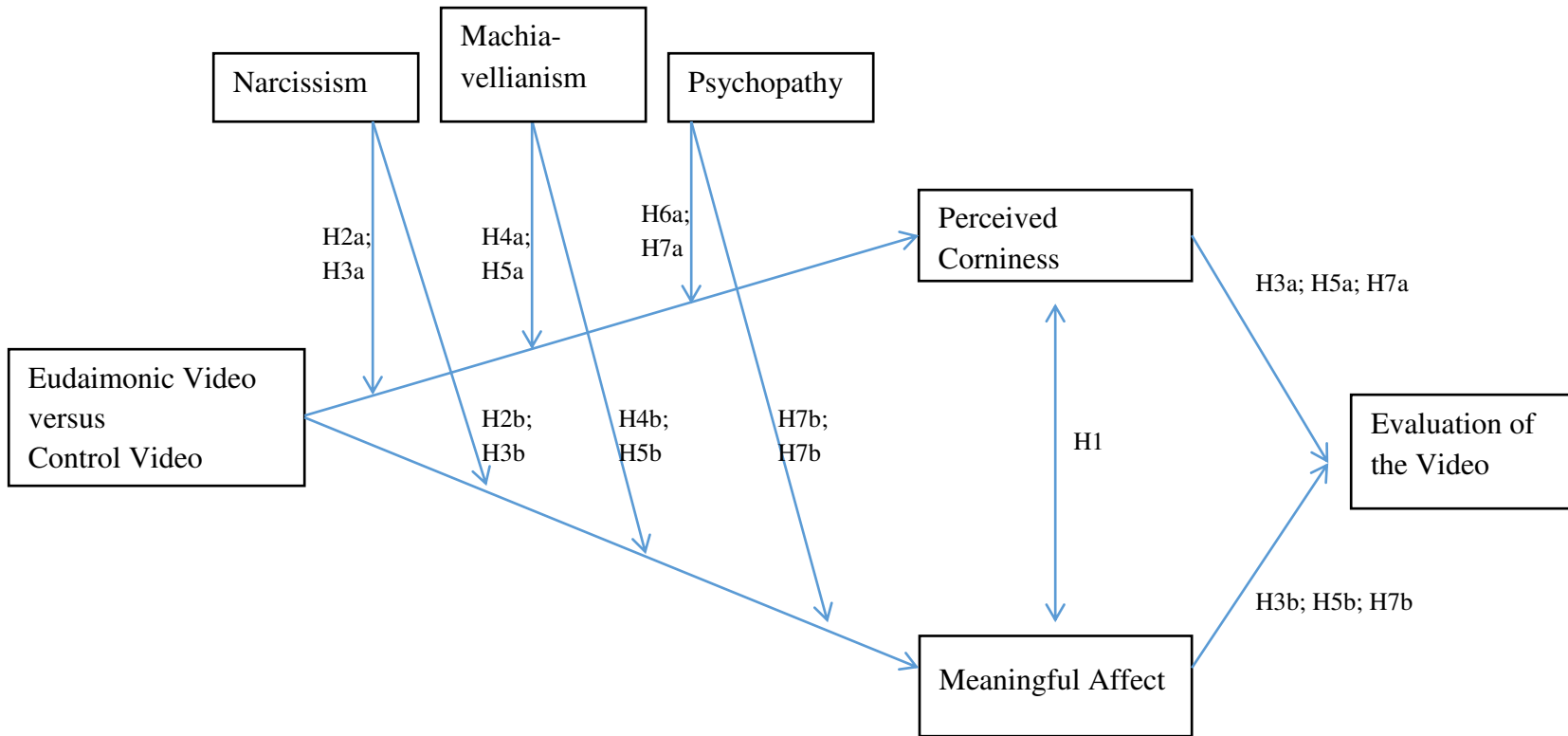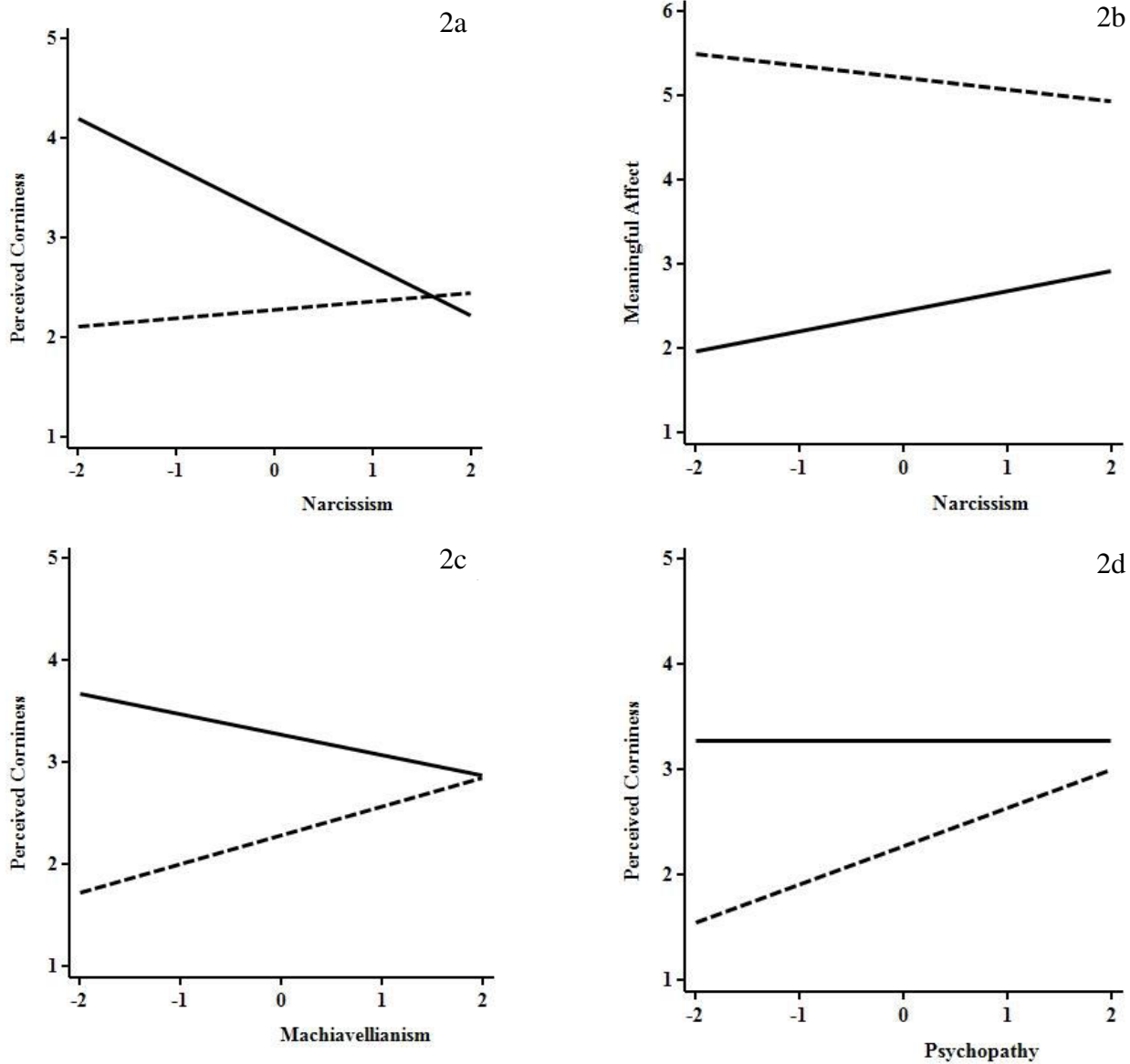*Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

*Figure 1.*
Graphical Representation of the Model and the Hypotheses.

*Figure 2.*
Perceived corniness as a function of the video treatment (straight line: non-eudaimonic videos, dotted line: eudaimonic videos) and participants' narcissism (2a), Machiavellianism (2c), and psychopathy (2d). Meaningful affect as a function of the video treatment and participants' narcissism (2b). Continuous predictors at +/- 2 SDs