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ARTIGOS

Comportamentos Antissociais Online: A Conexão entre a Triade Sombria e o Cyberstalking em uma Amostra Brasileira

Online Antisocial Behaviors: The Connection Between Dark Triad and Cyberstalking in a Brazilian Sample

Comportamientos Antisociales en Línea: La Conexión entre la Tríada Oscura y el Cyberstalking en una Muestra Brasileña

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Resumo: O cyberstalking em relacionamentos íntimos é uma preocupação crescente. Este estudo teve como objetivo investigar a associação entre os traços de personalidade da Triade Sombria (Maquiavelismo, narcisismo e psicopatia) e comportamentos de cyberstalking em uma amostra brasileira. Trata-se de um estudo quantitativo e transversal com 215 adultos brasileiros, recrutados via redes sociais. Os participantes responderam à Escala Dark Triad Dirty Dozen e à Escala de Cyberstalking de Parceiro Íntimo. Os dados foram analisados por meio de correlações de Pearson e regressão linear hierárquica. Todos os traços da Triade Sombria se correlacionaram positivamente com o cyberstalking. Na análise de regressão, a psicopatia foi um preditor significativo e único do cyberstalking em todos os modelos. O narcisismo também emergiu como um preditor significativo após o controle de variáveis sociodemográficas. Contudo, o Maquiavelismo não demonstrou um efeito preditivo único. Adicionalmente, os homens relataram níveis mais baixos de perpetração de cyberstalking do que as mulheres. Os achados sugerem que a psicopatia e o narcisismo são preditores-chave da perpetração de cyberstalking em relacionamentos íntimos, destacando o papel da personalidade na compreensão de comportamentos antissociais online. Os traços psicopáticos, em particular, destacam-se como o fator mais robusto.

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Palavras-chave: Triade sombria; cyberstalking; relacionamento íntimo.

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Abstract: Cyberstalking in intimate relationships is a growing concern. This study aimed to investigate the association between Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and cyberstalking behaviors in a Brazilian sample. This was a quantitative, cross-sectional study with 215 Brazilian adults, recruited via social media. Participants completed the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen and the Intimate Partner Cyberstalking Scale. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlations and hierarchical linear regression. All Dark Triad traits were positively correlated with cyberstalking. In the regression analysis, psychopathy was a significant and unique predictor of cyberstalking in all models. Narcissism also emerged as a significant predictor after controlling for sociodemographic

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variables. However, Machiavellianism did not show a unique predictive effect. Additionally, men reported lower levels of cyberstalking perpetration than women. The findings suggest that psychopathy and narcissism are key predictors of cyberstalking perpetration in intimate relationships, highlighting the role of personality in understanding online antisocial behaviors. Psychopathic traits, in particular, stand out as the most robust factor.

Keywords: Dark triad; cyberstalking. intimate relationship.

Resumen: El cyberstalking en las relaciones íntimas es una preocupación creciente. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar la asociación entre los rasgos de personalidad de la Tríada Oscura (maquiavelismo, narcisismo y psicopatía) y las conductas de cyberstalking en una muestra brasileña. Se realizó un estudio cuantitativo y transversal con 215 adultos brasileños, reclutados a través de redes sociales. Los participantes completaron la escala Dark Triad Dirty Dozen y la Escala de cyberstalking en la Pareja (IPCS). Los datos se analizaron mediante correlaciones de Pearson y regresión lineal jerárquica. Todos los rasgos de la Tríada Oscura se correlacionaron positivamente con el cyberstalking. En el análisis de regresión, la psicopatía fue un predictor significativo y único del cyberstalking en todos los modelos. El narcisismo también surgió como un predictor significativo tras controlar las variables sociodemográficas. Sin embargo, el maquiavelismo no mostró un efecto predictivo único. Además, los hombres informaron niveles más bajos de perpetración de ciberacoso que las mujeres. Los hallazgos sugieren que la psicopatía y el narcisismo son predictores clave de la perpetración de ciberacoso en relaciones íntimas, destacando el papel de la personalidad en la comprensión de las conductas antisociales en línea. Los rasgos psicopáticos, en particular, se destacan como el factor más robusto.

Palabras clave: Tríada oscura; cyberstalking; relación íntima.

Introduction

Stalking is characterized as a deliberate, repetitive, and intrusive pattern of intimidating behavior aimed at a specific individual with the intent to disturb, threaten, or frighten them (Fox et al., 2011). Although stalking has always been present in society, its criminalization and the way it is addressed have evolved significantly in recent years (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003), including the recent criminalization of the crime of persecution (stalking) in Brazil through Law No. 14,132/2021 (Boldt, 2021).

The growing prevalence of internet-enabled technologies, including smartphones, computers, and tablets, along with the widespread use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook,

and Twitter, has become a significant part of daily life. This technological shift has given rise to a new form of stalking known as cyberstalking (March et al., 2020). Cyberstalking is conceptualized as a persistent, deliberate, and intrusive pattern of behavior directed toward victims, enacted within digital environments, and often characterized by its unwelcome and distressing nature (Weekes et al., 2025). It may be perpetrated by strangers, acquaintances, friends (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007), or intimate partners (March et al., 2020), reflecting its multifaceted and relationally complex nature.

Perpetrators exploit the affordances of digital technologies, particularly social media platforms, to monitor, harass, or intimidate their targets, frequently employing strategies such as anonymity or pseudonymity (Rogers et al., 2023). Such practices not only obscure accountability but also contribute to the increasing prevalence and insidiousness of cyberstalking, underscoring its growing significance as a public health, psychological, and legal concern (Machado et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the psychological consequences for victims are profound, as cyberstalking often results in heightened levels of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and feelings of helplessness, with cascading effects across multiple domains of life, including personal well-being, family dynamics, and occupational functioning (Storey et al., 2023; Bussu et al., 2025). This underscores the pressing need for interdisciplinary approaches to prevention, intervention, and policy development addressing the growing prevalence and insidious nature of this phenomenon.

According to Ménard and Pincus (2012), individuals with a history of traumatic experiences are more likely to engage in stalking behaviors, as such experiences may lead them to interact with others in abusive, intrusive, or even aggressive ways. However, the most prevalent profile of cyberstalkers is associated with individuals who exhibit personality disorders (Storey et al., 2023; Truss & de Roos, 2024). Another critical aspect frequently emphasized in research is the role of dark personality traits in explaining stalking

behavior. This personality type is defined by the combination of four core traits commonly linked to the concept of the Dark Tetrad: Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism. These traits interact in complex ways, fostering behavioral patterns marked by manipulation, lack of empathy, and exploitative tendencies—common elements in stalking behavior. Defined by antisocial tendencies, this personality profile combines psychopathy (characterized by emotional insensitivity), sadism (pleasure derived from causing harm to others), narcissism (a grandiose self-view), and Machiavellianism (manipulative and calculating behavior). (Dinić et al., 2021; Moor & Anderson, 2019; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Smoker & March, 2017; Xu et al., 2024).

All three Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—along with sadism, were found to be significant predictors of cyberstalking, potentially driven by the anonymity and emotional detachment offered by the internet (Silva et al., 2021). Similarly, a study by March et al. (2020) reinforced the link between Dark Triad traits and cyberstalking behaviors in intimate partner relationships, also highlighting that perpetrators have a strong need to control the relationship. Despite this, research on the topic remains limited. As such, the aim of this study is to explore the connection between cyberstalking and Dark Triad traits within intimate relationships.

Cyberstalking

The internet has made stalking significantly easier compared to traditional methods, as online aggressors (Smoker & March, 2017) can access detailed information about a victim's life, particularly if the victim shares personal details on social media (Eterovic-Soric et al., 2017). Cyberstalking is defined as the use of technology to harass or stalk someone, distinct from traditional "offline" stalking due to its reliance on digital platforms. However, Crespo (2015) notes that both forms can occur simultaneously, with individuals engaging in both stalking and cyberstalking behaviors.

Cyberstalking involves an individual obsessively pursuing someone, often with the intent

to initiate or maintain a relationship for specific personal motives (Pires et al., 2018). Additionally, this behavior is typically linked to an obsessive impulse to pursue someone, along with excessive and problematic use of social media platforms (Wegmann et al., 2017).

This behavior leads the aggressor to spend significant time scrutinizing the posts shared across various accounts and profiles of their victim (Kircaburun et al., 2018), often reflecting a deeper need to control the relationship (March et al., 2020). The aggressor's actions typically manifest as harassment, stalking, and aggression, all carried out in an online or digital context (Smith-Darden et al., 2017).

Cyberstalking can be facilitated through actions such as sending friend requests or messages on social media, or more severe behaviors, including sending abusive, threatening, or obscene emails to the victim or their family members (DeTardo-Bora & Bora, 2016). This form of stalking most commonly targets intimate partners, both current and former, and often leads to significant physical, psychological, and financial harm for the victim (Smoker & March, 2017).

The rising rates of cyberstalking may be linked to the anonymity provided by the internet, which facilitates the spread of aggressive behavior (Smoker & March, 2017). Additionally, the nature of cyberstalking can amplify the aggressor's actions, as the absence of spatial and temporal boundaries increases the victim's sense of vulnerability. This lack of limitations allows the perpetrator to more easily manipulate, coerce, control, and harass the victim (Tokunaga & Aune, 2015).

A study by Reyns (2019), involving 1,310 American university students, found that 4.9% had engaged in cyberstalking behaviors. When examining the personality traits of cyberstalkers, March et al. (2020) confirmed the predictive role of Dark Triad factors in cyberstalking within intimate partner relationships, also revealing that perpetrators often have a strong need to control the relationship. However, research specifically focusing on the aggressor's role remains limited in the literature (Smoker & March, 2017).

Dark Triad

The Dark Triad is a cluster of three non-pathological personality traits—Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy—that share overlapping characteristics, despite being distinct constructs. These traits are marked by socially undesirable qualities, including manipulation, lack of empathy, self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The Dark Triad focuses on describing individuals who exhibit malevolent behavioral strategies and psychological tendencies (Ferreira et al., 2022; O'Boyle et al., 2014).

In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), narcissistic personality disorder is classified as a personality disorder characterized by pervasive patterns of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. These features are often associated with vulnerabilities in self-esteem, which drive a continuous need for validation and approval (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). However, narcissism can also be viewed as a personality dimension, existing along a continuum (Ames et al., 2006; Foster & Campbell, 2007; O'Boyle et al., 2012). The subclinical form of narcissism is typically defined by an inflated sense of self-esteem, dominance, superiority, and a strong belief in one's entitlement to special treatment (Furnham et al., 2014).

Of the three constructs in the Dark Triad, Machiavellianism is the only one not classified as a personality disorder (Gouveia et al., 2016). It primarily emphasizes the expression of manipulative and deceptive behaviors aimed at achieving specific goals (Gonçalves & Campbell, 2014; Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006), and is also characterized by a generalized, cynical perspective on the world and people (Czibor et al., 2017).

Psychopathy can be understood as the interaction of three dimensions: disinhibition, audacity, and cruelty (Patrick et al., 2009). While the term is commonly associated with criminals, clinically referred to as psychopaths, research

shows that non-pathological, subclinical traits of psychopathy are present in the general population (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). As a result, individuals with psychopathic traits often exhibit impulsive behaviors, which may lead to externalizing actions characterized by disinhibition (Gouveia et al., 2016). The most prominent aspects of the disorder appear to include a lack of empathy and remorse, which describe individuals as cold and insensitive, displaying cruelty. These traits are often accompanied by a parasitic lifestyle and a tendency toward predatory or instrumental forms of aggression, as well as sensation seeking (Venables et al., 2013).

Studies have shown that narcissistic individuals exhibit behavioral traits of grandiosity, need for dominance, and feelings of superiority (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Furthermore, they demonstrate difficulties in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships. Studies have shown that narcissistic individuals display behavioral traits such as grandiosity, a need for dominance, and feelings of superiority (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Additionally, they often struggle to form healthy interpersonal relationships (Samuel et al., 2012).

Previous studies suggest that all Dark Tetrad traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, psychopathy, and sadism—are significant predictors of cyberstalking behavior (Moor & Anderson, 2019). This connection can be partly explained by the anonymity and sense of distance provided by the internet, which amplify the negative traits associated with these personality characteristics (Lyons, 2019). However, Moor and Anderson (2019) emphasize that, despite the importance of dark traits in explaining online behaviors, there is still a limited number of studies exploring this relationship, particularly in the context of intimate relationships (Kircaburun et al., 2018).

The Dark Triad Dirty Dozen (DTDD) – Jonason and Webster (2010) – is a 12-item scale designed to measure the Dark Triad personality traits (psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism) without aiming to provide a clinical diagnosis.

Some sample items include: "I tend to manipulate others to get what I want" (Machiavellianism), "I tend to expect special favors from others" (narcissism), and "I tend to be callous or indifferent" (psychopathy). In Brazil, the DTDD was validated by Gouveia et al. (2016).

Based on the studies reviewed and the analysis of the data presented, it is evident that the traits of the Dark Triad of Personality—Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism—are significant contributors to the phenomenon of cyberstalking in the context of intimate relationships. Individuals displaying these traits often use digital technologies and social media as powerful tools to exercise control, monitor, and manipulate their victims (Moor & Anderson, 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2018). The anonymity and accessibility provided by the online environment intensify these behaviors, allowing actions to be carried out in an intrusive and persistent manner, with less risk of immediate social consequences (Lyons, 2019). Thus, virtual dynamics amplify the expression of dark traits, intensifying abusive patterns and heightening the vulnerability of victims in these contexts. These findings not only support previous research linking the Dark Triad to abusive and criminal behaviors but also emphasize the need for preventive and educational strategies to reduce the risks and impacts of cyberstalking in modern society. A deeper understanding of these dynamics is essential not only for safeguarding victims but also for promoting healthy and safe relationships both in digital and physical environments.

Thus, this study aimed to examine the association between Dark Personality Traits, Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, and the manifestation of cyberstalking behaviors within a Brazilian adult sample. Specifically, it sought to determine the extent to which these traits predict or contribute to the engagement in intrusive, manipulative, and controlling behaviors in online interpersonal contexts.

Method

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional approach. Data were collec-

ted through online questionnaires administered to a non-probabilistic sample of participants. Validated psychometric scales were used to assess the Dark Triad of Personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) as well as the occurrence of cyberstalking. This methodology enabled the exploration of associations between the constructs and provided an initial understanding of how these personality traits influence online stalking behaviors.

Participants

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling on social media (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram), with snowball sampling elements, aiming to reach Brazilian adults from different states. Posts containing a link to a Google Forms questionnaire were widely disseminated. The platform was selected as the data collection platform for its simplicity, accessibility, and zero cost. It allows secure and anonymous participation across devices, ensuring respondent privacy and enabling wide geographic reach (Aulianto & Raharja, 2023).

The selection criteria were being over 18 years of age and consenting to participate in the research. A total of 221 individuals accessed the questionnaire, with 215 Brazilian participants consenting to take part in the study. The mean age was 27.90 years ($SD = 10.15$). The sample was composed of 47.4% men and 51.6% women. Regarding relationship status, 49.8% were single, 23.3% were in a serious relationship, 17.7% were married or in a stable union, 5.1% were divorced, 3.7% were engaged, and 0.5% were in an open relationship. As for education level, 43.3% had completed higher education, 29.3% had incomplete higher education, and 27.4% had completed high school.

Instruments

Dark Triad Dirty Dozen (DTDD; Jonason & Webster, 2010). This instrument consists of 12-items, equally divided into three dimensions: Machiavellianism (e.g., item 3: "I tend to flatter others to get what I want"), psychopathy (e.g., item 7: "I

tend to be callous or indifferent"), and narcissism (e.g., item 10: "*I tend to want others to pay attention to me*"). The version adapted into Brazilian Portuguese by Gouveia et al. (2016) was used, with responses recorded on a five-point Likert scale (1 - *Strongly disagree* to 5 - *Strongly agree*). The internal consistency indices for the Brazilian version of the DTDD showed satisfactory reliability across all evaluated factors. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were $\alpha = .85$ for Machiavellianism, $\alpha = .80$ for Narcissism, and $\alpha = .72$ for Psychopathy. These figures indicate good internal consistency for the first two domains and acceptable reliability for Psychopathy, according to psychometric standards for brief scales (Gouveia et al., 2016). The findings support the original three-factor structure and demonstrate internal stability within the Brazilian context. However, the Psychopathy factor shows comparatively lower homogeneity, which aligns with observations from other cross-cultural adaptations of the instrument. Internal consistency in the current study was good ($\alpha = .86$). Subscale reliabilities were: Machiavellianism $\alpha = .77$ (acceptable), Narcissism $\alpha = .87$ (good), and Psychopathy $\alpha = .75$ (acceptable) (George & Mallery, 2019).

Intimate Partner Cyberstalking Scale (IPCS; Silva et al., 2021). It consists of 21 items that assess cyberstalking behavior in a comprehensive manner. For example, item 4 ("*I have checked messages from my partner (e.g., email, Facebook, cell phone) without them knowing*") and item 8 ("*I have checked my partner's phone/computer history to see what they have been doing*") are answered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Totally disagree) to 5 (Totally agree). The internal consistency analysis of the Brazilian version of the Intimate Partner Cyberstalking Scale (IPCS-Br) indicated high reliability indices. The standardized Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .93$) and McDonald's omega ($\omega = .93$) demonstrated excellent internal consistency, suggesting high homogeneity among the items. Both values exceed the cutoff point conventionally accepted in the psychometric literature (Silva et al., 2021). Internal consistency in the present study was good (Cronbach's $\alpha =$

.89) (George & Mallery, 2019).

Sociodemographic questionnaire, which included questions related to sex, age, level of education and relationship status.

Procedures

Before answering the questionnaires, all participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without prejudice. This information was presented in the Informed Consent Form (ICF), available on the first page of Google Forms. Only participants who agreed to the terms continued to answer the questions.

Data were collected between October and November 2024 through the application of three main instruments: the Sociodemographic Questionnaire, the DTDD scale and the IPCS. The Sociodemographic Questionnaire included questions about the participants' gender, age, education level and relationship status in order to characterize the sample and provide contextual information for data analysis.

The participants accessed the online questionnaires through the link provided in the promotional posts. After reading and accepting the informed consent form, participants answered the sociodemographic questionnaire questions, followed by the DTDD and IPCS items. Data collection was conducted anonymously, ensuring the participants' confidentiality and privacy of responses.

This study strictly followed the ethical principles for research involving human subjects. All participants were informed about the study objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of the information provided. The study was approved by an institutional ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent before answering the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

All analyses were conducted in Python 3.11 e software IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences - SPSS, version 24. Tests were two-tailed with $\alpha = .05$ and 95% confidence intervals (CIs). We

did not impute missing data: correlations used pairwise deletion, and regressions used listwise deletion. DTDD domain scores (Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy) and the DTDD total were computed as item means; the IPCS total was analyzed as provided (or as the means of available items when necessary). Sociodemographic variables (sex, education, relationship status) were cleaned/standardized and entered as dummy variables ($k-1$, drop-first) with explicit reference categories; age was treated as continuous. Descriptives for continuous variables (e.g., age) included mean (M) and standard deviation (SD); categorical variables were summarized with counts and percentages; missingness was reported.

Bivariate associations between DTDD domains and IPCS total were assessed with Pearson correlations (pairwise deletion), reporting 95% CIs via Fisher's z and controlling multiple testing across the three primary tests with Benjamini-Hochberg - false discovery rate - FDR (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995) (we report q alongside p). As a robustness check, we also computed Spearman correlations.

We fit two OLS models with IPCS total as the dependent variable. Model 1 included Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy simultaneously (therefore coefficients represent partial effects). We additionally reported standardized betas (β) by re-estimating on z -scored continuous variables. Model 2 added age, sex, education, and relationship status (dummy-coded) as controls. We examined heteroscedasticity with the

Breusch-Pagan test and computed Heteroscedasticity-Consistent (HC3) robust standard errors to ensure inferences were not driven by heteroscedasticity (Long & Ervin, 2000).

Variance inflation factors (VIFs) were used to assess multicollinearity among predictors and to qualify interpretation of unique effects. Full coefficients are displayed in forest plots of unstandardized Bs with 95% CIs. As supplementary robustness, we probed collinearity with Ridge and Elastic Net regressions (cross-validated) and an exploratory PCA of the three traits (and a simple PCR using PC1); these were used to check stability rather than as primary inferential tests. All analyses were performed following ethical and methodological guidelines pertinent to research in psychology and human behavior.

Results

Table 1 provides the sociodemographic profile of the sample. Participants were predominantly young adults (see M and SD). The sex distribution was balanced, with a slight predominance of females. Educational attainment was generally high, concentrated in higher education (completed or in progress). Regarding relationship status, single was the modal category, followed by committed relationship and married, whereas engaged, divorced, and open relationship were comparatively infrequent. Exact counts and percentages are reported in the table.

Table 1 - Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample ($N = 215$).

Variable	n	%
Age (years) $M = 27.9$, $SD = 10.2$		
Sex		
Female	112	50.5
Male	103	46.8
Education		
High school (completed)	60	27
Higher education completed	94	42.3
Incomplete higher education	64	28.8
Relationship status		
Single	108	48.6
Married	39	17.6

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Divorced	12	5.4
Engaged	9	4.1
Committed relationship	51	23
Open relationship	2	0.9

Pearson correlations (Table 2) indicated that all three dark traits were positively associated with cyberstalking. The strongest bivariate association was observed for Psychopathy, with Machiavellianism and Narcissism showing comparable, smaller effects. Effects were small to approaching medium and remained significant after FDR (Benjamini-Hochberg) correction across

the three tests.

A nonparametric sensitivity analysis (Spearman) yielded convergent results ($p = .194, p = .004; p = .254, p < .001; p = .315, p < .001$, respectively). Thus, higher levels of dark personality traits are associated with greater cyberstalking, accounting for $\approx 7\text{--}9\%$ of the variance at the bivariate level.

Table 2 - Correlations (with 95% CIs and FDR q) between DTDD domains and IPCS.

DDTD (X)	IPCS (Y)	<i>r</i>	95% IC <i>r</i>		<i>p</i>	<i>q</i> (FDR-BH)
			Lower	Upper		
Machiavellianism	IPCS	0.274	0.146	0.393	< .001	< .001
Narcissism	IPCS	0.273	0.145	0.393	< .001	< .001
Psychopathy	IPCS	0.295	0.168	0.413	< .001	< .001

Note. **FDR-BH**: False Discovery Rate - Benjamini-Hochberg.

Model 1: DTDD domains as concurrent predictors of cyberstalking

A linear regression including Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy as simultaneous predictors was significant, $R^2 = .128$, adjusted R^2

$= .115, F(3, 210) = 10.233, p < .001, n = 214$ (listwise deletion for Model 1). Detailed coefficients are presented in Table 3 and visualized as a forest plot in Figure 1.

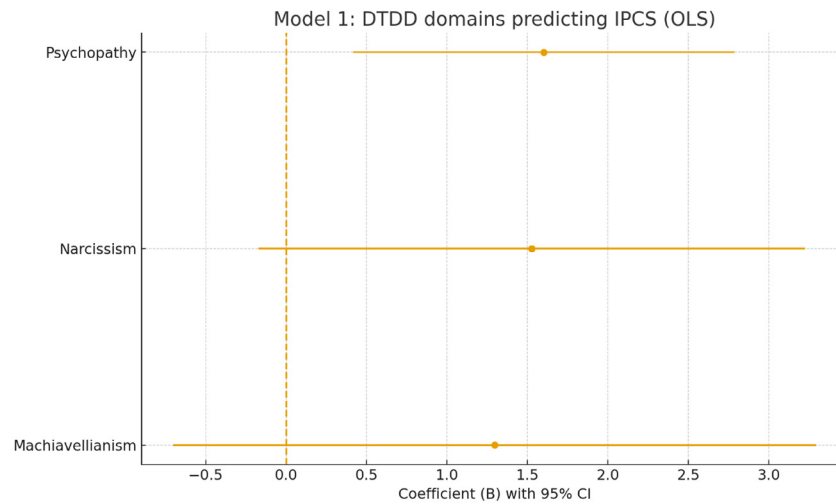
Table 3 - Regression DTDD domains as simultaneous predictors of IPCS (Model 1).

Variable	B	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% IC		β
					Lower	Upper	
Machiavellianism	1.439	1.030	1.398	0.164	-0.218	0.809	0.115
Narcissism	1.447	0.868	1.668	0.097 [†]	0.059	0.925	0.133
Psychopathy	1.637	0.603	2.714	< 0.01	0.135	0.729	0.198

[†]Tendency

In brief, Psychopathy showed a unique positive association with cyberstalking when the three traits were entered together. Narcissism displayed a positive tendency that did not reach conventional significance, and Machiavellianism did not show a unique effect. This pattern is consistent with the view that the three domains capture

overlapping features, while psychopathy contributes additional variance related to cyberstalking. Interpreting the unstandardized effect, a one-unit increase in Psychopathy was associated with an approximate +1.6-point increase in IPCS after accounting for Machiavellianism and Narcissism.

Figure 1 - Forest plot of Model 1 coefficients with HC3 95% CI.

Model 2: DTDD domains plus sociodemographic controls

Next, we added age, sex, education, and relationship status (dummy-coded with reference categories). Model (2) fit improved, $R^2 = .199$, adjusted $R^2 = .151$, $F(4.160)$, $p < .001$, $n = 214$. The Breusch-Pagan test indicated no heteroscedasticity ($p = .595$). Results are reported in Table 4 and summarized in Figure 2, which plots unstandardized coefficients with HC3 95% confidence intervals. Two findings are central: Psychopathy remained a robust positive predictor of cyberstalking, and Narcissism became significant after including sociodemographic controls.

Machiavellianism remained non-significant. Among the controls, sex was informative, men reported lower IPCS scores than women, hol-

ding all other variables constant (males scored on average about 2.8 points lower on IPCS than females), while age showed a small positive trend. In metric terms, a one-unit increase in Narcissism and Psychopathy was associated with $\approx +1.9$ and $\approx +1.8$ points in IPCS, respectively; Age showed a modest $\approx +0.12$ -point increase per year, and Male scored ≈ -2.8 points relative to Female. Education and relationship-status contrasts were not consequential once the focal predictors and age/sex were in the model. Using HC3 robust standard errors did not alter these conclusions. HC3 robust standard errors yielded the same pattern (Psychopathy - $p = .040$; Narcissism - $p = .045$), with Machiavellianism remaining non-significant and Age retaining a positive trend ($p \approx .11$).

Table 4 - Regression DTDD Domains + Sociodemographic controls (dummy-coded) as simultaneous predictors of IPCS (Model 2).

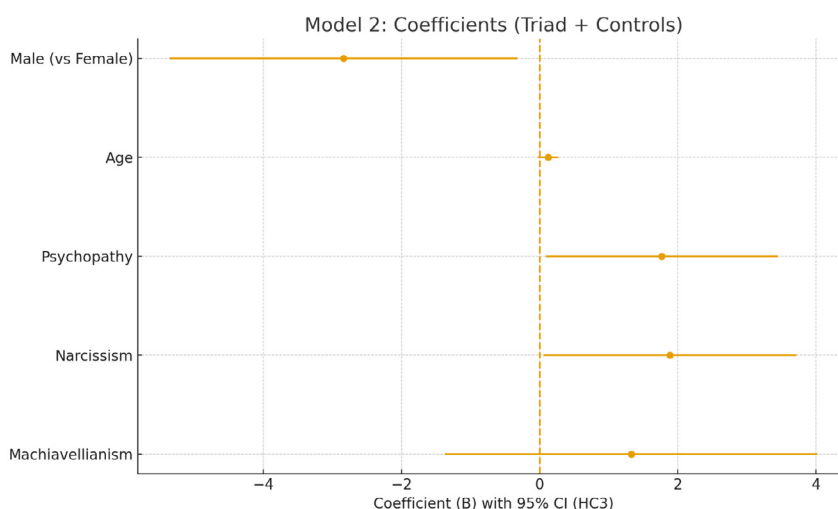
Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% IC		β
					Lower	Upper	
Machiavellianism	0.295	0.260	1.134	0.258	-0.218	0.809	0.096
Narcissism	0.492	0.22	2.241	< 0.05	0.059	0.925	0.181
Psychopathy	0.432	0.151	2.865	< 0.01	0.135	0.729	0.210
Age (years)	0.125	0.073	1.707	0.089 [†]	-0.019	0.27	0.144
Sex (male)	-2.808	1.218	-2.307	< 0.05	-5.209	-0.408	-0.317

[†]Tendency

Two ancillary checks support the stability of these conclusions. First, heteroscedasticity was not detected (Breusch–Pagan test $p = .595$), and results were unchanged when using HC3 robust standard errors (Figure 2 displays HC3-based 95% CIs). Second, diagnostics indicated mode-

rate-to-high multicollinearity among the three trait predictors (VIFs ≈ 7 – 10), which does not bias explained variance but may inflate standard errors; therefore, unique effects should be interpreted cautiously.

Figure 2 - Forest plot of Model 2 coefficients (B with HC3 95% CIs).



The persistence of the Psychopathy (and, with controls, Narcissism) effects despite this shared variance strengthens the inference that these domains provide incremental predictive value for cyberstalking beyond the common “dark” factor and basic demographics.

Discussion

This study examined the association between the Dark Triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) and cyberstalking behaviors in intimate relationships within a Brazilian sample. Consistent with previous research, higher levels of these traits were positively correlated with cyberstalking, with psychopathic traits emerging as the most robust predictor. These findings contribute to the evidence that personality factors play an important role in perpetrating technology-mediated aggression (Volkmer et al., 2023; Gylfason et al., 2021; Moor & Anderson, 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2018).

Centrality of Psychopathy in Predicting Cyberstalking

Psychopathy demonstrated a consistent and significant relationship with cyberstalking in all analyses, even after controlling for sociodemographic variables and the shared variance with the other traits. This result aligns with theoretical models that conceptualize psychopathy as characterized by impulsivity, callousness, and emotional detachment (Hudon, et al., 2025; Leite et al., 2023; Schade et al., 2021). The absence of empathy and remorse may reduce the internal constraints that typically inhibit harmful behaviors, particularly in digital contexts where anonymity and psychological distance attenuate social and moral accountability (Corkum & Shead, 2023; Lyons, 2019).

This pattern corroborates findings from Leite et al. (2023) and Blais et al. (2024), which suggest that psychopathic traits increase the likelihood of using technology to manipulate and control others. Interestingly, Branković et al. (2022) distinguished different forms of stalking, associating

psychopathy with "aggravated stalking," which involves more direct, risky, and severe acts, suggesting that the strong association found in this study may reflect the more aggressive dimension of cyberstalking. However, it is noteworthy that the study by Kircaburun et al. (2018) did not find a unique association of psychopathy with cyberstalking when sadism was in the model, indicating that the relationship can be complex and dependent on the variables included in the analysis.

Role of Narcissism and Machiavellianism

Narcissism emerged as a significant predictor of cyberstalking only after the inclusion of socio-demographic controls. Narcissistic individuals' heightened need for admiration, validation, and control in relationships may render them particularly vulnerable to engaging in intrusive online monitoring when their sense of self or relational status is threatened (Casale & Banchi, 2020; Farrell & Vaillancourt, 2020; Fan et al., 2019). These behaviors may serve as compensatory functions to restore perceived dominance (Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). Research by Branković et al. (2022) supports this interpretation by associating narcissism with forms of "surveillance stalking," which are more indirect and covert. Furthermore, the victims' perspective corroborates the relevance of these traits, as they tend to attribute high levels of narcissism and psychopathy to their pursuers (Truss & de Roos, 2024).

In contrast, Machiavellianism did not stand out as a unique predictor, despite its positive correlation. This suggests that the manipulative and strategic tendencies of Machiavellianism substantially overlap with the exploitative interpersonal style of psychopathy and narcissism (Koehn et al., 2019; Ubaradka & Khangnaba, 2024). Authors have highlighted that these traits share a "dark core" rooted in antagonism and low empathy, which may explain their shared variance in predicting cyberstalking (Jones & Paulhus, 2011). The research by Wang and Bi (2025) offers a more in-depth view, showing that the effect of

Machiavellianism may depend on its interaction with narcissism; individuals high in both traits showed a much greater propensity for indirect cyber aggression.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings reinforce the utility of the Dark Triad framework (Gonçalves & Campbell, 2014; Lyons, 2019; Pabian et al., 2015; Paulhus & Williams, 2002) for understanding digital forms of relational aggression. The positive associations between these traits and cyberstalking highlight the continuity between offline antisocial tendencies and their online expressions. The anonymity and boundarylessness of digital environments may function as situational amplifiers of a dispositional risk (Buckels et al., 2014; Kircaburun et al., 2018).

The persistence of the effects of psychopathy and narcissism after statistical controls supports the notion that these traits contribute unique pathways to cyberstalking perpetration, psychopathy through affective detachment and impulsivity, and narcissism through ego-threat reactivity (Casale & Banchi, 2020; Hudon, et al., 2025; Leite et al., 2023; Lyons, 2019). This study also contributes to the literature on the "dark digital personality" (Craker & March, 2016; Gylfason et al., 2021), suggesting that individuals high in dark traits exploit online platforms to satisfy psychological needs for control, dominance, and reinforcement of self-worth. Finally, by analyzing a Brazilian sample, the study offers a contribution to the cross-cultural validation of these associations.

In this regard, Brazil's recent enactment of Law No. 14,132/2021, which criminalized stalking, is a key landmark. This new legislation, as noted by Boldt (2021), explicitly encompasses cyberstalking, adapting the law to a hyperconnected society. By identifying psychopathy and narcissism as key predictors, our findings provide a practical basis for applying this law. An understanding of perpetrator's psychological profiles may help legal and public security professionals with risk assessment and the implementation of more effective protective measures, for instance, by

distinguishing between behaviors driven by impulsivity and affective detachment (psychopathy) versus those motivated by a need for control and surveillance (narcissism).

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the contributions, some limitations must be considered. First, the study's cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal studies like that of Wang and Bi (2025) are necessary to establish the directionality of this relationship. Second, the exclusive use of self-report measures is subject to biases, such as social desirability. The finding that men reported less cyberstalking perpetration, despite other research indicating that they tend to find the behavior more acceptable (Becker et al., 2020), may be a reflection of this bias.

The inclusion of sadism, a component of the "Dark Tetrad", could have altered the observed relationships, especially that of psychopathy, given that both traits are linked to cruel behaviors (Kircaburun et al., 2018). Finally, the non-probabilistic sample, recruited through social media, limits the generalizability of the results to the broader Brazilian population.

For future research, the use of longitudinal designs is suggested. It would be valuable to include sadism to test the complete Dark Tetrad model. Furthermore, the use of multiple data sources (e.g., partner reports) could mitigate self-report biases. Future studies could also explore the specific types of cyberstalking behaviors (e.g., passive monitoring vs. direct harassment) and how they relate differentially to each of the Dark Triad traits, following the approach of Branković et al. (2022). Investigating the consequences for victims, such as depression and anxiety (Begotti & Maran, 2019), continues to be a crucial area.

Conclusion

In summary, this study underscores the significant contribution of dark personality traits, particularly psychopathy and narcissism, to cyberstalking behaviors in intimate relationships. The findings advance the understanding of how dispositional risk factors intersect with the affordances

of digital environments to produce coercive and intrusive relational patterns. Integrating personality psychology with digital behavioral research offers a promising pathway for the development of preventive, therapeutic, and policy-oriented responses to online aggression.

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