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Relationship between Dominating Personalities and Toxic Positivity: Mediating Roles of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Control

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Toxic positivity refers to the practice of constantly presenting oneself as optimistic while disregarding negative emotions. When positivity is frequently employed to minimise or conceal negative experiences, it becomes toxic, like anything carried out in excess. Denial, minimisation and invalidation of the genuine human emotional experience are the adverse outcomes of toxic positivity (Gross et al., 1997). This study aimed to investigate the relationship between dominant personality traits, toxic positivity, and the mediating effect of intrapersonal and interpersonal control in young adults. A cross-sectional design was used, and data were collected from 278 participants using four questionnaires measuring dominance, intrapersonal control, interpersonal control, and toxic positivity. The data were analyzed using the structural equation model and Hayes' Macro Process Model 6, which revealed an indirect positive correlation between dominance and toxic positivity through intrapersonal and interpersonal control. The findings of this study have important implications for clinical psychology, counseling psychology, workplace psychology, and other areas where personality assessments are useful. The findings may aid psychologists in developing interventions for people who have a high level of toxic positivity. The findings can be used by corporations and policymakers to build management and screening strategies. Additionally, it provides insights into the effects of toxic positivity and can assist young adults in identifying and addressing toxic patterns to enhance their mental health.

Keywords: toxic positivity, dominance, intrapersonal control, interpersonal control, cross-sectional design, Hayes' macro process model 6.

Toxic positivity is a pervasive form of optimism that denies the reality of negative emotions and experiences (Quintero & Long, 2019). This over-generalisation of optimism across all situations can inhibit the expression of unpleasant emotions and serve as an avoidance mechanism, particularly in individuals with high dominance (Drews, 1993). Dominance, as an attribute of repeated, agonistic interactions between individuals, is characterised by consistent outcomes favoring the same dyad member and yielding responses from their opponent (Drews, 1993). Individuals high in dominance consistently attain high levels of influence within groups and may exhibit toxic positivity due to their perceptions of hierarchical interpersonal relationships (Utley et al., 1989). Intrapersonal control, or self-control, refers to an individual's ability to regulate emotions

and actions. Conversely, interpersonal control is defined as the desire to regulate another person's behaviors, thoughts, activities, and feelings (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1990). This study examines the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity and the potential mediating roles of intrapersonal and interpersonal control.

Toxic Positivity in Positive Psychology

The concept of toxic positivity is often associated with positive psychology, which emphasizes the importance of focusing on positive experiences and emotions. However, toxic positivity can have harmful consequences for individuals and their relationships, as it can prevent people from processing and resolving negative emotions, leading to marginalization and prolonged suffering. Furthermore, it can contribute to burnout and decreased mental

well-being for those who try to maintain a positive outlook in the face of life's difficulties. There exists a limited amount of literature on toxic positivity. However, the idea of excessive positivity and the suppression of negative emotions have been studied in psychology and discussed by various psychologists and researchers. A recent study revealed that social media users frequently engage in toxic positivity or the promotion of forced positive discourse influenced by the neoliberal ideology of "positive thinking" (Lecompte-Van Poucke, 2022).

Dominant Personalities and Toxic Positivity

The relationship between dominant personalities and toxic positivity is a complex issue that has gained attention recently (Brinkmann, 2017; Gornto & Scherer, 2019). The excessive and misguided promotion of positivity, often at the expense of acknowledging and addressing negative emotions and experiences, characterizes toxic positivity (Brinkmann, 2017). The negative effects of toxic positivity on mental health and relationships cannot be overstated (Gornto & Scherer, 2019).

A theoretical base for the relationship between Toxic positivity and Dominance can be Karen Horney's theory of neurotic needs (Horney, 1937), in which individuals develop coping mechanisms to deal with anxieties and insecurities in their relationships with others. According to Horney's theory, individuals with a high need for Dominance often exhibit aggressive and controlling behaviour toward others to compensate for their insecurity and inferiority (Horney, 1937). In this context, toxic positivity can manifest the dominant individual's need to maintain control and avoid facing negative emotions. By constantly insisting on a positive outlook and downplaying the negative aspects of a situation, the dominant individual tries to assert their power and control over their environment, which can harm the individual's interpersonal relationships.

Another theory corroborating the relation between the two variables in concern is Alfred Adler's theory. According to Adler's theory, individuals with a high need for superiority or Dominance often assert their power and

control over others to compensate for feelings of inferiority and insecurity (Adler, 1924). This study proposes that The drive for Dominance mentioned in Adler's theory can manifest in various forms, including toxic positivity. The researchers theorise that individual may try to impose their optimistic outlook on others, disregarding their feelings and experiences and pressuring them to maintain a positive attitude even under challenging circumstances.

Adler's theory helps to explain the relationship between high Dominance and toxic positivity by emphasizing the importance of the individual's need for power and control in shaping their behaviour. The drive for superiority can lead individuals to adopt toxic positivity to assert dominance over others and maintain control over their environment.

Toxic Positivity and Psychological Well-being

When it comes to toxic positivity, the most significant issue is emotional suppression. The desire to suppress negative emotions in people who have a high level of toxic positivity might be detrimental to their general well-being. As a result, understanding the repercussions of emotional suppression and the empirical consensus surrounding it is critical in order to really comprehend the gravity of the trait of toxic positivity.

Contemporary research highlights the adverse outcomes of emotional suppression, a significant aspect of Toxic positivity. The results of a study conducted in 2003 indicated that individuals who suppressed their emotions were prone to experiencing more intense negative and fewer positive emotions. Additionally, the research demonstrated a negative correlation between suppression and overall well-being (Gross & John, 2003). Another study corroborated the above finding by stating that emotional suppression was ineffective in reducing distress (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006).

In a study that involved a cold-pressor pain induction (CPT) test, participants were divided into three groups, each with instructions for handling the pain. The first group was instructed to pay attention to the pain, the second to focus on their home environment as a distraction, and

the third to suppress the sensations they felt. The results showed that the group that focused on the pain had the quickest recovery from the pain, while the group that suppressed the sensations had the slowest recovery (Cioffi & Holloway, 1993). This emphasises the harmful effects of suppressing negative emotions and pain. This emotional repression is a fundamental component of toxic positivity, making it a serious issue.

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Control

Intrapersonal control refers to an individual's ability to regulate and manage their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors within themselves. It involves self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Intrapersonal control is essential for personal growth and emotional intelligence. It allows individuals to make informed decisions and adapt to various situations by understanding and managing their own inner processes. According to research in intrapersonal communication, this self-awareness and self-regulation contribute to effective intrapersonal communication, which is crucial for self-reflection and self-improvement (Smith, 2013).

Interpersonal control, on the other hand, relates to an individual's ability to interact, communicate, and influence others in social contexts. It involves skills such as active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and effective communication. Research shows that interpersonal control plays a significant role in building and maintaining relationships, resolving conflicts, and achieving collaborative goals (Nair, 2023). Additionally, it is discussed in studies examining the impact of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional factors on various aspects of social and psychological well-being (sciencedirect.com).

Studies have shown that dominant individuals display toxic positivity, leading to negative consequences for themselves and their relationships (Brinkmann, 2017; Gornto & Scherer, 2019). However, the relationship between dominance, toxic positivity, and the mediating roles of intrapersonal and interpersonal control is yet to be fully understood. Hence, this study explores the relationship between

dominance and toxic positivity and examines the potential mediating roles of intrapersonal and interpersonal control.

Current Study

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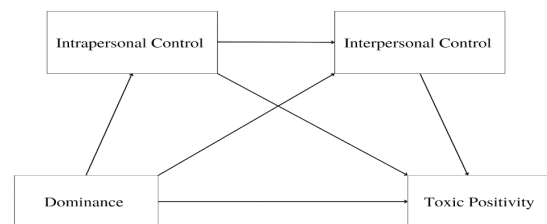


Figure 1. An Initial Serial Multiple Mediation Model Objectives

- To investigate the association between dominance and toxic positivity.
- To examine the mediating effects of intrapersonal control on the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity.
- To explore the mediating effects of interpersonal control on the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity.

Hypotheses

1. There is a positive relationship between dominance and toxic positivity, indicating that individuals with higher dominance levels are more likely to exhibit toxic positivity.
2. Intrapersonal control will mediate the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity, suggesting that dominance influences toxic positivity through its impact on intrapersonal control.

- Interpersonal control will mediate the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity, indicating that dominance affects toxic positivity by influencing interpersonal control.

Method

Participants

The study was focused on young adults, specifically the college-going population. Power analysis was conducted using G-Power software to determine the minimum sample size needed, which was set at 128 participants. A total of 278 responses were recorded, and they were asked to fill out a self-reported questionnaire. The obtained sample of participants was from 18 to 25 years old (M=20.34; SD=2.635). The participants consisted of three groups based on gender: women (49.5%), men (45.7%), and others (4.9%).

Table I. Characteristics of Demographic Variables (N = 278)

Variable		n	%
Age (M=20.74, SD= 2.09)			
Gender	Male	164	59.0
	Female	106	38.1
	Non-binary	8	2.9

The characteristics of demographic variables are presented in Table I, which shows the composition of participants included in the present study. The mean age of the participants was 20.74 years, with a standard deviation of 2.09.

Measures

Dominance/Submission Test (IDRIabs)

A 30-item questionnaire was used to assess the dominance level of the participants. Items are scored on a frequency scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher total scores indicating higher levels of dominance. The overall score demonstrated adequate internal consistency, high test-retest reliability, and good convergent and concurrent validity (IDRIabs, 2020). The study of Smith et al. inspired the scale.

Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS)

A 13-item questionnaire was designed to assess the trait of intrapersonal control in the study group. The scale consists of multiple factors. According to Ferrari et al. (2009), a two-factor structure with the factors “impulse control” (Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 13) and “self-discipline”(Items 1, 6, 8, and 11) is the most suitable. Using all 13 components for the one-factor solution, measures of internal consistency for the BSCS were calculated. To calculate internal consistency for the two-factor solution, the components were divided. Factor 1 consisted of items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8, whereas Factor 2 consisted of items 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 13. The coefficients alpha (Cronbach, 1951) and omega (McDonald, 1970) for the one-factor model were found to be .914 and .915, respectively. The two-factor model’s Factor 1 had coefficients alpha and omega of .892 and .894, respectively. In the two-factor model, alpha was .819 and omega was .826 for Factor 2.

The BSCS is a psychological instrument designed to measure an individual’s level of self-control. Developed by Tangney et al. in 2004, the BSCS consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-control. The items assess aspects of self-control such as impulse control, the ability to resist temptation, and the capacity to delay gratification.

Interpersonal Style Inventory

The Interpersonal Style Inventory (ISI) is a scientifically validated assessment tool created by Clawson and Blank in 1987. It evaluates an individual’s interpersonal style, which refers to their behaviour and attitudes in interaction with others in various social circumstances. The ISI assesses six distinct interpersonal styles: assertiveness, passivity, hostility, manipulateness, sociability, and intimacy. The report generated by the ISI provides a comprehensive analysis of the individual’s communication tendencies and how they impact their relationships with others. Additionally, it offers insight into how the individual’s interpersonal style affects their behaviour in diverse scenarios and

provides recommendations for enhancing their relationships with others.

IDR-Three Minute Toxic Positivity Test (IDR-3MTPT)

The IDR-3MTPT is a self-administered evaluation tool developed by IDRlabs in 2022 to detect the presence of toxic positivity in an individual's thoughts and behaviours (Toxic Positivity Test, 2022). This assessment tool is designed to take approximately three minutes to complete and consists of a series of statements and questions that assess the individual's views on positivity and negativity. Based on the responses provided, the test calculates the level of toxic positivity in the individual's thought patterns and provides recommendations for healthier coping mechanisms. It is important to emphasise that self-report assessments like the IDR-3MTPT should not be considered a replacement for professional medical advice. The indications of toxic positivity described in Quintero, S. & Long, J., were the basis for the IDRlabs Toxic Positivity Test (2019).

Procedure

Once the study was approved by Christ (Deemed to be University), an online compilation of all the four self-report questionnaires were made and demographic information, including age and gender, were collected. Informed consent from all the participants were taken. Following data collection from participants, each questionnaire was analysed, and individual scores for each variable for each participant were obtained. These scores were then respectively reversed and analysed to determine the correlation between the variables.

Data Analysis

The first step in the preliminary analysis was to evaluate the data for nonnormality and statistical outliers, neither of which were discovered. After that, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for the research variables were computed. The PROCESS macro (v4.0) for SPSS was used to perform a series of indirect effect studies, and 5000 bootstrap samples were used to create 95% confidence ranges for indirect effect estimates (Hayes, 2018).

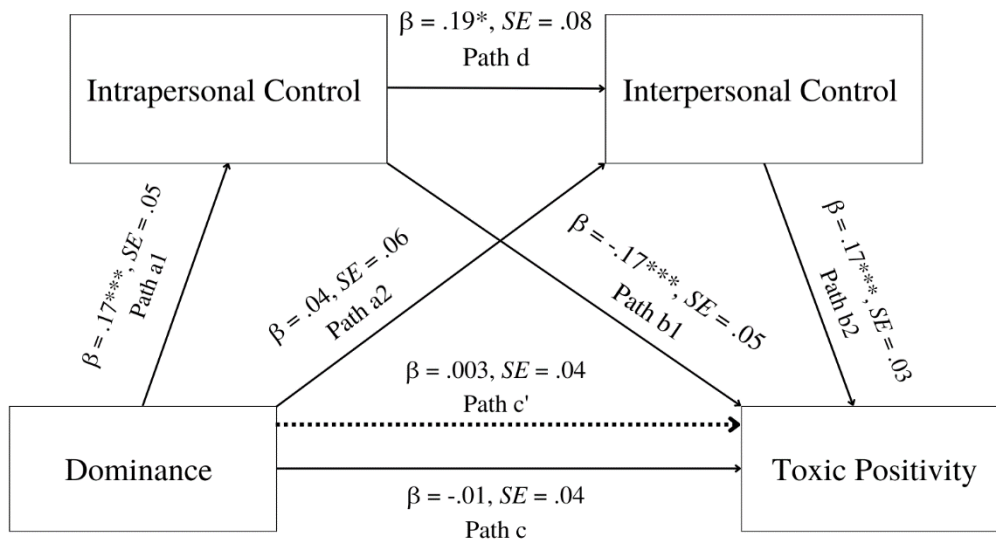


Figure II. The Serial Mediation Models among Study Variables

Note. The direct effect of dominance on toxic positivity is presented above lines, and the total effect is presented below the lines. $N = 278$.

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

Simple mediation analyses were first conducted to test intrapersonal control as a potential mediator in dominance and toxic positivity. In Figure 2, path a1 illustrates a positive relationship between dominance and intrapersonal control, and path b1 shows a negative relation between intrapersonal control and toxic positivity.

Again, a mediation analysis was conducted to check the potential mediation role of interpersonal control in the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity (paths a2 and b2). Interpersonal control was positively correlated with toxic positivity, although no correlation was found between dominance and interpersonal control.

Finally, the whole pathway was analysed (paths a1, d and b2). Correlations were found to be effective when mediated by both variables. Table II shows the significant and insignificant correlations found.

Results

Correlation Analysis

Table II demonstrates the correlation among study variables. Dominance was found to be positively correlated with self-control ($r = .208, p < .01$). However, dominance was not found to be correlated with interpersonal control and toxic positivity. Self-control was positively correlated with interpersonal control ($r = .153, p < .05$) and negatively correlated with toxic positivity ($r = -.172, p < .01$). Similarly, interpersonal control was positively correlated with toxic positivity ($r = .251, p < .01$).

Serial Mediation Analysis

We conducted serial mediation analyses to test intrapersonal control and interpersonal control as mediators of the relationship between

dominance and toxic positivity. Figure 2 shows the serial mediation model with dominance as the predictor of pathways between intrapersonal control, interpersonal control, and toxic positivity.

As shown in Figure 2, dominance predicted intrapersonal control positively (path a1; $\beta = .17, p < .001$) and did not predict interpersonal control (path a2; $\beta = .04, p = .596$); intrapersonal control positively predicted interpersonal control (path d; $\beta = .19, p < .05$) and negatively predicted toxic positivity (path b1; $\beta = -.17, p < .001$); and interpersonal control positively predicted toxic positivity (path b2; $\beta = .17, p < .001$). When both intrapersonal control and interpersonal control were controlled in this model, the association between dominance and toxic positivity became nonsignificant (path c'; $\beta = .003, p < .942$). Therefore, the serial mediation of intrapersonal control and interpersonal control partially mediated the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity.

As shown in Table III, based on 95% bootstrap confidence intervals with 5,000 samples, the first mediating effect in the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity mediated by intrapersonal control was estimated as $-.03, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.056, -.010]$ (Hypothesis 1 was supported); the second mediating effect in the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity did not mediate by interpersonal control was estimated as $.007, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.015, .030]$ (Hypothesis 2 was not supported); and the serial mediating effect of this association mediated by serial mediators (intrapersonal control to interpersonal control) was estimated as $.006, 95\% \text{ CI } [.001, .013]$ (Hypothesis 3 was supported). These findings show that the mediating effects of intrapersonal control and serial mediation of intrapersonal control to interpersonal control were likely to

Table II . Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 278)

Variable	1	2	3	M	SD
1. Dominance	-			92.17	9.15
2. Intrapersonal control	.208**	-		37.38	7.73
3. Interpersonal control	.066	.153*	-	97.22	10.20
4. Toxic Positivity	-.022	.172**	.251**	33.05	6.39

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Table III. Direct and Indirect Pathways among Study Variables with 95% Confidence Intervals

Model pathways	β	SE	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Direct effects				
D → TP	-.015	.042	-.098	.067
D → SC	.175	.049	.077	.273
D → IP	.040	.067	-.093	.173
SC → IP	.191	.080	.033	.349
SC → TP	-.178	.048	-.274	-.082
IP → TP	.177	.036	.106	.248
Indirect effects				
Double mediation				
D → SC → TP	-.031	.012	-.056	-.010
D → IP → TP	.007	.011	-.015	.030
Serial mediation				
D → SC → IP → TP	.006	.003	.001	.013

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; D = dominance; TP = toxic positivity; SC = intrapersonal control; IP = interpersonal control. 95% bootstrap CI with 5000 samples was used to estimate the indirect effects of intrapersonal control, interpersonal control, and both intrapersonal control and interpersonal control

appear because these effects did not include zero value.

Discussion

Although dominance, intrapersonal and interpersonal control has been extensively studied in the past, a gap exists in literature regarding the concept of toxic positivity associated with personality traits. The current study confirmed the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity mediated by intrapersonal and interpersonal control. Even in the absence of a direct relationship between the two variables, when the mediators were considered, individuals with high levels of dominance tend to engage in toxic positive behaviour, provided their self-control and interpersonal control are increased. This outcome shed new light on the influence of interpersonal control and overpowering self-control in an individual. Alongside this, it challenged the notion of dominant individuals possessing low levels of self-control, although the study of Carré et al. (2017) does not corroborate this finding.

In this paper, the significance of self-control and interpersonal control underscores the evolving societal beliefs and dynamics. Empirical evidence suggests that self-control influences adaptive responses to changing societal norms

and expectations (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Additionally, interpersonal control plays a pivotal role in shaping interactions within a transforming societal context (Nair, 2023).

With the constantly changing behavioural traits in and around us, one needs to keep oneself updated and critically analyse if one's opinion and outlook still stand accurate. In accordance with our findings, which indicated the absence of a discernible correlation between dominance and interpersonal control, it can be postulated that individuals with domineering tendencies are increasingly exhibiting heightened self-awareness and are redirecting their dominance inwardly, thereby refraining from solely externalizing it upon others.

This finding offers a logical explanation for Horney's theory of neurotic needs. People with high dominance might use toxic positivity as a coping mechanism (Horney, 1937). We can interpret the exhibition of toxic positivity in two ways: to one's own self, through increased self-control and to others, through interpersonal control. It was also observed that individuals with high scores on the interpersonal scale tend to gravitate more towards being toxically positive. However, one can look at this study to examine the changing trends in human behaviour as the

characteristics of trait dominance have altered over time.

Conclusion

This paper establishes the correlation between dominance and toxic positivity mediated by intrapersonal and interpersonal control. The findings shed more light on the emerging concept of toxic positivity and how it may manifest in individuals with a dominant personality.

In addition, the research addresses the previously identified research gap by exploring the connection between dominant personalities, interpersonal control, intrapersonal control, and toxic positivity. Further research can continue to deepen our understanding and inform interventions aimed at diminishing and coping with the pervasiveness of toxic positivity in the domain of mental health.

The use of cross-sectional data, which reduces our confidence in inferring temporal and causal correlations, is a significant drawback of the current study. Even though we examined alternative serial mediation models and discovered some evidence in favour of the theoretical directions we suggested, future research on mediation models similar to those in the current study would benefit from using longitudinal or experimental designs that could demonstrate the temporal precedence of variables and possibly be more indicative of causal relationships.

Demand factors could have an effect on a study's findings. The propensity for participants to alter their behaviour to match expectations or the researcher's hypothesis is referred to here. This may lead to skewed findings and make it challenging to establish the link between the variables precisely. Moreover, as there were no scales available for interpersonal control, the usage of ISI (Interpersonal style inventory) might alter the reliability of the results. The non-standardization of the IDR-3MTPT might also serve as a possible hindrance. However, a reliability coefficient of 0.7 to 0.8 for IDR-3MTPT was obtained, which proves that the data collected through this scale was relevant.

The concept of toxic positivity has been linked to several psychological variables, such

as motivation and burnout. Research suggests that toxic positivity can reduce motivation, as individuals may become discouraged when unable to meet unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, it may also contribute to burnout, as people may feel overwhelmed by the pressure to maintain a positive outlook, leading to exhaustion and reduced productivity. Recognising the effects of dominance and toxic positivity can help businesses foster more upbeat and practical work environments. Decreasing dominance and toxic positivity can benefit society by fostering a more fair and just society. Furthermore, therapists and mental health professionals may utilise this study to guide their work with clients, assisting them in overcoming problematic habits and encouraging good change in their lives. It can also be useful in understanding various interpersonal relationships that might be influenced by the dominance trait or toxically positive behaviour.

The findings of this study have implications for various areas of psychology, including clinical psychology, counselling psychology, workplace psychology, and other areas where personality assessments may be valuable. By exploring the relationship between dominance and toxic positivity and the potential mediating roles of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal control, this study contributes to our understanding of this complex issue. It may promote a more balanced and healthy approach to emotions.

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