



## Article

# Conflict in Love: An Examination of the Role of Dark Triad Traits in Romantic Relationships among Women

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**Abstract:** The present study examined how the personality dimensions of the Dark Triad (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) predict infidelity intentions and jealousy and whether these variables predict conflict tactics used in relationships. Adult women ( $N = 567$ , 18–73 years old,  $M_{age} = 31.91$ ;  $SD = 10.29$ ) completed self-report scales assessing the Dark Triad traits, jealousy (i.e., cognitive, emotional, and behavioral), intentions towards infidelity, and conflict tactics, including negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury. Our results demonstrated that the Dark Triad traits had strong links to the intention to commit infidelity and jealousy, and at the correlational level, there were small correlations between jealousy and the intention to commit infidelity. Both jealousy and the intention to commit infidelity predicted conflict tactics. As this is possibly one of the first studies to examine these variables jointly, the present results add to our understanding of the role of personality in romantic relationships.



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**Keywords:** interpersonal relationships; intimate partner violence; jealousy; narcissism; psychopathy; machiavellianism

## 1. Introduction

People with higher scores on the Dark Triad traits employ short-term mating strategies (Jonason et al. 2010), especially in romantic and sexual relationships, usually with undesirable results such as jealousy and infidelity. Understanding how personality traits like the Dark Triad traits affect relationships is crucial for preventing unwanted consequences, such as intimate partner violence (Costa et al. 2023). Nevertheless, most research has overlooked the interaction between personality and different conflict tactics in relationships. Thus, in this study, we explore the associations of the Dark Triad traits with jealousy, infidelity, and conflict tactics in women, providing further evidence of how everyday relationships lead to negative outcomes.

While previous authors suggest variations in how men and women display these qualities and their effects on relationships (Jonason and Davis 2018), we concentrate on women to fill the gap concerning how women comprehend relationship interactions. Examining women enables us to further examine the specific forms through which personality, jealousy, intentions towards infidelity, and conflict tactics manifest in women, given that women record higher levels of exploitation by partners in situations of violence between couples (Costa et al. 2023).

The Dark Triad is a set of socially undesirable personality traits comprising Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Paulhus and Williams 2002). The authors acknowledge the current discussions about using the term Dark Triad versus Antagonistic Triad. However, we have opted to keep the original name proposed by Paulhus and

Williams (2002). These traits are characterized by a callous and insensitive core, with each trait associated with specific behavioral and psychological features (Jones and Figueredo 2013). Machiavellianism is defined as the manipulation of others for personal gain, often at the expense of affection, morality, and ideology (Christie and Geis 1970). In relationships, higher scores in Machiavellianism are associated with controlling behavior, emotional abuse, and jealousy and are less trustworthy and warm (Barelds and Dijkstra 2021; Brewer and Abell 2017; Ináncsi et al. 2016). This manipulation can foster jealousy, as they are prone to suspicion and distrust, fearing that their partner may act similarly (Brewer and Abell 2017). Their willingness to engage in infidelity is calculated and strategic, aimed at maximizing personal benefit while minimizing emotional investment in the relationship (Ináncsi et al. 2016). Narcissism is characterized by grandiosity, dishonesty, and a lack of humility (Campbell and Miller 2011), and in romantic relations, people with higher scores in narcissism are initially perceived as likable and easy-going, while in the long term, they tend to be self-centered, jealous, and unfaithful (Barelds et al. 2017; WWurst et al. 2017). They tend to view their partners as extensions of themselves, seeking constant validation and attention. When their partner's attention shifts away or they perceive a threat to their sense of superiority, this can trigger emotional jealousy. Psychopathy, comprising manipulation, dominance, insensitivity, impulsiveness, irresponsibility, shallow emotions, and relationships, as well as a lack of empathy, guilt, and remorse (Patrick 2018), is related to higher levels of jealousy and a greater propensity to engage in intimate partner violence (Forth et al. 2022; Massar et al. 2017). Their impulsive behaviors make them more likely to act on immediate desires, such as infidelity, without considering long-term consequences. It is worth noting that while men generally score higher on Dark Triad traits and engage in these behaviors more often than women in specific contexts (Miller et al. 2019), we examine women, who frequently face distinct risks and outcomes in relationships characterized by Dark Triad traits.

Both men and women are more physically attracted to individuals with lower scores on the Dark Triad traits and prefer them as long-term partners (Jonason et al. 2015); as such, mate preferences can increase the investment and retention of partners. People with high Dark Triad scores tend to engage in shorter relationships and engage in costly tactics to exert control over their partners (Kiire 2019). Consequently, feelings of abandonment in relationships can lead to emotional, cognitive, and behavioral forms of jealousy (Harris 2003; Pfeiffer and Wong 1989). Emotional jealousy includes responses to perceived threats and involves concerns about real or imagined rivals; behavioral jealousy can lead to investigations into a partner's personal life and protective behaviors (i.e., which can be normal or pathological depending on the frequency, intensity, and coherence with reality), and cognitive jealousy has been linked to abuse in virtual relationships, with high levels of hostility associated with high levels of abuse in relationships (Pfeiffer and Wong 1989). Furthermore, jealousy and its consequences are different between men and women (Sagarin et al. 2012), with women being more jealous in emotional infidelity situations (Edlund and Sagarin 2017). The Dark Triad traits correlate with cognitive and behavioral jealousy, while only narcissism has been reported to correlate significantly with emotional jealousy (Chin et al. 2017). As jealousy can lead to rivalry, infidelity, and violent behaviors such as intimate partner violence (Harris 2003; Pichon et al. 2020), gaining a better understanding of the role of jealousy in relationships is important.

The level of jealousy that one partner experiences is related to infidelity by the other partner (Pichon et al. 2020). Infidelity is defined as interactions outside the relationship that surpass the established limits of acceptability set by the partners (Buunk 1980). Infidelity can be categorized into emotional and sexual forms, and these forms do not necessarily need to co-occur. Most men and women report that emotional infidelity can occur without sexual infidelity, but not the other way around (Guitar et al. 2017). Sexual infidelity involves sexual activity with a third party and sexual behaviors beyond the act of sex, while emotional infidelity encompasses behaviors such as attending important events with a third party, deceiving the partner about feelings, and forming an emotional commitment to someone

else (Guitar et al. 2017). Women are reported to respond with greater jealousy in emotional infidelity situations, while men respond with greater jealousy in sexual infidelity events (Edlund and Sagarin 2017).

Reasons for seeking partners outside a relationship may include the availability of mates or dissatisfaction. To avoid relationship dissatisfaction, fidelity history tends to predict partner choices for establishing either short or long-term relationships (Mogilski et al. 2014). In terms of the Dark Triad traits, the intention to be unfaithful in a relationship is more significant for individuals with higher scores on measures of Machiavellianism and psychopathy (Alavi et al. 2018). With respect to short-term and long-term relationships, narcissism is reported to be a stronger predictor of betrayal intentions in long-term relationships than in short-term ones, while psychopathy is more related to betrayal intention in short-term relationships than in long-term ones (Alavi et al. 2018). Overall, men tend to perpetrate more abuse in relationships than women (Deans and Bhogal 2019). Thus, one of the possible consequences of jealousy and infidelity is intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence is a pervasive problem that disproportionately affects women, with psychological violence being the most frequent form, often accompanied by other types of violence, including physical and sexual (Pichon et al. 2020). Physical violence involves bodily harm, resulting in pain and wounds. Psychological violence consists of verbal and nonverbal aggression. Sexual violence involves acts that force someone to engage in unwanted sexual activities (Straus et al. 1996). Various factors contribute to the perpetration of violent behaviors, including low self-esteem, emotional instability, power imbalances, conflicts, expectations for the future, communication issues, and proximity (Viejo et al. 2016). Additionally, men are often the perpetrators of violence, with such acts possibly legitimized by societal norms that prioritize male dominance (Pichon et al. 2020). Higher scores in psychopathy are commonly associated with serious crimes, including rape and molestation (Costa et al. 2023), whereas higher scores in Machiavellianism are associated with hostility (Jones and Neria 2015).

Partners' characteristics are also related to the level of aggressiveness toward the other partner (Webster et al. 2016). Jealous behaviors associated with the Dark Triad traits predict aggression between partners (Tassy and Winstead 2014), while tactics to maintain partners, such as punishing a mate's infidelity and verbal possession signals, involve aggression when there is a threat of loss (Jonason et al. 2010). Narcissism and psychopathy are related to sexual harassment in both men and women (Zeigler-Hill et al. 2016). Regarding the perception of victims, women tend to perceive other women as more likely to suffer sexual harassment than men, regardless of their levels of Dark Triad traits, while men tend to perceive other men as less likely to suffer sexual harassment when their levels of psychopathy and tendency towards harassment are high or when their narcissism is low, and their Machiavellianism is high (Zeigler-Hill et al. 2016). Regarding relationship dynamics and personality traits, behavioral responses can vary across different stages of life, as age plays a vital role in shaping these behaviors. For example, older people display more stable relationship patterns and lower levels of impulsivity, while younger individuals are more prone to risky behaviors, such as infidelity (Jonason and Davis 2018; Jones and Paulhus 2014).

Most existing research on the Dark Triad traits, as the ones discussed above, and relationship dynamics has been conducted using mixed-gender samples, with some studies focusing predominantly on male participants or relying on WEIRD samples (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic populations). These studies have shown that men tend to score higher on Dark Triad traits, especially narcissism and psychopathy. Thus, we aim to fill the gap by exploring how these traits manifest in women.

### *Present Study*

Despite the existing literature, when it comes to the Dark Triad traits, jealousy, violence, and infidelity in intimate relationship conflicts, there are no studies that we know of investigating all variables together solely in women. Thus, the aim of this study is to test

an exploratory model where the Dark Triad traits predict conflict tactics in relationships mediated by jealousy and intentions toward infidelity in women. We hypothesize that the Dark Triad traits will positively predict jealousy and intentions towards infidelity, which in turn will positively predict conflict tactics in relationships. We chose to predict jealousy and infidelity as mediators based on personality theory, which suggests that personality traits shape cognitive and emotional processes before influencing behaviors. Furthermore, traits such as narcissism and psychopathy are closely linked to heightened emotional responses, such as jealousy, and cognitive strategies, like infidelity, which would precede overt behavioral manifestations, such as conflict tactics (Campbell and Miller 2011; Jonason et al. 2010).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants were 567 Brazilian women, with ages ranging from 18 to 73 years old ( $M_{age} = 31.91$ ;  $SD = 10.29$ ). In terms of other demographic information, 34.03% reported being bachelor's students, 22.75% had a university degree, (50.79% were employed, 21.51% were unemployed, and 27.70% were retired. Participants identified as heterosexual (66.84%), bisexual (27.51%), homosexual (3.35%), or others (2.29%), and 37.56% indicated they were in a relationship, 31.76% were married, 24.69% were single, while 5.11% were divorced. Regarding relationship preferences, 77.60% indicated that they prefer fewer partners and relationships with longer durations, 8.64% indicated that they prefer fewer partners and relationships with lesser duration, 8.28% indicated that they prefer more partners and relationships with lesser duration, and 5.46% indicated that they prefer more partners and relationships with longer duration. If participants were not in a relationship, we asked them to reply based on previous relationships or how they would assume a relationship would be for them. There were no missing data. We followed all ethical procedures stated in the Declaration of Helsinki during this research. Participants were recruited and debriefed using social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Instagram), and as volunteers, participants did not receive monetary compensation.

### 2.2. Measures

To assess individual differences in the Dark Triad traits, we used the Short Dark Triad (Jones and Paulhus 2014) in Brazilian Portuguese (Monteiro 2017). The scale is composed of 27 items, 9 per trait (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy). Participants reported their agreement (1 = Disagree strongly to 5 = Agree strongly) with each item. The scores for each subscale range from 9 to 45. Some items are "It's not wise to tell your secrets" for Machiavellianism, "People see me as a natural leader" for narcissism, and "People often say I'm out of control" for psychopathy. For this study, the confirmatory model with three factors yielded excellent results (CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.05 [CI 90% 0.04 to 0.06]). Items were summed to create scores for Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ,  $\omega = 0.81$ ), narcissism ( $\alpha = 0.69$ ,  $\omega = 0.70$ ), and psychopathy ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ,  $\omega = 0.74$ ).

To assess individual differences in jealousy, we used the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (Pfeiffer and Wong 1989) in Brazilian Portuguese (Lucas et al. 2012). The scale is composed of 24 items, 8 per trait (cognitive jealousy, emotional jealousy, and behavioral jealousy). Participants reported their agreement (1 = Never to 5 = Always or 1 = Very pleased to 5 = Very upset) with each item. Scores for each subscale range from 8 to 40. Example items are "I suspect that X is secretly seeing someone of the opposite sex" for cognitive jealousy, "Someone of the opposite sex is dating X" for emotional jealousy, and "I look through X's drawers, handbag, or pockets" (i.e., X is representative of one's partner) for behavioral jealousy. For this study, the confirmatory model with three factors yielded excellent results (CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98, and RMSEA = 0.04 [CI 90% 0.03 to 0.05]). Items were summed to create scores for cognitive jealousy ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ,  $\omega = 0.91$ ), emotional jealousy ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ,  $\omega = 0.85$ ), and behavioral jealousy ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ,  $\omega = 0.83$ ).



To assess individual differences in infidelity, we used the Intentions Towards Infidelity Scale (Jones et al. 2011) in Brazilian Portuguese (Gouveia et al. 2018). It is composed of seven items, and participants reported their agreement (−3 = Not at all likely to +3 = Extremely likely) with each item. Scores for each subscale range from 0 to 42. An example item is “How likely are you to be unfaithful to a partner if you knew you wouldn’t get caught?”. For this study, the confirmatory unidimensional model yielded excellent results (CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, and RMSEA = 0.05 [CI 90% 0.04 to 0.07]). Items were summed to create a single score for infidelity ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ,  $\omega = 0.89$ ).

To assess individual differences in relationship conflicts, we used the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (Straus et al. 1996) in Brazilian Portuguese (Moraes et al. 2002). The scale is composed of 78 items with five dimensions (negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury). Participants reported their agreement (0 = This has never happened to 7 = Not in the past year, but it did happen before) with each item. Scores range from 0 to 84, with each subscale having a certain number of items. Example items are “I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed” for negotiation, “I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner” for physical aggression, “I twisted my partner’s arm or hair” for physical assault, “I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight” for injury, and “I made my partner have sex without a condom” for sexual coercion. For this study, the confirmatory model with five factors yielded excellent results (CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98, and RMSEA = 0.01 [CI 90% 0.01 to 0.02]). Items were summed to create scores for negotiation ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ,  $\omega = 0.80$ ), psychological aggression ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ,  $\omega = 0.81$ ), physical assault ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ,  $\omega = 0.87$ ), sexual coercion ( $\alpha = 0.44$ ,  $\omega = 0.46$ ), and injury ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ,  $\omega = 0.84$ ).

### 2.3. Data Analysis

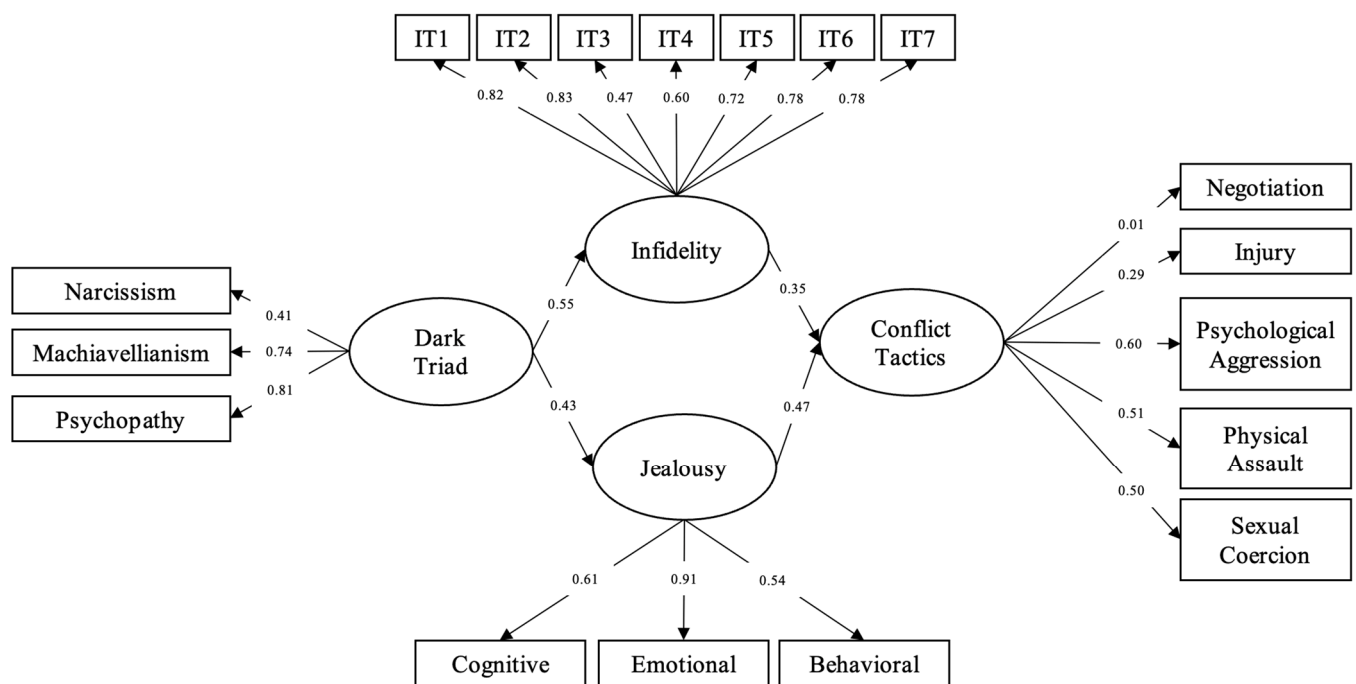
First, we correlated the Dark Triad traits with jealousy, intentions towards infidelity, and conflict tactics. Second, we used a hierarchical linear regression with the direct entry method, with the conflict tactics as the dependent variable and the other variables as predictors, to test each independent facet of conflict tactics (allowing us to examine each association). Lastly, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypothesis. The model consisted of the Dark Triad traits predicting jealousy and intentions towards infidelity, which, in turn, predicted a general latent score for conflict tactics (allowing for the examination of a path model). We tested both models because regression analyses allowed us to examine each conflict tactic in relation to other study variables, while SEM allowed us to test the different paths from the Dark Triad to conflict tactics. Overall, this informed us of two things: first, the Dark Triad is indeed associated with conflict tactics, and second, what specific tactics are used by women with elevated Dark Triad traits?

We used the following criteria to assess fit indexes: Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) higher than 0.90 are considered acceptable (McDonald and Ho 2002), and higher than 0.95 are considered good (Hu and Bentler 1999); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values lower than 0.10 are considered acceptable (MacCallum et al. 1996), and values lower than 0.05 are deemed good (Hu and Bentler 1999). The SEM was conducted using the Maximum Likelihood with Robust Standard Errors (MLR) estimator in MPlus 8 software (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017).

## 3. Results

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and correlation values for our variables. As expected, all socially undesirable variables were positively inter-correlated, with small effect sizes. All dark traits and cognitive and emotional jealousy correlated with intentions towards infidelity. Psychopathy and emotional jealousy were positively correlated with most conflict tactics, while narcissism was only significantly correlated with sexual coercion. We tested a hierarchical linear regression for each of the five conflict tactics dimensions with age in Step 1, the Dark Triad traits in Step 2, and jealousy types and intention towards infidelity in Step 3. The results are shown in Table 2a–c with standardized beta weights. For

negotiation, intentions toward infidelity were the strongest predictor. For psychological aggression, psychopathy, emotional jealousy, intentions towards infidelity, and age were the strongest predictors. For physical assault, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, emotional jealousy, and intentions toward infidelity were the best predictors. For sexual coercion, psychopathy, emotional jealousy, and intentions toward infidelity were the best predictors, although these results should be interpreted with caution because of the low internal consistency estimate for the sexual coercion scale. For injury, Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, cognitive jealousy, and age were the best predictors. All regression models showed a small effect size (i.e., Cohen  $f^2$ ). An SEM where the Dark Triad traits predicted jealousy and intention towards infidelity, which in turn predicted conflict tactics, was computed. As reported in Figure 1, the Dark Triad traits positively predict jealousy and intention towards infidelity, while both positively predict conflict tactics.



**Figure 1.** Moderation structural equation model for women. Notes. Fit indexes:  $\chi^2(112) = 222.66$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.98$ , CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04 (CI 90% 0.03 to 0.05); All standardized beta weights were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) except the negotiation path.

**Table 1.** Correlations between the Dark Triad traits, jealousy, intentions towards infidelity, and conflict tactics for women.

<i>n</i> = 567	Min	Max	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	18	37	31.91	10.29												
2. Machiavellianism	9	45	25.26	6.99	−0.14 *											
3. Narcissism	9	44	22.69	5.97	−0.01	0.33 *										
4. Psychopathy	9	39	17.79	6.18	−0.05	0.59 *	0.34 *									
5. Cognitive Jealousy	8	40	17.94	8.29	0.03	0.24 *	0.04	0.28 *								
6. Emotional Jealousy	8	40	14.75	6.42	0.01	0.28 *	0.16 *	0.32 *	0.55 *							
7. Behavioral Jealousy	8	40	28.59	5.83	−0.01	0.20 *	−0.01	0.08	0.36 *	0.50 *						
8. Infidelity	0	42	13.39	11.12	0.16 *	0.39 *	0.17 *	0.42 *	0.15 *	0.17 *	0.05					
9. Negotiation	0	42	25.56	8.31	0.01	−0.09	−0.02	−0.05	0.06	0.07	0.01	−0.11 *				
10. Psychological Aggression	0	56	11.96	11.31	0.21 *	0.09	0.03	0.21 *	0.24 *	0.33 *	0.20 *	0.21 *	0.30 *			
11. Physical Assault	0	77	4.88	10.94	0.08	0.07	0.03	0.22 *	0.19 *	0.28 *	0.09	0.17 *	0.08	0.62 *		
12. Sexual Coercion	0	28	1.02	2.80	0.01	0.18 *	0.16 *	0.25 *	0.10	0.24 *	0.05	0.23 *	0.03	0.30 *	0.27	
13. Injury	0	42	2.33	6.09	0.22 *	−0.01	−0.05	0.17 *	0.22 *	0.17 *	0.08	0.09	0.21 *	0.51 *	0.61 *	0.13

Notes. \* *p* < 0.01.

**Table 2.** (a) Hierarchical linear regression with the conflict tactics as dependent variables. (b) Hierarchical linear regression with the conflict tactics as dependent variables. (c) Hierarchical linear regression with the conflict tactics as dependent variables.

(a)																							
	Negotiation								Psychological Aggression														
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>DF</i>	<i>DR</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>DF</i>	<i>DR</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>f</i> <sup>2</sup>	
	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>						<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>β</i>	<i>t</i>						<i>β</i>
Model 1							0.00	0.00										24.90 ***	0.04				
Age	0.00	−0.01	−0.02	−0.34	0.00	−0.01						0.21	4.99 ***	0.22	5.31 ***	0.18	4.40 ***						
Model 2							1.25	0.01	1.67	0.01	0.01							14.75 ***	0.09	10.93 ***	0.05	0.05	
Machiavellianism		−0.10	−1.82	−0.08	−1.51								−0.01	−0.16	−0.10	−1.86							
Narcissism		0.02	0.38	0.01	0.28								−0.05	−1.14	−0.05	−1.16							
Psychopathy		−0.01	−0.08	−0.02	−0.28								0.25	4.87 ***	0.15	2.94 **							
Model 3							2.29 *	0.03	3.30 **	0.02	0.02							16.10 ***	0.18	15.87 ***	0.09	0.11	
Cognitive Jealousy				0.06	1.17										0.05	1.07							
Emotional Jealousy				0.11	1.95										0.24	4.64 ***							
Behavioral Jealousy				−0.04	−0.86										0.07	1.45							
Intentions toward infidelity				−0.10	−2.10 *										0.11	2.58 **							

Table 2. Cont.

(b)																														
Physical Assault												Sexual Coercion																		
Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		F	R <sup>2</sup>	DF	DR <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		F	R <sup>2</sup>	DF	DR <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>									
β	t	β	t	β	t						β	t	β	t	β	t						β	t							
Model 1						3.57	0.01											0.01	0.01											
Age		0.08	1.89	0.08	1.97 *	0.05	1.16											0.01	0.09	0.02	0.48	−0.02	−0.44	10.80 ***	0.07	14.40 ***	0.07	0.07		
Model 2						9.61 ***	0.06	11.55 ***	0.05	0.06											9.45 ***	0.11	7.60 ***	0.04	0.05					
Machiavellianism		−0.08 −1.45		−0.13 −2.45 *												0.04	0.73	−0.01 −0.20												
Narcissism		−0.04 −0.83		−0.05 −1.09												0.07	1.69	0.06 1.30												
Psychopathy		0.29 5.54 ***		0.19 3.55 ***												0.21	4.06 ***	0.12 2.30 *												
Model 3						10.19 ***	0.12	10.15 ***	0.11	0.07											9.45 ***	0.11	7.60 ***	0.04	0.05					
Cognitive Jealousy				0.03 0.70												−0.06 −1.14														
Emotional Jealousy				0.25 4.78 ***												0.23 4.22 ***														
Behavioral Jealousy				−0.05 −1.00												−0.06 −1.24														
Intentions toward infidelity				0.10 2.20 *												0.16 3.37 ***														

(c)												
Injury												
Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		F	R <sup>2</sup>	DF	DR <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>		
β	t	β	t	β	t							
Model 1						28.00 ***	0.04					
Age		0.22	5.29 ***	0.22	5.33 ***	0.20	4.94 ***					
Model 2						15.62 ***	0.10	10.99 ***	0.05	0.05		
Machiavellianism		−0.09 −1.84		−0.13 −2.37 *								
Narcissism		−0.11 −2.58 **		−0.10 −2.32 *								
Psychopathy		0.28 5.46 ***		0.23 4.33 ***								
Model 3						10.54 ***	0.13	5.02 ***	0.03	0.03		
Cognitive Jealousy						0.15	3.04 **					
Emotional Jealousy						0.06	1.04					
Behavioral Jealousy						0.01	0.24					
Intentions toward infidelity						−0.01	−0.04					

Notes. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .



#### 4. Discussion

We explored the association of the Dark Triad traits with conflict tactics, mediated by jealousy and infidelity in women, providing further evidence of how everyday relationships can lead to negative outcomes. To do so, we tested a structural equation model, and our hypothesis was confirmed, with positive prediction amongst all traits. Our results suggest that the Dark Triad traits are not only linked to negative outcomes in relationships but also interact with different conflict tactics. Specifically, narcissism and Machiavellianism were associated with sexual coercion. However, results regarding the sexual coercion scale must be interpreted with caution because of the low internal consistency estimate. Psychopathy was positively associated with all undesirable conflict tactics, except negotiation, indicating a lack of healthy and constructive approaches to conflict resolution. Intentions toward infidelity correlated with cognitive and emotional jealousy. Moreover, our study has two key results. First, despite the Dark Triad traits being better predictors of intentions towards infidelity than jealousy, jealousy is the best predictor of different conflict tactics. Second, psychopathy, emotional jealousy, and intentions toward infidelity were the strongest predictors of the conflict tactics. Overall, our results should be interpreted with parsimony because even though we found differences, most of them presented a small effect size.

Our first finding was that jealousy was a strong mediator for different conflict tactics. Because people with higher scores on the Dark Triad employ short-term mating strategies, especially in romantic and sexual relationships, jealousy can lead to rivalry and violent behaviors, such as intimate partner violence (Kiire 2019; Pichon et al. 2020). Furthermore, individuals scoring higher on the Dark Triad scales tend to engage in costly inflicting tactics to exert control over their partners and engage in shorter-term relationships (Jonason et al. 2010). Jealousy may have been a better predictor than infidelity because of partner retention tactics often employed by women, reinforcing the suggestion that even with higher scores on darker traits, women may engage in non-direct aversive behaviors instead of more direct aversive tactics, such as infidelity (Edlund and Sagarin 2017; Jonason et al. 2010). We hypothesize that studies with men may find higher results for infidelity because of the suggested gene propagation tactics employed by males (Barelds and Dijkstra 2021; Jonason et al. 2010).

The second finding was that psychopathy, emotional jealousy, and intentions toward infidelity were stronger individual predictors for each conflict tactic. As often suggested, psychopathy is the core of the darker traits, with people showing higher scores usually displaying the most undesirable set of behaviors (Jones and Figueredo 2013). For emotional jealousy and intentions toward infidelity, conflict tactics could be used to deal with and retain partners when faced with perceived (real or imaginary) threats (Edlund and Sagarin 2017; Jonason et al. 2010). Thus, women scoring higher on measures of psychopathy and emotional jealousy may be more likely to engage in controlling behavior and emotional abuse and be less trustworthy and warm in relationships.

One surprising finding was the lack of significant effects on behavioral jealousy. Behavioral jealousy, thus, may represent a more passive and indirect form of jealousy in women. These behaviors might not immediately escalate into direct conflicts, such as physical assault or psychological aggression (Pfeiffer and Wong 1989). Ultimately, it is possible to argue that emotional jealousy is primary because it occurs at a moment upon perception of a threat (Edlund and Sagarin 2017) when one may act impulsively, leading to the escalation of such actions. Emotional jealousy tends to trigger more direct emotional reactions like rage, fear, or insecurity, which may render it a more significant predictor of conflict tactics compared to cognitive or behavioral forms of jealousy. Because this form of jealousy is immediate, it leads to conflicts, especially among those who possess high Dark Triad traits that would hinder them from controlling their feelings.

Finally, considering previous findings, it can be said that people with high levels of Dark Triad traits would benefit from conflict management programs, as they are likely to use harmful conflict tactics in relationships. Nevertheless, our research provides new perspectives beyond the general advice above. To be specific, jealousy and infidelity

intentions serve as mediators between aversive characteristics and ways of relating to other people in terms of conflicts among women.

#### *Limitations and Conclusions*

While our study has several strengths, like the integration of several variables into a model derived from theory and a large sample of participants from a non-WEIRD sample, it is nonetheless limited. First, our results are more about how these patterns and variables relate to one another in women. With no men, not only are the correlations biased toward female response patterns, but we also cannot test how sex may moderate various links between traits and other important variables. Second, the use of self-report measures may have introduced biases because of social desirability effects. Future research could address these limitations using larger and more diverse samples and incorporating longitudinal methods of data collection to examine how personality predicts relationship behaviors over time or possibly including the romantic partner's responses to determine the level of agreement in perceptions of relationship characteristics. Third, the precision of the Dark Triad measure could be threatened by measurement difficulties, including unidimensionality and indistinctness, as pointed out elsewhere (Miller et al. 2019). Fourth, much of the theoretical framework and discussion we made are framed from a heteronormative perspective, focusing on heterosexual relationships and evolutionary explanations. However, we included participants of diverse sexual orientations and the literature we referenced primarily addresses heterosexual mate preferences, which may not fully capture the complexities of non-heterosexual relationships.

Despite these shortcomings, the results of our study emphasize the importance of understanding the role of dark personality traits in shaping relationship dynamics. We found that women with higher scores on the Dark Triad traits may be more prone to experiencing and perpetrating abusive behaviors in relationships because of their use of destructive conflict tactics, thus engaging in shorter relationships. As such, understanding the effects of Dark Triad traits on relationships is crucial for preventing unwanted consequences such as intimate partner violence. Therefore, interventions aimed at promoting healthy conflict resolution skills may be beneficial in preventing intimate partner violence and reducing negative outcomes in relationships involving individuals with high Dark Triad scores.

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