



## The dark side of romantic jealousy



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### ABSTRACT

The present study investigates whether self-esteem and entitlement moderate the relation between jealousy (cognitive, emotional, behavioral) and the Dark Triad (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy). To test this question, 453 participants (311 females, 140 males, 2 unidentified) between the ages of 17 to 81 years ( $M = 33.19$ ,  $SD = 10.32$ ) completed the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale, the Short-D3, the Psychological Entitlement Scale, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The interaction of self-esteem and Machiavellianism has an effect on cognitive jealousy and emotional jealousy, and the interaction of self-esteem and narcissism has an effect on behavioral jealousy. The interaction of entitlement and narcissism has an effect on emotional jealousy and behavioral jealousy, and the interaction of entitlement and psychopathy has an effect on cognitive jealousy. These findings identify dimensions of the Dark Triad and other personality traits that influence the propensity to experience different types of jealousy.

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### 1. Introduction

How are dark traits and jealousy related? Here, we report two studies examining relations between the Dark Triad personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and sub-clinical psychopathy; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) and three dimensions of romantic jealousy (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) as assessed by the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale (MJS; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). In Study 1 we report correlations between these variables, while in Study 2 we sought to replicate the findings of Study 1 using a more diverse sample and to investigate the possible moderating effects of self-esteem and entitlement on relations between the Dark Triad and dimensions of romantic jealousy.

#### 1.1. The Dark Triad

Modern conceptualizations of personality assume that personality traits can be assessed at a several levels (i.e., higher-order, mid-level, and lower-order; e.g., Jonason & Webster, 2010). The Dark Triad is a fairly recently developed model of three mid-level antisocial personality traits, measured in the normal population at the sub-clinical level: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Machiavellianism is primarily characterized by manipulativeness, deceptiveness, and emotional coldness (Christie & Geis, 1970; Geis & Moon, 1981). Narcissism is defined by feelings of vanity, grandiosity, a sense of entitlement, and, in its vulnerable form, is

sometimes associated with low self-esteem and insecurity (Krizan & Johar, 2012; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Raskin & Hall, 1979). Psychopathy is defined by characteristics such as callous indifference, sensation-seeking, high impulsivity, and low empathy (Hare, 1985; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Previous research has shown that the Dark Triad represent three theoretically independent, although overlapping traits (e.g., Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy appear to be linked by a common core of disagreeableness, a lack of humility, and a short-term (versus long-term) mating orientation (Jonason & Tost, 2010; Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Previous findings have also demonstrated relations between the Dark Triad traits and the perceived capability to deceive, with Machiavellianism yielding the strongest association (Giammarco, Atkinson, Baughman, Veselka, & Vernon, 2012). This could suggest that the reported relations between Machiavellianism and success in acts of deception (e.g., Geis & Moon, 1981) may influence these Machiavellians to consider themselves more adept at deceiving potential targets (Giammarco et al., 2012). The Dark Triad are also differentially predictive of several other aspects of personality, such as risk-taking and aggressiveness, an opportunistic life strategy, a lack of self-control, strategic or impulsive social orientations, love styles, and mate-retention/mate-poaching (Jonason, Li, & Buss, 2010; Jonason & Webster, 2010).

#### 1.2. Romantic jealousy

Research on romantic jealousy indicates that jealousy is, at least partially, the product of perceived threats to attachment relationships

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(e.g., Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989). Often one or both persons in a partnership will employ relationship maintenance behaviors, known as mate retention tactics. Such tactics include both positive and negative strategies that have been reported to range from vigilance to violence (Buss, 1988; Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Investigations into different tactics have provided valuable insights into the fundamental operations of romantic relationships (Holden, Zeigler-Hill, Pham, & Shackelford, 2014). For example, mate retention behaviors have been found to be associated with violence toward a partner (Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Goetz, 2009), frequency of intercourse (Kaighobadi & Shackelford, 2008), and, importantly to the current research, intersexual negative inducements (i.e., jealousy induction, emotional and commitment manipulation, derogation of competitors, and punishing a mate's infidelity threat; de Miguel & Buss, 2011; Shackelford, Goetz, & Buss, 2005).

Previous studies have examined relations between mate retention tactics and the Dark Triad traits. For example, it has been found that the Dark Triad are associated with employment of verbal possession signals, jealousy inducement, and emotional manipulation (Jonason et al., 2010). However, research has yet to address relations between the Dark Triad and romantic jealousy. Previous findings suggest that these traits may be associated with the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of romantic jealousy. Importantly, romantic jealousy has been found to be positively related to feelings of insecurity, low self-esteem, and self-consciousness (Khanchandani & Durham, 2009). In past research, jealousy has been conceived as having the capacity to serve either an adaptive or a maladaptive function (Buss, 2000). The adaptive characteristics of jealousy are evident through an evolutionary perspective, which postulates the inherent need to guard (potential) mates from (potential) mate poachers (i.e., mate-retention tactics; Buss, 2000; Schmitt & Buss, 2001). However, maladaptive jealousy can become problematic when it presents in forms of insecurity, violence, manipulation, self-consciousness, anxiety, and other disadvantageous ways (Wade & Walsh, 2008).

## 2. Study 1

Study 1 investigates correlations between the Dark Triad traits and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of romantic jealousy. We predicted that Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy would be positively correlated with the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of the MJS. However, narcissism was also expected to correlate significantly with emotional jealousy due to the inherent insecurity and self-consciousness associated with the trait. In contrast, psychopathy and Machiavellianism were expected not to be significantly related with this dimension due to the increased mental-toughness associated with these traits. As mentioned, Machiavellianism is notably characterized by the high use of deceit and manipulation as well as a cold and callous disposition. Consequently, Machiavellianism was expected to exhibit significant relations with both dimensions of cognitive and behavioral jealousy. Additionally, the associations between jealousy, low self-esteem, and insecurity suggest that narcissism would exhibit significant positive correlations with all dimensions of the MJS (Vecchio, 2000, 2005) because insecurity, emotional vulnerability, and the narcissist's notable sense of entitlement may lead to increased rumination regarding potential threats as well as jealousy behaviors in attachment relationships. Finally, we predicted that significant positive correlations would be found between psychopathy and both cognitive and behavioral dimensions of the MJS. Psychopaths' noted propensity for rash impulsivity, thrill-seeking, and especially callous indifference suggests that psychopathy would be related most highly to behavioral jealousy, followed by cognitive jealousy. However, it would not be significantly related to emotional jealousy due to an inherent lack of emotional attachment to others.

## 2.1. Method

### 2.1.1. Participants and procedure

This sample consisted of 510 English-speaking participants from North America (153 males, 355 females; age:  $M = 19.76$ ,  $SD = 5.44$ , range = 16–80 years). Participants were recruited via email in partial fulfillment of university course requirements and accessed an online-survey via FluidSurvey. Participants first received a letter of information which briefed them on the nature of the study. Informed consent was then given before redirection to the questionnaires. Participants were asked to complete all questionnaires in full, and upon completion were provided with a debriefing form. Participants were compensated either with entry to a draw for one of ten \$50.00 prizes or received course credit for participation. The study took approximately 45 min to complete.

### 2.1.2. Materials

The *Multidimensional Jealousy Scale* (MJS; Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989) is a 28-item measure of jealousy which has three subscales tapping cognitive, emotional, and behavioral jealousy. Participants were instructed to think of a person they are having or have had a strong romantic relationship with and to rate their agreement with each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale (cognitive and behavioral: 1 = *never*, 7 = *all the time*; emotional: 1 = *very pleased*, 7 = *very upset*). An example cognitive item is "I suspect that X is secretly seeing someone of the opposite sex" (where X is their current or former partner); an example emotional item is "X is flirting with someone of the opposite sex"; and an example behavioral item is "I question X about his or her whereabouts". The MJS has demonstrated good psychometric properties (Pfeiffer & Wong, 1989).

The *SD3* (Jones & Paulhus, 2014) is a 27-item measure of the Dark Triad. Participants rated their agreement with items on each of the Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy subscales using a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *disagree strongly*, 5 = *agree strongly*). An example Machiavellianism item is "I like to use clever manipulation to get my way"; an example narcissism item is "I know that I am special because everyone keeps telling me so"; and an example item for psychopathy is "Payback needs to be quick and nasty". The SD3 has demonstrated good reliability and validity (Jones & Paulhus, 2014).

## 2.2. Results and discussion

Cronbach's reliability coefficients reached satisfactory to good values, ranging from 0.67 to 0.77 for the SD3 and from 0.81 to 0.92 for the MJS (see main diagonal of Table 1). Correlational analyses revealed moderate positive correlations among the Dark Triad traits (see Table 1). Moderate positive correlations were also observed among the jealousy subscales, indicating that the jealousy dimensions were related, yet distinct. Significant positive correlations were found between several of the Dark Triad traits and the measures of jealousy. In particular, and as predicted, all three Dark Traits correlated with cognitive and behavioral jealousy while only narcissism correlated significantly with

**Table 1**

Study 1 correlations and internal consistencies for the SD3 and Multidimensional Jealousy Scale.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Machiavellianism	0.67	0.27**	0.48**	0.15**	0.07	0.13**
2. Narcissism		0.69	0.34**	0.11*	0.15**	0.17**
3. Psychopathy			0.77	0.28**	0.06	0.21**
4. Cognitive Jealousy				0.92	0.21**	0.51**
5. Emotional Jealousy					0.81	0.22**
6. Behavioral Jealousy						0.85

Cronbach's alphas reported along main diagonal.

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level.

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