

# The Light Triad of Personality, Emotional Intelligence and Satisfaction With Life in Adulthood

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## Abstract

**Objective:** The study aimed to determine the relationship between the personality traits included in the light triad scale (faith in humanity, humanism, kantianism) and emotional intelligence and to examine how these variables are related to life satisfaction in people during adulthood.

**Method:** The study was conducted in a group of 162 people between 18 and 85. The scales used were the Light triad scale in the Polish adaptation by Gerymski and Krok (2019), the INTE Questionnaire by Schutte and colleagues (1998) in the Polish adaptation by Ciechanowicz, Jaworowska and Matczak (2000), and the SWLS (Satisfaction With Life Scale) by Diener, Emmons, Larson, and Griffin (1985) in a Polish adaptation by Juczyński (2001).

**Results:** The results indicate statistically significant positive relationships between the light triad traits, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction. The only trait that is not correlated with life satisfaction is kantianism. There was also a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and all traits of the light triad. Gender differentiated the studied group regarding emotional intelligence and the traits of the light triad – women achieved a higher emotional intelligence index, higher humanism, and an overall score of light triad traits. There was a positive relationship between the age of the studied group and the overall index of light triad traits. The study also found that emotional intelligence and light triad traits explain 23% of the variance in life satisfaction.

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**Conclusions:** The study provided important findings on the light triad personality traits, which are relatively new and still developing constructs. It has added to the existing pool of research on the relationship with emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence and the light triad, as opposed to dark triad traits, are associated with higher life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** light triad, dark triad, emotional intelligence, life satisfaction, adulthood

Much of the literature and research has been devoted to the ‘dark’ side of the personality, which consists of narcissism, machiavellianism, and psychopathy. The relationship of the dark triad traits has been studied, among other things, with personality traits from the so-called Big Five, with which they show a negative correlation, as well as with emotional intelligence (Austin et al., 2014; Petrides et al., 2011). A study by Láng and Birkás (2014) found that individuals with high levels of machiavellian traits perceived their families as more disengaged, chaotic, less cohesive, and less flexible. They also reported poorer family communication and lower satisfaction with family life. Building on the tenets of positive psychology, Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde, and Tsukayama (2019) proposed an alternative personality construct to the dark triad called the light triad. They aimed to contrast the dark and light sides of personality and to create a measurement that was not intended to be a mere inverted version of the dark triad traits but a new construct measuring the positive aspects of personality (Gerymski & Krok, 2019). The factor analysis resulted in three related but distinct dimensions: faith in humanity, humanism, and kantianism (Kaufman et al., 2019; Lukić & Živanović, 2021). The first dimension refers to seeing the good in people, the second is treating people with respect and value worthy of every human being, and the third is avoiding treating them instrumentally (Gerymski & Krok, 2019). Kaufman and his team’s (2019) research on the associations of light triad traits showed that they correlate moderately negatively with dark triad traits and are therefore not the inverse of the dark triad. A negative association with the light triad was also shown with unpredictability in childhood, need for power, self-valorization, immature defensive style, sociosexuality, anxious and avoidant attachment style, reactive and proactive aggression, and selfishness, among others (Kaufman et al., 2019). This construct was positively associated with the following demographics: older age (Gerymski & Krok, 2019; Kaufman et al., 2019), femininity, and high income (Kaufman et al., 2019). Other researchers have shown a positive relationship between faith in humanity and political and charitable activism and humanism with social activism (Peterson & Palmer, 2021). Despite the increasing interest of researchers in the light triad scale, it is still the case that in research on the factors of the various dimensions of human life, the dark triad and its interrelationships prevail. Meanwhile, despite the relatively small number of studies, the light personality triad appears to be a promising construct in the field of personality or health psychology (Gerymski & Krok, 2019).

## Light Triad Traits and Emotional Intelligence

According to Goleman (1997), emotional intelligence includes motivation and perseverance in pursuit of a goal, control of weaknesses, ability to control emotions, which contributes to better thinking ability, recognition of emotions in others, empathy, and a positive view of the future. The light triad is a relatively young construct, and few studies measure its relationship to different aspects of human functioning. There are no studies yet on its relationship with emotional intelligence, unlike the traits of the dark triad, which studies show a negative correlation with this factor (Austin et al., 2014), only narcissism in a survey by Petrides et al. (2011) shows a positive relationship with EI. A clue to explore the relationship between the light triad and emotional intelligence is the study by Kaufman et al. (2019), in which one of the variables was empathy as measured by the Cognitive, Affective and Somatic Empathy Scale by Raine and Chen (2018). According to the results of this study light triad traits were positively associated with empathy and were predicted by both affective and cognitive empathy (Kaufman et al., 2019).

## The Light Triad, Emotional Intelligence, and Life Satisfaction

The sense of life satisfaction can be explained based on three groups of theories, which, in their assumptions, focus on other factors influencing feelings of happiness and subjective well-being. The first group is linked to the view that life satisfaction is related to genetic predisposition (to some extent, people are born inclined to be happy or unhappy) and personality traits – the traits that are most related to subjective well-being include extraversion (positive correlation) and neuroticism (negative correlation) (Diener et al., 2011). In the second group are theories of need satisfaction and goals, which revolve around the idea that reducing stress (e.g., eliminating pain and satisfying biological and psychological needs) leads to happiness (Diener et al., 2011). In the third one, the focus is on the individual's activity; his or her satisfaction with life will therefore depend on the degree of involvement in such activities, which are interesting on the one hand and adapted to the person's abilities on the other (Diener et al., 2011). There are few studies on the relationship between the light triad and life satisfaction. Those that are available indicate that the higher the level of faith in humanity, humanism, and kantianism, the higher the life satisfaction (Kaufman et al., 2019; Neumann et al., 2020). The same authors further showed that the dark triad is associated with lower life satisfaction (Kaufman et al., 2019; Neumann et al., 2020). Numerous studies more or less confirm the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and life satisfaction (Ain et al., 2021; Extremera & Rey, 2016; Gul, 2020; Jain, 2015; Mónico et al., 2019; Morón, 2018; Özyer et al., 2011).

There are some differences in this relationship when the demographic data are considered. Özyer et al. (2011) showed that women had higher levels of emotional intelligence than men, which is supported by the study of Fayyaz et al. (2017) but contradicted by the results of Aina et al. (2021). Levels of life satisfaction in the

context of gender in the aforementioned studies did not show a clear direction or some indication of higher levels of life satisfaction in women (Fayyaz et al., 2017). Age was not significant in the level of emotional intelligence, as shown in studies by Mónico et al. (2019) and Özyer et al. (2011). It was, however, significant in terms of perceived life satisfaction. According to the results of the study by Mónico et al. (2019), young adults (18–39 years) had higher levels of life satisfaction than those in middle and late adulthood (40–60 years).

## Research Problem and Hypotheses

This study analyzes the relationship between the light triad personality traits (faith in humanity, humanism, kantianism), emotional intelligence and life satisfaction in adulthood. The main research problem is to answer the question: What are the relationships between life satisfaction and light triad personality traits (faith in humanity, humanism, kantianism) and emotional intelligence in adulthood?

Based on the theoretical assumptions presented in the introduction regarding the relationships between the light triad traits, emotional intelligence, and satisfaction with life, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Emotional intelligence is positively associated with all light triad traits.
- H2: Light triad traits are positively associated with life satisfaction.
- H3: Women have higher light triad traits and emotional intelligence levels.
- H4: Emotional intelligence and the light triad traits positively predict life satisfaction.

In addition, due to the lack of explicit theoretical assumptions, no hypotheses considering gender and age were formulated, but gender differences in life satisfaction, as well as the relationships between age and the level of life satisfaction, emotional intelligence, and the light triad traits, were analyzed.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 162 adults (female:  $n = 84$ , 51.9%; male:  $n = 84$ , 49.1%), residents from Pomorskie and Warminsko-Mazurskie provinces. The youngest participant was 18, and the oldest was 85 ( $M = 45$ ,  $SD = 16.8$ ). Most respondents (48.8%) had higher and secondary education (28.4%). The participants came mainly from cities with up to 50 thousand inhabitants (34%) and over 250 thousand inhabitants (32.1%). Most respondents were professionally active (66.7%) and were married (45.1%) or in a partnership (20.4%). More than half of the participants (59.9%) had at least one child.

## Measures

### *Light Triad of Personality*

The light triad personality traits were measured by the Light Triad Scale in the Polish adaptation by Gerymski and Krok (2019). The original questionnaire was created by Kaufman et al. (2019) and consists of 12 items that examine three traits: humanism, faith in humanity, and kantianism. The participant had to indicate on a 5-point scale (1 – *very strongly disagree*, 5 – *very strongly agree*) to what extent they agreed with each statement. The results were analyzed for each trait individually and for a total score. The reliability of the subscales was assessed based on the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach's alpha for humanism – .77, faith in humanity – .61, kantianism – .50).

### *Emotional Intelligence*

The *INTE questionnaire* by Schutte et al. (1998) in the Polish adaptation by Ciechanowicz, Jaworowska, and Matczak (2000) was used to measure emotional intelligence. The questionnaire consists of 33 items. The respondents assessed each on a 5-point scale (1 – *strongly disagree*, 5 – *strongly agree*). The total emotional intelligence score was used to analyze the results of this study. The Cronbach's alpha was .90.

### *Satisfaction With Life*

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) by Diener, Emmons, Larson, and Griffin (1985) in the Polish adaptation by Juczyński (2001) was used to measure satisfaction with life. The scale consists of 5 items, which the respondents assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – *strongly disagree*, 7 – *strongly agree*). The measurement result is a general indicator of satisfaction with life; its reliability is assessed based on the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and, in the current study, is .81.

## Procedure

The study was conducted using the paper-pencil method. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Each survey included information about the study's aim and a complete set of questionnaires. Participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

## Data Analysis Methods

The statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.1, licensed by the University of Gdańsk, was used to conduct statistical analyses. First, extreme values in

variables were analyzed. Extreme values appeared in the following variables: the overall score of the light triad ( $n = 1$ ) and kantianism ( $n = 1$ ), and these values were replaced with the closest value that is not considered extreme (Aguinis et al., 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to verify hypotheses 1 and 2, predicting relationships between emotional intelligence, satisfaction with life, and the light triad traits. To examine hypothesis 3 and answer the research questions considering gender differences, the Student's  $t$ -test for independent samples was performed. Pearson correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship between age and the variables included in the study. Linear regression was used to test hypothesis 4.

The sample size was estimated using G\*power 3.1.9.7. (Faul et al., 2009). Power analysis for linear regression with four predictors (with  $\alpha$  error = .05, medium effect size) and power .95 indicated that the minimum number of subjects would be 129.

## Results

The correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between the overall score of the light triad and emotional intelligence.

**Table 1**

*The Correlations Between Satisfaction With Life, Light Triad Traits, and Emotional Intelligence (Pearson Correlation Coefficients)*

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
Satisfaction with life	162	21.41	5.29	—	
Emotional intelligence	162	123.49	15.26	.49**	—
Light triad – total score	162	45.18	6.14	.29**	.46**
Humanism	162	15.04	2.53	.26**	.45**
Faith in humanity	162	13.96	3.35	.25**	.33**
Kantianism	162	16.16	2.38	.14	.25**

\*\* $p < .01$ ; 1 – satisfaction with life, 2 – emotional intelligence

Additionally, the preliminary analyses presented correlation coefficients for the relationships between satisfaction with life, emotional intelligence, and the light triad traits (Table 1). Emotional intelligence is positively associated with all light triad personality traits and satisfaction with life. Similarly, the total score of the light triad traits positively correlates with declared life satisfaction. However, the analysis of the traits included in the light triad model indicates that not all traits are significantly related to life satisfaction – the trait that does not show these significant relationships is kantianism. In addition, it was verified that there is a statistically significant difference between the correlation

coefficients of life satisfaction and the light triad and life satisfaction and emotional intelligence ( $Z = 2.12, p = .03$ ) – the relationship between life satisfaction and emotional intelligence occurred to be stronger than with the light triad of personality. To sum up, hypothesis 1 was confirmed, and hypothesis 2 was partially confirmed.

Table 2 presents gender differences in the dimensions of the light triad traits, emotional intelligence, and satisfaction with life.

**Table 2**

*Light Triad, Emotional Intelligence and Satisfaction With Life Among Females and Males (the Student's *t*-test for Independent Samples)*

	Female <i>n</i> = 84		Male <i>n</i> = 78		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Light triad – total score	46.35	5.70	43.92	6.38	2.56	160	.012
Humanism	15.61	2.35	14.42	2.58	3.06	160	.003
Faith in humanity	14.29	3.24	13.62	3.46	1.27	160	.205
Kantianism	16.42	2.47	15.88	2.26	1.44	160	.153
Emotional intelligence	126.44	12.54	120.36	17.25	2.54	159	.012
Satisfaction with life	21.63	5.03	21.17	5.58	0.56	160	.58

As the results show, women declared higher levels of the light triad traits in the overall score and higher levels of humanism and emotional intelligence than men, which confirms hypothesis 3. The gender differences in kantianism, faith in humanity, and satisfaction with life were statistically insignificant (Table 2).

**Table 3**

*Light Triad and Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Satisfaction With Life (Linear Regression Analysis)*

Variables	Regression coefficient values		<i>t</i>
	<i>b</i>	<i>beta</i>	
Constant	0.494		−0.14
Emotional intelligence	0.15	.45	5.60*
Humanism	0.04	.02	0.24
Faith in humanity	0.15	.09	1.19
Kantianism	0.015	.01	0.09
$R^2 = .25$ ; adjusted $R^2 = .23$			
$F(4.156) = 12.76$ ; $p < .001$			

\* $p < .05$

The results of Pearson correlation analysis showed that age was positively (statistically significant) related only to the overall score of the light triad traits ( $r = .23, p < .01$ ) and faith in humanity ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ). No statistically significant relationships were found between age, the remaining light triad traits, emotional intelligence, and life satisfaction.

In the last step, linear regression analysis was conducted, where declared satisfaction with life was predicted by emotional intelligence and light triad traits (Table 3, p. 187). The assumed model was statistically significant and explained 23% of the variance of life satisfaction; however, in this model, only emotional intelligence was a statistically significant predictor. Thus, hypothesis 4 was partially confirmed.

## Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between the relatively new construct of the light personality triad and emotional intelligence and their joint significance for satisfaction with life in adulthood. Demographic variables such as gender and age were included in the analyses.

Firstly, the analyses showed that emotional intelligence is associated with all the traits of the light triad, as predicted. This result is a strength of this study, as to date, the relationship of the light triad traits with the overall emotional intelligence factor has yet to be investigated. The relationship between the light triad personality is discussed. Emotional intelligence remains consistent with the results obtained by Kaufman et al. (2019), in which empathy was a significant correlate of the light triad personality traits. According to the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) model, one emotional intelligence factor is recognizing, understanding, and controlling emotions in oneself and others. Johnson (2018), like the creators of the light triad who reflected on the attitudes and characteristics of benevolent individuals, noted that most research on prosocial behavior has focused on situational factors rather than individual differences. She recognized that empathy, compassion, and altruism as constructs associated with prosocial behavior were so important that she constructed her Light Triad Scale (Light-3) from them, which examined the dimensions of these three factors. This demonstrates the validity of seeking links between the light triad created by Kaufman and colleagues (2019) and emotional intelligence. It may be worth attempting to combine these two scales in the future.

Secondly, preliminary correlation analyses confirmed positive associations between satisfaction with life and emotional intelligence and the light triad personality scale traits, excluding kantianism. However, a more substantial relationship was found between satisfaction with life and emotional intelligence than with the light triad (overall score). The joint inclusion of the light triad traits and emotional intelligence as predictors of satisfaction with life indicated that it was primarily based on declared emotional intelligence that can predict life satisfaction. In this context, the role of emotional intelligence in the practical



realization of an individual's important goals may be confirmed, but also that people seek and undertake those activities that are attractive to them from the point of view of their needs and that involve experiencing positive emotions (Żmuda et al., 2021). A more recent study by Mewara (2024) on the relationship between light triad traits and satisfaction with life in healthcare workers indicates a positive correlation between the two dimensions. In the future, research will look for differences in the possession of light triad traits and life satisfaction and job satisfaction between different professions to analyze the usefulness of these traits in different professional settings. Interestingly, in the study group, demographic variables such as age and gender were not associated with life satisfaction. The theory cites the findings of Mónico et al. (2019), which indicated higher levels of satisfaction with life among individuals in early adulthood. The lack of differences in this variable in this study may be related to the comparative level of life satisfaction in this group of respondents but is also consistent with the results of studies by Realo and Dobewall (2011), in which residents of Finland and Sweden also showed no differences between age and life satisfaction, as did residents of the United States in the study by Hartung et al. (2021).

Furthermore, some gender differences were found in the variables analyzed. Women had a higher index of light triad traits in the total score and humanism, which is also confirmed by the results of Gerymski and Krok (2019) and Pechorro et al. (2024), according to which this result is consistent with gender differences favoring women in terms of antisocial personality and psychopathic traits. Concerning the other traits, future studies still need to analyze the sociodemographic characteristics of men and women further. Analyses also confirmed that women achieved higher rates of emotional intelligence (cf. Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Day & Carroll, 2004).

In summary, there is no doubt that human nature has both dark and light sides. However, research has paid more attention to the 'dark side' of personality and its relationship to ethically, morally, and socially negative beliefs and behaviors (Moshagen et al., 2018). When they started working on this construct, the creators of the light triad wondered how the lives of people who represent the traits of the dark triad differ from those who display a loving and charitable attitude daily (Kaufman et al., 2019). The results obtained in their study suggest that higher emotional intelligence is conducive to declaring higher life satisfaction.

Factors of emotional intelligence influencing subjective well-being include, for example, self-esteem, understood as the ability to understand, perceive, and accept oneself; self-actualization; stress tolerance, as the ability to deal constructively with emotions; optimism; and happiness (Bar-On, 2006). What is puzzling, however, is the weaker relationship between the traits of the light personality triad and satisfaction with life. While the self-report study showed a positive relationship between these variables, which is supported by previous research (cf. Gourand et al., 2023; Kaufman et al., 2019; Neumann et al., 2020), while in a model that captured emotional intelligence and traits of the light triad, the latter did not prove to be significant predictors of life satisfaction.

It remains open to exploring in research and discussion the relationship of the light side of personality with life satisfaction and other aspects, such as

relationship satisfaction and work life, as well as exploring predictors of humanism, faith in humanity, and kantianism.

## Limitations of the Self-Study

One of the study's limitations is the group's high homogeneity and the non-random sampling. Most respondents are university-educated, working, married, in a civil partnership, and from nuclear families. Future research would need to enlarge this group, diversify it, and use random sampling, which would increase the possibility of verifying the existence of minor effects on the relationships analyzed and generalizing the results obtained.

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